

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 February 2015

## Pakistani government database employees on strike

National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) workers protested outside the Karachi Press Club on February 2 as part of a national five-day strike over working conditions and allowances. They are demanding a service structure, medical facilities and payment of a medical allowance in line with other government employees.

An All Pakistan Nadra Employees Union (APNEU) spokesman said members had been campaigning for more than a year over these issues. The current industrial action follows demonstrations in several provinces.

## Pakistan airline employees walk-out

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) workers took national strike action on February 3 in protest against the government's decision to impose a new wage tax—effectively cutting 2,500 rupees (\$US24.70) from each workers' monthly salary. The strike, which interrupted operations at major airports throughout the country, was called off by the PIA Air League later in the day, after authorities agreed to negotiate with the union.

PIA employees are also campaigning against low wages, prolonged delays in wage payments and the government's plan to restructure and privatise the state-run airline. The airline currently employs 3,000 workers on a daily wage contract basis.

## Pakistan water and power workers continue protests

For the second time last month, thousands of Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers from around the country protested outside the National Press Club in Islamabad against the government's proposed privatisation of power distribution companies. The January 28 protest was organised by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union and supported by the Engineers Association.

The government is moving to sell off the Islamabad Electric Supply Company, the Faisalabad Electric Supply Company and the Lahore Electric Supply Company. A union spokesman told the media that the government was preparing to hire consultancy services for the privatisation plan, which could be extended to other state-owned

companies. WAPDA unions have conducted a three-year protest campaign against privatisation of the sector.

## Cambodian garment workers strike

About 900 employees of the Apsara Garment Factory in Pur Senchey district walked off the job on January 30 calling for higher pay and better conditions. They returned to work on February 3 after police arrested a Solidarity Worker Federation leader. At least 100 workers continued protesting outside the factory gate and at the police station to demand the union leader's release.

The workers' main demand was for a \$28 monthly salary rise to bring them in line with the recently mandated minimum wage increase from \$100 to \$128. Workers want those presently earning more than \$100 to receive the full \$28 increase. They are also demanding daily lunch allowance of 2,000 riel or about \$0.50.

## Phnom Penh municipal bus drivers strike

Municipal bus drivers in Phnom Penh struck on Monday and protested at the city's Night Market to demand a promised wage increase.

The City Bus Service drivers alleged that the municipal government had pledged last year to pay them between \$300 and \$350 (1,200,000–1,400,000 riel) per month. At least 40 drivers are currently paid just \$180 a month. They are demanding between \$280 and \$300.

## New South Wales meat workers locked out

Over 300 meat workers at Fletchers International Exports in Dubbo, New South Wales have been locked out since January 29 in an enterprise agreement dispute. The company initiated the lock out after workers decided to strike for a day-and-a-half, following 12 months of failed negotiations between the company and the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU).

The meat workers rejected an initial offer by the company of no wage increase but and a roll-over of existing conditions. They decided to strike when Fletchers offered a small increase in the hourly pay rate

in exchange for an extra 30 minutes production time. Negotiations between Fletchers and the AMIEU are continuing.

### **Victorian supermarket workers vote to strike**

Meat workers employed by the Coles supermarket chain in Victoria voted to take protected industrial action yesterday in an enterprise agreement dispute. Australian Meat Industry Employees Union members are concerned that a workplace agreement between a rival union, the Shop Distribution and Allied Employees Association, and Coles' management could reduce their existing wages and conditions.

Under the proposed agreement, which would encompass all Coles meat workers and truck drivers, penalty rates would be reduced or eliminated, weekend work made mandatory, sick leave pay reduced, rostered days off axed and cuts made to adult rates for young meat packers and cabinet attendants.

The meat workers rejected Coles' assurance that a "grandfather" clause in the agreement would protect them against loss of current entitlements.

### **Victorian food flavouring manufacturing workers end factory occupation**

Twenty-six workers at International Flavours & Fragrances (IFF) in the Melbourne outer-suburb of Dandenong ended their five-day occupation of the factory lunch room on January 30, after the company agreed to negotiate with the Nation Union of Workers (NUW) in the Fair Work Commission (FWC).

IFF, which makes flavours for Coca-Cola and other companies, wanted to cut conditions, including removal of one of two paid 10-minute breaks a day and removal of a clause in the enterprise agreement paying out unused personal leave when workers resign. While IFF had offered pay increases between 1.5 and 2 percent and a \$50 per day bonus for unused sick days, capped at \$500 per year, the IFF workers wanted a pay rise linked to the Consumer Price Index currently at 2.3 percent.

FWC negotiations ended on Sunday and workers voted to accept an agreement that grants a wage rise over three years and retains the conditions that management had sought to erase. Full details of the deal, however, have not been released by the NUW.

### **South Australian gas maintenance workers down tools**

Around 100 APA Group (APA) maintenance workers walked off the job for two hours at the company's Kidman Park Depot in Adelaide on February 4 in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The limited industrial action, which was called by the Plumbers Union, follows seven months of negotiations between the union and APA.

The maintenance workers want a 3.5 percent pay increase and retention of their current provisions. APA has offered a 2.5 percent

increase with reduced redundancy provisions and the right to determine when workers take annual leave. APA insisted that there would be no wage increase if workers want to keep their current entitlements.

APA is Australia's largest natural gas infrastructure business, owning and/or operating more than \$12 billion in energy assets.

### **Papua New Guinea teachers protest**

Teachers in Papua New Guinea's Western province protested on Monday over the non-payment of their holiday leave fares, which were due in December. Leave fares are paid to teachers before the break so they can return to their home villages during the annual school holiday. Thousands of teachers across the country are still waiting to receive the allowance. Classes have been cancelled because teachers have refused to resume duties until their fares are paid.

While the PNG Teachers Association has told teachers that the government was responding "positively" to its representations, the union and the government have told parents to send their children to school as usual, putting pressure on teachers to end their protests and resume duties.

### **Solomon Islands port workers issue strike notice**

Over 170 Solomon Islands Port Authority (SIPA) workers in Honiara have threatened to strike on February 23 in a collective agreement dispute. The workers decided to take action after SIPA management refused to allow them to join the Workers Union of Solomon Islands. The port workers were holding a secret ballot this week to decide whether to join the union or establish a staff welfare committee.



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