

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

4 April 2015

## Asia

### Chinese shoe factory workers win allowance after strike

Following a three-day strike in mid-March to demand the government-mandated housing allowance, the Stella International Xing Ang shoe factory in Dongguan has agreed to pay workers from a housing fund program funded by China's social insurance system. The issue largely affects migrant workers who do not qualify to become local residents and must leave after their employment ends.

Workers had walked off the job after management failed to pay the allowance by March 1. After three days of protests in front of the factory riot police surrounded the workers and used batons to force them back into the factory. According to reports, police beat anyone outside the factory who was wearing a factory uniform. Many workers were hospitalised with police dog bites.

### India: Karnataka sanitation workers continue protests

Mandya sanitation workers, including 90 permanent workers and 185 contract workers, demonstrated at the City Municipal Corporation headquarters to demand immediate payment of long outstanding wages. It was the second protest in the past fortnight.

Workers said they had not been paid for the last four months. They demanded that wages be paid in the first week of every month and threatened to expand their protest if they were ignored.

### Karnataka college lecturers protest

Lecturers at private and government funded colleges held a state-wide protest on March 31 against government demands that increase their weekly workload from 16 to 22 hours.

The lecturers said that the government ignored the fact that teachers are also involved in administrative, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Teachers involved in Bangalore University exams have threatened to boycott work if the government demand is not withdrawn.

The Karnataka Government College Teachers Association has also demanded payment of arrears from pay-scale adjustments made since 2006.

### New Delhi sanitation workers on strike

Around 12,000 sanitation workers employed by the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) have been on strike since March 24 over the non-payment of wages.

Workers burnt effigies of the prime minister and chief minister during the protest and dumped garbage on several city roads. The municipal commissioner responded by claiming there were no funds and said he would not "bow to the demands of the workers."

### Chandigarh sanitation workers end strike

Chandigarh Municipal Corporation sanitation workers called off an eight-day strike on March 31 after workers accepted a deal organised by the unions. The strikers wanted permanency for 134 daily wage workers, a salary rise of 10,600 rupees, jobs to family members of deceased employees and the promotion of literate sanitation workers to clerks' positions. The sanitation workers were assured of house rent allowance, health insurance and other benefits given to permanent employees.

### Telangana beedi workers hold another protest

Thousands of beedi workers (cigarette rollers) in Telangana state held demonstrations outside district collector offices in Dubbak, Ramyampet, Jogipet and Andol on March 30 for several demands. These included immediate implementation of insurance schemes and continuation of the guaranteed 100-day work scheme of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Although the labour law demands that beedi workers are offered 26 days' work a month, many only get 15 days. The latest action follows a demonstration in January and December over low wages and other issues. There are more than 700,000 beedi workers in Telangana who are paid around 100 rupees (\$1.60) per 1,000 cigarettes rolled.

### Pakistan: Punjab government employees strike

Over a thousand Punjab government clerks walked off the job on March 26 to demand various improvements in wages and working conditions. These include a 5 percent salary increase, a 50 percent pay rise for Special

Education Department employees, timescale promotions, pay-scale upgrades, a minimum wage increase from 9,000 rupees (\$US88) to 12,000 rupees and job permanency for contract employees.

A protest march in Lahore was prevented from reaching the chief minister's residence by a large contingent of police. The protests, which continued overnight, were also joined by workers from remote districts.

While the government has failed to deliver on previous commitments, the All Pakistan Clerks Association Punjab Chapter called off the strike after 24 hours, claiming that the government agreed to implement the workers' demands.

### **Punjab government doctors strike again**

Government doctors at most teaching hospitals across Punjab province walked off the job on March 31 over long-standing demands, including service structure and delayed wages. The strike was most effective in Lahore where doctors locked several departments in teaching hospitals and held a protest march.

The action, which was called by members of the Young Doctors Association (YDA), follows two strikes in February. In 2012, the government agreed to implement a revised service structure, ending a five-week strike. It has continuously delayed its adoption. Another concern is that the government is delaying wages for trainee doctors. The YDA is also concerned that the government is delaying wages for trainee doctors and has said it is planning further strike action.

### **South Korea: McDonald's workers in Seoul continue protests**

Part-time employees of McDonald's outlets in Seoul have been holding protests at fast food restaurants since last November over low wages and working conditions. On March 28, over 50 workers demonstrated outside the Sinchon, Jongno and Hongje outlets, accusing the company of using its flexible working hours system as a means of controlling its employees.

The Arbeit Workers Union (AWU) claimed that the company arbitrarily adjusted rosters to save money and often failed to pay wages on time. Most McDonald's workers in Korea earn a minimum hourly wage of 5,580 won (\$US5.10). The protesting workers want their wages increased to 10,000 won an hour, stable working hours and a union presence in each restaurant.

### **Australia and the Pacific**

#### **Federal public sector workers begin limited action**

More than 15,000 Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members in Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support began 10 days of limited industrial action on March 30 in a dispute with the Abbott Liberal government for new work agreements. Staff in around 500 worksites are co-ordinating their breaks so they are all off the job at 12.30 p.m. each day. Meanwhile, CPSU members in the Department of Agriculture biosecurity at airports, ports and regional centres across the country stopped work at 10.30 a.m. for half an hour on Thursday in their dispute

with the government for a pay increase.

Negotiations for new work agreements covering over 160,000 public sector workers began in April last year with the government. Workers in all federal departments have overwhelmingly rejected management "offers," which sought to cut superannuation protections and other hard-won conditions, in return for annual pay increases of between 0 and 1.05 percent. With inflation running at over 2 percent, the pay offers would amount to a \$2,500-\$3,000 annual pay cut.

Tens of thousands of CPSU members across the Australian public service plan taking action in April. This includes work bans and stoppages.

### **New South Wales power workers strike**

Workers at state-owned electricity network companies Ausgrid and Endeavour Energy stopped work for four hours on Tuesday in a dispute for a new work agreement. Following three months of failed negotiations, the Electrical Trades Union and the United Services Union have reduced their pay demand from an 8 percent increase over two years to annual 2.5 percent increases over two years in line with the New South Wales Liberal government's wages policy. In return, the union called on the companies to retain all existing conditions, including a guarantee of no forced redundancies.

Workers are concerned that the looming possibility of privatisation and the pending decision of the Australian Energy Regulator on pricing could see 2,400 jobs cut at Ausgrid and 700 at Endeavour Energy. The ETU has worked with the companies to impose all previous redundancies in the industry.

### **New Zealand Pak'n Save workers protest**

Workers of supermarket chain Pak'n Save demonstrated outside the company's Henderson store in Auckland on Thursday to protest low wages. According to the FIRST union, the store pays the lowest supermarket wages in the city. Management offered a 35 cents per hour pay increase which workers rejected.

Last week, 30 Pak'n Save workers demonstrated outside the company's Rotorua store over alleged bullying and intimidation by the store's management. Employees who recently joined the FIRST union have alleged that they were summoned one by one to speak with the store and the HR managers who pressured them to resign from the union.



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