

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 April 2015

South Korean public sector workers to strike

The 140,000-strong Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU) has called for strike action on April 24 over government plans to "reform" the civil service pension. Following a protest by 120,000 civil servants in Seoul in October, over 570,000 government employees voted against the proposed pension changes.

According to the KGEU, public servants' monthly pensions will be cut by 34 percent but premiums increased by 43 percent. The age at which public sector workers can receive the pension will also be lifted from 56 to 65 by 2033.

The government claims that the reforms are necessary to reduce the public sector pension fund's deficit by 43 percent by 2016. Government workers complained that they have tolerated low pay for the promise of high returns after retirement. They fear that the "reform" is to force them into expensive private pension schemes.

The Confederation of Korean Government Employees' Unions has backed away from previous threats to strike and bring down the Park Geun-hye administration if the planned bill is not withdrawn.

Bangladeshi poultry farm workers protest

Kazi Farm Group poultry workers protested in Thakurgaon, north-west Bangladesh on April 5, calling for an "end to repression." They called for immediate cancellation of removal and transfer orders of local employees, reappointment of sacked workers and the hiring of local people.

Organised by the Thakurgaon Transport Workers Union, Thakurgaon District Truck, Tank Lorry and Covered Van Workers' Union and Thakurgaon Kuli Sramik Union, the poultry workers threatened strike action if their demands were not met.

Their protest was part of ongoing action begun by workers at the Habibpur Poultry Hatchery, a sister concern of Kazi Farms, who walked off the job on March 19 and are currently picketing the farm's main gate. The strikers are protesting the sacking of 15 temporary workers and the transfer of 10 employees to distant districts.

Workers at other Kazi Farms plants reported similar action by the company which is reorganising its operations. Kazi Farms Limited and associated poultry companies sell chicks, feed, eggs and live broiler chickens across Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi jute workers protest

Jute workers in Khulna and Jessore in Bangladesh demonstrated outside their factories on April 5 with five demands, including a 20 percent dearness allowance and formation of a wage commission board for state-owned factory workers. The jute workers warned that they have planned further demonstrations in April.

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation reported that due to reduced demand for jute exports many mills are holding unsold stock. Only 2,600 jute looms out of the 4,090 in Khulna are operating each day.

India: Bosch auto parts workers in Jaipur locked out

Auto component manufacturer Bosch declared a lockout at its Jaipur plant in Rajasthan, Northern India, effective from April 7 in response to industrial action begun by employees last month. The lockout follows a one-day strike in February in a long-running dispute for a new work agreement. Forty-five contract workers have been terminated since the action began and seven workers who were on a hunger strike have been arrested by police.

Wage negotiations for the period June 2013 to May 2017 have been ongoing for more than 20 months. The workers want monthly wages increased by 9,000 rupees and the workload cut by 30 percent. Bosch has offered just 7,000 rupees. The Rajasthan government has referred the matter to the industrial tribunal, Jaipur for adjudication.

Last year, workers at Bosch's Bangalore plant struck work for over three months over wages. The strike ended after the Workmen Union Mico Employees' Association accepted a 35 percent pay rise, lifting monthly wages to 86,000 rupees (\$US1,383).

Goa emergency medical workers end strike

Paramedics and drivers of the 108 Emergency Research Institute (ambulance service) in Panaji, the capital of Goa, called off their 45-day strike on April 2 after reaching agreement with management over pay and conditions.

Management agreed to begin talks on an improved pay package on April 20 and that 11 workers terminated during the strike would be reinstated.

Pondicherry textile mill workers down tools

Workers at the state-owned Anglo French Textile mill in Pondicherry

downed tools and occupied the factory on April 2 to protest government moves toward privatisation. Workers accused the government of deliberately running the plant at a loss to justify leasing it to a private consortium. Strikers demanded that the Indian government carry out urgent repairs and restore production to when the mill employed over 7,600 people over a decade ago.

Pondicherry government medical university workers protest

Daily wage workers at the Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education & Research (JIPMER) in Pondicherry demonstrated inside the premises on April 6 to demand permanent employment. The workers said that while they had been employed at the university for 14 years they were denied the entitlements of regular employees. The workers also demanded the immediate payment of Employment Provident Funds worth 35.4 million rupees (\$US569,000).

New Delhi: Sanitation workers' strike called off

Sanitation workers of three municipalities in New Delhi ended their 8-day strike on April 4, after reaching an agreement with authorities. They were demanding payment of two months' outstanding wages, job permanency and cashless medical schemes. Authorities agreed to all demands and promised to pay overdue wages by April 10.

Karnataka college lecturers protest

Around 17,000 Karnataka Pre-University College (PUC) lecturers held a state-wide protest on April 5 to demand that their pay be increased to 28,100 rupees (\$451) a month and regular job promotions. Lecturers complained that there was pay disparity between qualified staff. The protest was organised by the Karnataka State PU Lecturers Association.

Kerala postal workers protest against privatisation

Postal workers in Kollam district, Kerala demonstrated on April 7 against the privatisation of the postal department. The postal department is the second largest employer next to railways in India. Workers claimed that privatisation would lead not only to the loss of job security but reduced efficiency in services. People from other walks of life joined hands with the postal workers to form a human chain during the protest.

Maharashtra auto drivers' strike

Around 18,000 auto drivers stayed off the road on April 6 in Thane against the repressive measures by the state and traffic police. Their demands included a rise of auto fares in line with inflation, renewal of

licenses of drivers who had driven for 15 years, no cancelling licenses for a second offense, no scrapping of old autos, and no green tax enforcement. Over 3,000 people protested in front of the regional transport office.

Sri Lankan nurses demand transfers

All Ceylon Nurses Union members demonstrated outside the National Hospital in central Colombo on April 8, demanding immediate implementation of a delayed transfer scheme. The protesting nurses claimed that they have been waiting for transfers for several years. Nurses also want allowances increased on par with the increased cost of living.

Hospital theatre nurses in Perth threaten strike action

Theatre nurses employed at the newly opened Fiona Stanley Hospital in Western Australia's capital Perth have called for strike action unless concerns over unsafe sterilisation practices are rectified by the state's Department of Health.

The nurses have raised concerns over the poor quality of sterilisation services being performed by private contractor Serco after sterilised equipment returned to theatres contained traces of body tissue and blood. Surgical packs were also missing essential items.

The Fiona Stanley Hospital, which became fully operational in February, has its "non-clinical" services carried out by Serco. The British based multi-national company runs detention centres and prisons in Western Australia and in other states around the country.

The state Liberal Barnett government awarded an unprecedented 20-year, \$4.3 billion contract to Serco to provide hospital services, including sterilisation, catering, maintenance, laundry and other support services in July 2011.

The Australian Nurses Union responded to nurses' calls for a walkout by holding a stop-work meeting on Wednesday and ruling out any strike action. Instead, a demand was made to reduce surgical operations by half until safety and infection control issues are addressed. The limited action, however, will only extend the number of patients on the public waiting list for surgery. The union presented no other plans for industrial action.

New Zealand fast food workers vote on strike action

Employees at fast food chains McDonalds and Burger King are currently voting in a ballot calling for industrial action in their dispute for new work agreements. Their collective agreements expired on March 31. Workers at Wendy's Hamburger restaurants have already begun action in their push for a better work agreement.

The main demand of fast food workers is for the end of "zero-hours" contracts, which have been in use at Wendy's, McDonald's, KFC, Pizza Hut, Starbucks and Burger King. Under these contracts workers are rostered anywhere between 3 and 40 hours a week.

The Unite union announced on Thursday that it had reached agreement with Restaurant Brands, which owns KFC, Pizza Hut, Carl's Jnr and Starbucks brands, to end the use of zero-hours contracts by July. Clauses in the agreement stipulate that if a worker leaves, or if more shifts become available, they will be offered to existing staff first. Unite has 2,000

members at the chain and is recommending the new terms to members in a vote to be held over the next two weeks.

Organised by the Unite union, fast food workers will hold protests across New Zealand on April 15 in an “international day of action to end super exploitation” in the fast food industry. In the US workers will call for \$15 an hour and a union. In New Zealand workers will demand the end of zero-hours contracts.

Part-time employees of McDonald’s outlets in Seoul, South Korea have been holding protests at fast food restaurants since last November over low wages, working conditions and against the use of zero-hours contracts as a means of intimidating staff.

Guam Coca-Cola workers strike

Some 25 workers at Foremost Foods on the island of Guam, a territory of the United States in the western Pacific Ocean, walked off the job on April 2 and demonstrated outside the Revenue and Taxation building to protest against wage cuts. The workers, comprising truck drivers, mechanics and warehouse workers, are members of the Teamsters Local 986.

Workers complained that the union has previously signed pay-cutting agreements with Foremost Foods/Coca Cola Guam. “All we’re asking is three more years (of the) status quo—that wages and benefits stay the same,” one worker told the media.

A spokesman for the company, which distributes Coca-Cola and Foremost-branded ice cream, milk, juices, coffee and other products, said the strike had not impacted on operations and that the management would not agree to workers’ demands.



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