

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 April 2015

India: Telecommunications workers hold national stoppage

Over 225,000 workers at India's state-owned telecommunications company BSNL walked off the job for two days on April 21 to demand management take immediate steps to revive the company and ensure its ongoing financial viability. The strike, which is part of a joint union "Save BSNL Campaign," followed demonstrations in March.

A spokesman for the many unions and associations involved told the media that they had submitted a 21-point charter to the government and management. The Campaign demands include immediate procurement of equipment, compensation to BSNL for loss-making rural services, financial assistance to BSNL to expand services, payment of the outstanding 67 billion rupees by the Indian government to BSNL and no merger of BSNL and MTNL in metropolitan areas.

Meanwhile, BSNL contracted workers demonstrated outside the company's Karnataka office in Shivamogga on April 21 to demand job permanency and a wage increase. The Karnataka BSNL Non-Permanent Workers' Union alleges that the contract workers with more than 10 years' service were being denied their legally entitled benefits and that monthly wages were regularly delayed. A union spokesman said that contract employers had also failed to pay their contributions to the provident fund.

The union wants wages paid to contract workers by the 5th of every month, the monthly minimum wage increased to 15,000 rupees (\$US238), the ceiling on payment of bonuses withdrawn, provident fund contributions paid and workers given job permanency.

Tamil Nadu power-loom workers end strike

Unions representing some 52,000 workers operating over 30,000 power-loom looms in Pallipalayam and Komarapalayam, Tamil Nadu ended a two-week strike on April 21, after reaching agreement with the government and textile manufacturers.

The power-loom workers had demanded a 75 percent wage rise to compensate for not receiving an outstanding pay increase in 2014. The unions shut down the strike after accepting a 20 percent increase, effective from April 1 for two years. While 80 percent of power loom operators returned to work some were still continuing the strike.

Tamil Nadu noon-meal workers protest

Around 1,000 workers organised by the Tamil Nadu Nutritious Meal

Employees Association in Vellor are protesting over police harassment and arrests when they marched to the Collectors Office. The demonstration was part of state-wide action by 60,000 noon-meal workers for better wages and benefits which began on April 15.

The noon-meal workers want their wages brought into line with government workers, a 3,500-rupee monthly pension and a minimum gratuity of 200,000 rupees. The Tamil Nadu government promised to grant these demands during the 2011 election.

Indian fishermen protest against government report

Fishermen from Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu and Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala protested on April 21 against the Meenakumari report, which wants to prevent fishermen from living close to the shoreline and restrict their access to deep sea fishing waters.

The fishermen are organised by the National Fish Workers Forum and the Kerala Swathantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation, which is affiliated with the All India Trade Union Congress. They are concerned that the government report will hand over the industry to big fishing companies.

Tamil Nadu government hospital staff protest

Doctors, paramedics, sanitary workers and pharmacists at the government's Rajaji Hospital in Madurai, Tamil Nadu held a protest meeting on April 20 and struck for an hour the following day to demand a canteen within the premises. Protesters said that although they had a private canteen, the hygiene and quality of food there were low. There are 2,000 staff members and 1,000 students within the campus without a proper canteen.

Tamil Nadu IT workers demand wages

C-Cube workers demonstrated in Coimbatore on April 18 to demand wages after the firm suddenly closed without notice the day before. The more than 220 workers at the company have not been paid since March. Protestors said that they have not been given a date when the outstanding wages will be paid or when the necessary documents to look for new jobs would be issued. The workers have demanded that the government intervene.

Pondicherry university teachers on hunger protest

Teachers at the Pondicherry University began a hunger protest on April 20 to demand the removal of the university's vice chancellor, Chandra Krishnamurthy. According to the Pondicherry University Teachers Association, the vice chancellor has broken university rules and regulations. Teachers said they would continue their protest until he was removed.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police attack government employees

Hundreds of demonstrating Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government employees in Peshawar on April 21 were attacked by police using tear gas, batons and discharging firearms. The grade 1–15 workers, who had marched through the city that morning, assembled in the afternoon outside the provincial assembly to denounce the chief minister for failing to honour previous promises to promote them by one grade.

The protest was organised by the All Technical and Non-technical Government Employees Coordination Council K-P chapter.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa paramedics strike

Paramedics walked off the job for several hours on April 22 at all Khyber Pakhtunkhwa public sector health institutions. The workers were calling for promotion and other demands. The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Paramedical Association called off the strike after the provincial government vowed to resolve their grievances.

Apart from up-grades, the paramedics want defined service rules and to be allowed to provide first-aid in their respective villages as they did in the past. The association has given the government one month to resolve their grievances.

Bangladeshi jute workers continue protests

Jute workers in Khulna and Jessore in Bangladesh are continuing a series of demonstrations they began on April 15 over allowances and conditions. They want a 20 percent dearness allowance, the formation of a wage commission for state-owned factory workers and other demands. The campaign, which was organised by the Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA)-Non CBA Oikya Parishad, ended on April 24.

Burmese garment workers end strike

Some 590 garment workers in Yayni, Burma have ended a strike begun in early April after reaching agreement with management. They were demanding an end to forced overtime, double overtime rates on Sundays and national holidays, increased break time to 20 minutes and a salary rise from 30,000 kyats (\$US30) per month to 60,000 kyats. Management would not agree to double wages but granted other demands. Strikers

accepted a new monthly salary rate of 41,000 kyats (\$US41).

Workers were also concerned that there is only one toilet at the factory for 700 employees. At least 500 workers have decided to form and register a union.

Coles supermarket meatworkers strike

Meatworkers at Coles/Wesfarmers supermarket chain in Victoria took strike action on April 23 and 24 in a dispute for a new work agreement. Their action follows three one-day strikes in February over the issue. The workers are members of the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) and are opposing a sweetheart agreement signed between Coles and a rival union the Shop Distributives Association (SDA) to cover all Coles' retail workers.

Under the SDA agreement, all new supermarket meat department workers will be on lower wages and conditions than the AMIEU members. Workers are concerned that Coles intends to use the SDA agreement to do away with skilled meat workers. The deal erodes penalty rates, sick leave and casual loading for new employees. Meat packers will be \$300 per week worse off than they were previously.

There will be a vote involving all employees on the new agreement starting on April 29. Meatworkers are calling for a 'No' vote. The Coles agreement follows a similar agreement made between the SDA and Coles competitor the Safeway/Woolworths supermarket chain.

Western Australian taxi drivers protest

Around 300 taxi drivers demonstrated outside the Western Australian state parliament in Perth on April 21 against alleged unfair competition by Uber, the ride-sharing private taxi service, which is impacting on taxi driver's wages and conditions.

Taxi drivers are angry that they are charged exorbitant leasing and plate fees whilst Uber drivers operate without regulation.

The protesting taxi drivers, who are members of the Transport Workers Union, travelled in convoy from Perth Airport to the parliament. They planned to enter the parliament and confront the state Liberal government's transport minister but were blocked by police.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact