

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 May 2015

South Korea: Migrant workers protest

About 200 migrant workers demonstrated in central Seoul on April 26 calling for more labour rights. Protesters said they held the rally before May Day because migrant workers do not get time off work to attend the May Day rallies. A spokesman for the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU), which is not recognised by the government despite its 10 years of existence, alleged that violations of the basic rights of 700,000 migrant workers were rampant.

The MTU wants three fundamental labour rights it claims are provided for under existing industrial law—the establishment of unions, collective bargaining and taking collective action—as well as higher salaries and more freedom for migrant workers to change jobs.

Under the current system, employers can pay migrant workers severance pay only after they leave Korea. Many workers have complained that they receive nothing from their employers and there is little they can do about it.

Philippines banana-processing workers end protest

Following two weeks of protests by 5,000 banana-processing workers at Sumifru Corporation, management agreed on April 22 to revoke its piece-rate scheme and make up for lost income.

Workers began limited strike action and protests in early April after the company, which is owned by Japan's Sumitomo Corporation, changed the method of determining wages at its packing plants in Compostela Valley Province, Davao Region in Mindanao. According to workers, the piece-rate scheme, which ended hourly-rate payments, reduced their take-home pay by 50 percent.

India: Tamil Nadu power-loom workers resume strike

A week after their union accepted a 20 percent pay increase and shutdown a two-week strike, power-loom workers in Pallipalayam,

Tamil Nadu walked out again on Monday to demand an additional 25 percent.

On April 6, 52,000 workers operating over 30,000 power-loom in Pallipalayam and Komarapalayam struck to demand a 75 percent pay rise to compensate for not receiving an outstanding pay increase in 2014. The government and manufacturers insisted last weekend that they would not increase their original 20 percent pay rise offer.

Telangana contract power workers strike

Around 18,000 contract workers of the Telangana State Power Generation Corporation, Telangana State Power Transmission Corporation, and Southern and Northern Power Distribution Companies struck on April 27 to demand permanent jobs and an end to outsourced contract employment. Their action followed a demonstration in Hyderabad two days earlier organised by the Telangana Electricity Contract Employees' JAC.

At least 22,000 contract workers are employed in Telangana electricity utilities. The Telangana state government told media that it was willing to consider direct payment to contract workers but will not remove the "supervisory role" of contractors.

Tamil Nadu paint manufacturing workers strike

Around 300 permanent and contract employees at the Asian Paints plant in Sriperumbudur downed tools on April 28 following the dismissal of two workers and the filing of cases against two others. The Asian Paints Employees' Union wants the reinstatement of 62 contract workers and a wage increase. Their three-year wage contract expired on July 2014.

Around 100 striking employees have occupied the factory with the remainder protesting outside the plant. Management has blocked the supply of food to the strikers inside the factory and hired 40 thugs and 50 security guards to threaten the workers in an attempt to break the strike.

According to company sources, Asian Paints has maintained sales by stepping up production at its manufacturing facilities in

Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Tamil Nadu castings manufacturing workers locked out

Locked-out employees at Pricol Castings in Coimbatore demonstrated outside the factory on April 28 to demand unpaid wages and the renewal of wage agreements which expired on December 2013. According to the Coimbatore District Engineering Workers' Union, operations have been suspended since March 27 and workers have not received wages since February.

Workers had raised the issue with the labour department but management did not budge, alleging that the company was "not doing well."

Coimbatore cab drivers strike

Around 300 drivers of private cab operator OLA went on strike in Coimbatore on April 27 to oppose an increase in the working day from 14 to 15 hours. Drivers also demanded payment of promised wages. The company employs around 600 drivers.

Punjab power workers implement overtime ban

Punjab State Power Corporation technical staff are refusing work beyond 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., from April 24 to May 31. They are demanding the filling of all vacant posts, the creation of new posts and permanent employment for contract employees. In 1995 the Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) had 125,000 workers. The Punjab State Power Corporation currently employs 40,000 people.

A spokesman for the Border Zone Employees Federation told the media at a demonstration of workers at Ludhiana that after PSEB was corporatised the government began shifting distribution and construction to private contractors. Power generation has also been handed over to private operators.

CSIRO staff take industrial action

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) workers imposed work bans on April 30, after a breakdown of negotiations between the CSIRO Staff Association and management over an enterprise agreement. The bans include limitations on recording and supply of efficiency data, attending face-to-face meetings with management and working unpaid

overtime.

The CSIRO staff bans are the latest in a wave of industrial action by federal public sector workers in 15 agencies over the federal government's attacks on pay and conditions. Bargaining for new enterprise agreements for around 160,000 public servants in 117 federal agencies has been under way for a year. The Abbott government "offered" between zero and 1.05 percent annual wage increases combined with cuts to conditions and entitlements.

The CSIRO has demanded cuts to redundancy by eight weeks of paid entitlements, an increase in total working hours, shortening or removal of the annual shutdown, cancellation of an additional day of Christmas leave and increasing the difficulty of the test for salary progression. Management wants to strip entitlements and conditions from at least 45 clauses.

The CSIRO Staff Association has said that the bans will remain in place throughout May and could escalate into strike action.

Queensland coal transport workers strike

Coal trains in central Queensland remained idle on Wednesday after the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) called a 24-hour strike. Workers at depots in Callimondah (Gladstone), Rockhampton and Bluff, east of Blackwater, walked off the job while overtime bans were put in place at Mackay and Maryborough.

The stoppage followed the Fair Work Commission's decision to allow rail operator Aurizon to terminate 12 expired enterprise bargaining agreements covering over 6,000 employees and force them back onto rail industry minimum award conditions starting on May 18. The Fair Work Commission (FWC) found in favour of Aurizon on grounds that the business needed to remain competitive. Aurizon applied to the FWC last May to have existing agreements terminated after failed attempts to negotiate a new deal with unions.

Members of the Electrical Trades Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees are also affected by Aurizon's move. The RTBU has appealed the FWC decision and asked for a hearing before May 18.

Rail and locomotive maintenance workers struck for 24 hours in January, after Aurizon refused to negotiate for 12 months, following workers' rejection of its pay offer. The company offered annual 4 percent pay increases but demanded cuts in conditions and entitlements comparable with its competitors.



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