

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 May 2015

## Bangladesh: Ashulia Industrial Police attack furniture workers

Ashulia Industrial Police viciously attacked a demonstration of Otobi furniture factory workers in Ashulia on the outskirts of Dhaka on Tuesday. Some 50 workers were hospitalised and a local vendor and three workers arrested under the pretext of “inciting the workers.”

The furniture workers walked out in the morning after management announced that their wages would not be paid until May 20. Later that evening, company authorities promised that the wages would be paid on May 12.

## Dhaka police attack protesting garment workers

Police baton-charged protesting garment workers outside the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) building in Dhaka on Monday afternoon, hospitalising five workers. Several hundred employees from the Swan Garments factory at Mollartek in the city’s Uttara area rallied at the BGMEA building to demand five-month’s salaries that were due to 1,300 employees when the factory closed down on April 10 following the death of the owner.

BGMEA officials told workers that because the owner was a foreigner the government would have to take charge of the factory assets. A spokesman from the Garment Worker Trade Union Centre said that BGMEA agreed to hold a tripartite meeting, including government and workers, within three days to resolve the crisis.

## India: Karnataka community health workers on state wide strike

Some 38,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers in Karnataka have been on a state-wide strike since May 1 over unpaid wages. Strikers demonstrated outside the deputy commissioner’s office in Ballari on Monday, declaring that they would not return to work until their demands were met.

A spokesperson from the Karnataka ASHA Workers Union said workers wanted the state government to pass on a promised honorarium payment from the federal government which it had promised to do in October 2013. The union has also demanded regular monthly payments, mobile phones with sim cards, uniforms, social security and inclusion in the Vajpayee Arogyashri Health Insurance

scheme.

## Maharashtra public transport workers strike

As part of a nationwide campaign, Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) workers walked off the job for five hours on April 30 during the morning peak hour to oppose the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led central government’s Road Transport and Safety Bill 2014.

Transport unions fear that state-run public transport will be privatised destroying hundreds of jobs. They have demanded amendments to the bill. Transport workers, including rickshaw drivers/owners, also oppose high penalties proposed in the new bill, along with stricter vehicle, road-worthiness and licensing testing standards.

The strike was deemed illegal under the Maharashtra Essential Services Maintenance Act which automatically applies to all public transport workers. MSRTC management said it will deduct eight days’ pay from every worker involved in the strike.

## Andhra Pradesh and Telangana public transport workers strike

State Road Transport corporation workers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana struck on May 6 to demand a 43 percent wage increase. Around 12,000 buses from Andhra Pradesh and 10,000 buses from Telangana stayed off the road as a result of the strike.

## Andhra Pradesh tourist workers protest

State Tourism contract and daily wage workers demonstrated outside the State Tourism divisional office in Vishakhapatnam on May 5 to demand job permanency. Workers demanded that the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) directly recruit employees rather than using outsourcing agencies.

Workers were organised by the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Contract, Manpower, Daily-wage Employees and Workers Union, which is affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

## **Tamil Nadu power loom workers on strike**

Around 800 workers from 7,000 power loom units in Madurai have been on strike since May 1 to demand a wage rise due from a previous work agreement. While international manufacturers kept promises to pay 4.5 rupees per metre length of cloth, local manufacturers have failed to pay the increase. The power loom workers produce surgical bandages for local and international markets.

## **Maharashtra power distribution workers strike**

Technical workers of power distributor Spanco Nagpur Discom Limited, a franchisee of Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company, walked off the job in Nagpur for 24 hours on May 5 to demand reduced workloads, a wage rise and adequate equipment. At least half of Nagpur (population two million) was without power on Tuesday evening. Strikers returned to work after management agreed to increase wages and provide necessary equipment.

In a cost-cutting exercise the company has retrenched half its 640-strong workforce. Workers said that they have been made to work two continuous shifts a day and lacked the necessary equipment for full maintenance work.

## **Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa teachers demand job permanency**

Teachers and other employees of education institutes under the Workers Welfare Board of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demonstrated in Islamabad on April 30 to demand job permanency for contract employees. The protest followed recent sit-in strikes outside the provincial assembly.

At least 6,000 teachers and other employees of 60 educational institutes are facing unemployment following the expiry of their contracts in June. Officials refused to make workers permanent claiming there were irregularities in the administration of recruitment.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government, like the federal government, is implementing International Monetary Fund austerity measures, including funding cuts to public services such as education and healthcare. Long delays in paying wages are frequent in the province.

## **Sindh government database employees end strike**

The All Pakistan NADRA Employee's Union called off its four-day National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) in Sindh on May 4 after management agreed to include employees' representatives in a working committee. The union called off a five-day strike in February even though their demands were unresolved.

NADRA workers have been campaigning for over a year for a

service structure, medical facilities and payment of a medical allowance in line with other government employees. The authorities have rejected official acknowledgment of the union despite its continuous existence and have taken legal action to ban union activity in an ongoing court case. Management claimed that the employees' protest and all union activities were illegal.

## **More federal public servants vote for industrial action**

More than 4,000 (94 percent) of Australian Tax Office workers have voted to strike over pay and conditions, just weeks before millions of Australians begin filing their tax returns. Limited industrial action over bargaining policies are now underway in 15 government agencies, including the ATO, Bureau of Meteorology, Defence department, CSIRO, Veteran Affairs and Department of Human Services.

Industrial action has been limited by the public sector to stop work meetings and bans on some administrative work. Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members in the Department of Human Services have maintained low level action since December in their dispute for a new work agreement.

Bargaining for new enterprise agreements for around 160,000 public servants in 117 federal agencies has been under way for a year. Workers in all departments have rejected the Abbott government's pay "offer" between zero and 1.05 percent annual increases combined with cuts to conditions and entitlements. For some employees the pay offer would be a \$2,000 annual pay cut on top of losing conditions.

## **New Zealand: McDonalds' agrees to end zero-hours contracts**

Following several months of protests and pickets outside fast food restaurants in New Zealand, McDonalds' signed a deal with the Unite union to end the company's use of "zero-hours" contracts. Other fast food chains, including KFC, Pizza Hut, Carl's Jnr and Starbucks, agreed in July to end zero-hours contracts.

Those employed on "zero-hours" contracts are not guaranteed set hours and can be rostered anywhere between 3 and 40 hours a week. Under the McDonalds' deal, which will be implemented in July, workers are guaranteed at least 80 percent of the average number of hours worked each week, up to a 32-hour cap. This will be subjected to regular three-month surveys.



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