

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 May 2015

## Locked out Bangladeshi garment workers protest for wages

Hundreds of locked out Grameen Knitwear workers in Dhaka protested outside the National Press Club in Dhaka on Tuesday to demand unpaid salaries and the withdrawal of false charges. Owners closed the factory on March 12 and filed fraud cases against workers. The factory reopened on March 25 but management refused to allow employees back into the factory. The National Garment Workers Federation organised the protest.

## Bangladeshi garment workers protest

Around 1,000 workers from two factories—NRN Knitting and Garments and Natural Sweater Village—in Ashulia outside Dhaka, demonstrated at the Savar Bus Stand on May 9 with several demands. The workers later marched to the Rana Plaza collapse site where over 1,100 garment workers were killed when the eight-storey building collapsed in April 2013.

NRN Knitting workers claim that 29 employees were terminated on May 3 after they demanded that the factory be inspected following a recent earth quake. Bangladesh building inspectors claimed in February they found more than 80,000 safety violations in 1,000 of the 1,100 factories they have recently inspected.

Natural Sweater Village employees are demanding the reopening of their factory. Management closed the plant, claiming it did not have enough workers to maintain production. The protest was organised by the Garment Workers Trade Union Centre.

## India: Delhi public transport workers return to work

Delhi Transport Corporation bus drivers ended a two-day strike on Monday evening after the Delhi government announced that it would partially accept compensation for the family of a driver, Ashok Kumar, killed on duty. Kumar, 42, was beaten to death, allegedly by a youth, after his bus grazed the latter's bike. Strikers also demanded a job for a Kumar family member.

While the corporation offered 500,000 rupees (\$US7,800) compensation the drivers were forced back to following enactment of the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act.

## Indian nurses hold protest march

Hundreds of nurses from various Indian states marched in New Delhi on May 9 in protest against health budget cuts, deteriorating public healthcare and rampant exploitation of the nursing staff. The nurses also called for an end to the contract labour system and back-breaking work schedules. The protest coincided with a two-day international nurses' convention in New Delhi. The protest was coordinated by the Delhi Nurses Union (DNU).

## Andhra Pradesh and Telangana public transport workers on strike

Public transport workers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have been on strike since May 6 to demand payment of a 43 percent pay rise. The increase has been outstanding for 25 months. Around 22,000 buses are off the road due to the strike. Authorities have offered an increase of only 27 percent. Strikers in both states have defied return to work orders.

## Contract teachers in Bihar maintain strike

Thousands of contract teachers from six different unions in India's north-eastern state of Bihar have been on strike since April 8 to demand permanency and equal pay with regular teachers. They have defied police arrests and held processions and demonstrations outside government offices in every district.

## Tamil Nadu teacher trainers protest

Some 1,500 teacher trainers from Dindigul, Tiruchi, Theni and Salem districts of Tamil Nadu held a protest fast on May 9 to demand permanency, transfers to regular schools and promotions for 500 teachers on a seniority basis. There are at least 4,500 teacher trainers affected.

According to the Tamil Nadu Teacher Trainers' Association, the trainers are responsible for developing infrastructure in schools,

monitoring school dropouts, encouraging education for girls and training regular teachers in government schools.

### **Sri Lankan public health sector radiologists strike**

Up to 500 radiologists walked off the job on Wednesday in protest against the Sirisena government's attempts to intimidate 14 Government Radiological Technologists Association (GRTA) members by demanding that they explain their involvement in union action. Wednesday's strike affected 110 government hospitals around the country.

Strikers submitted several other demands, including suspension of pay as you earn tax, and compensation payments for technologists continuously exposed to radiation. According to GRTA spokesman, the radiologists have been fighting for these demands since 2000.

### **Pakistan: Power utility workers strike over privatisation**

Thousands of workers at state-owned power generation and distribution companies across Pakistan's Sindh province walked off the job for the day on Wednesday to oppose the national government's plan to privatise power assets. Demonstrations were held in all cities and major towns across the province.

Meanwhile, Lahore Electric Supply Company (Lesco) workers have been demonstrating outside company headquarters since Monday as management briefed a Privatisation Commission delegation on Lesco's assets, equipment, manpower and liabilities.

Power utility workers have been campaigning for three years against the sale of Pakistan's state-run assets. The protests and limited strikes are controlled by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union and have had no impact on the Pakistan government. In line with International Monetary Fund and World Bank demands, the government says that it will continue to privatise state-run utilities.

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province doctors strike**

Over 30 doctors at basic health units (BHUs) in Charsadda district walked off the job on Tuesday to demand payment of three month's salaries. The doctors, who are appointed by the People's Primary Healthcare Initiative, said they would not return to work until they are paid.

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa biscuit plant workers strike**

Over 300 biscuit manufacturing workers at the Hattar Industrial Estate demonstrated outside the labour department offices in Haripur on May 8 to protest a 20 percent wage cut. Wages were reduced from

15,000 rupees a month to 12,000 (\$US118). Management claimed that the affected workers had been over-paid according to a recent Peshawar High Court ruling.

### **Indonesian seafood processing workers protest**

Over 170 workers from the Phillips Seafood plant in Lampung, on the southern tip of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia protested outside the factory on May 4 to demand reinstatement and permanency.

The workers, who had been daily wage employees with the company for up to nine years were sacked without warning late last month. Without warning, the company posted a notice on the bulletin board declaring that workers' jobs had been terminated. Factory management has agreed to meet with union representatives and begin negotiations.

### **Australian Tax Office workers walk out**

Several thousand Australian Tax Office (ATO) employees across Australia walked off the job for the day on Tuesday in a dispute over a new work agreement. The 4,400 ATO workers join tens of thousands of other public sector workers in 15 federal departments who are taking, or preparing to take, industrial action in protest against the Abbott government's plan to cut wages and conditions in proposed new work agreements. Human Services, Defence, Immigration, Customs, Agriculture and the Bureau of Meteorology and other federal public sector workers are involved in the pay campaign.

Enterprise agreement negotiations for around 160,000 public servants have been underway 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 so-called offer would be a \$2,000 annual pay cut.



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