

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 May 2015

Hong Kong: Cathay Pacific flight attendants protest

At least 600 Cathay Pacific flight attendants held a 41-hour sit-in demonstration at the arrival hall of Hong Kong airport on Tuesday to protest cuts in salaries and benefits. The flight attendants are concerned over cuts in some cabin crew allowances, pay discrepancies for junior staff renewing their contracts and loss of legal support for workers involved in court cases, such as civil action stemming from passenger assaults.

The Cathay Pacific Flight Attendants Union, which has over 6,300 members, has threatened to strike at the end of August if their grievances are not resolved.

India: Telangana ambulance service workers on strike

Around 1,800 emergency ambulance service (108) workers in Telangana have been on strike since May 14. Over 300 ambulances across ten districts are now grounded. Members of the 108 Ambulance Services Staff have 15 demands, including an increase in their current 9,000-rupee monthly pay to 12,000 rupees (\$US188), provision of accident insurance and the reemployment of 70 former workers. The strikers have also demanded a reduction of the 12-hour working day to eight hours, complaining that they are never paid overtime.

Health authorities have tried to maintain emergency services by hiring private drivers and utilising the services of lab technicians and other para-medical staff.

Tamil Nadu sanitary workers protest

About 350 Ramanathapuram district sanitary workers, including women and pump operators, demonstrated in Ramanathapuram City on May 14. The workers are demanding health insurance, a dearness allowance and job permanency and to be paid 10,000 rupees (\$US157) per month. They also called

for pay parity for sanitary workers with pump operators.

Pakistan: More power utility protest strikes over privatisation

For the second day in a row, hundreds of Faisalabad Electric Supply Company employees held a sit-in outside the Fesco headquarters in Faisalabad, the third largest city in Pakistan, on May 19 to oppose the planned privatisation of the state-owned utility. Strikers locked the Fesco offices and barricaded the street in front of the building.

The Fesco workers' action follows a 24-hour strike last week by thousands of state-owned power utility workers opposed to privatisation in Sindh province.

For nearly three years the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union has organised various protests and limited strike action against the Pakistan government's plan to implement the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's demand that all Pakistan's utilities and other state assets be privatised. The protests have had no impact on the government's agenda.

Punjab brick-kiln workers protest

Scores of brick-kiln workers protested outside the Kamalia Press Club in Punjab province on May 16 to demand the legal minimum wage. The protesters said that they had been campaigning for nearly a year for kiln operators to be paid the official minimum wage of 888 rupees per 100 bricks. Workers complained that they had approached the government over the issue on several occasions but were falsely told that "the matter will be resolved soon."

Public hospital contract workers in Islamabad protest

Striking contract workers at the 150-bed Federal General Hospital (FGH) in Islamabad were joined by employees of Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims), Polyclinic, Capital Hospital and the National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine on May 18 in a demonstration outside the hospital. The health workers were demanding two months' unpaid salaries and regularisation. They have threatened to call for strikes at all Islamabad public hospitals if their demands were not soon met.

Punjab government school teachers protest

Teachers from Punjab province government schools ended an eight-day demonstration outside the provincial assembly in Lahore on May 15 without resolving any of their grievances. The protest was coordinated by the Muttahida Mahaz Asataza Punjab, a consortium of different teachers' associations across the province.

The teachers are demanding pay-scale revisions and time-scale promotions, an end of the performance evaluation scheme, which is being used to intimidate teachers, and job permanency for teachers on temporary contracts. The teachers have rejected government claims that the job regularisation of 50,000 teachers is underway.

After ending the demonstration, the teachers announced a "black day" protest in schools on May 18 and the resumption of demonstrations in Lahore on May 21. The authorities have asked school districts for lists of teachers who joined the protests, allegedly in preparation for a witch-hunt.

Federal public servants stop work

Hundreds of public servants from several government departments throughout Australia stopped work for one hour on Tuesday in a dispute with the Abbott government over proposed new work agreements. Staff from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology and Department of Agriculture in Perth, Western Australia walked out, along with Department of Employment and Defence Department staff in Canberra and Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support staff in Wollongong, New South Wales.

Tens of thousands of public sector workers in 15 federal departments 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 covering around 160,000 federal public servants.

Since negotiations began over a year ago workers in all

departments have rejected the Abbott government's pay "offer" of between zero and 1.05 percent annual increases combined with cuts to conditions and entitlements. According to the Community and Public Sector Union, the so-called pay offer for some employees would be a \$2,000 annual pay cut along with reductions to leave and other entitlements.

The CPSU and other unions covering federal public servants are demanding 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions.

Truck drivers in Victoria protest over safety

Hundreds of truck drivers and transport workers demonstrated on May 21 outside the Melbourne head office of supermarket giant Coles. They were protesting high road deaths, which they blame on poor safety regulations and pressure from large retailers to cut delivery costs. Transport Workers Union (TWU) members marched from a nearby Coles supermarket to the Store Support Centre.

The family members of David Tagliaferri, who was killed by a truck in 2011, spoke to the crowd. According to the TWU road transport workers are 15 times more likely to be killed at work than any other employee in Australia. Over 300 people are killed in truck crashes every year in Australia.

The TWU refused to organise any concrete political or industrial action against transport contractors or the large retailers who push drivers to safety limits. The union's campaign has been limited to protests and appeals to government and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.



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