

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 June 2015

India: Tamil Nadu fishermen strike

More than 4,000 fishermen and boat owners in the Tamil Nadu coastal town of Rameswaram struck on June 6 to protest the monopoly operations of fish export companies. Boat owners complained that they incurred huge losses because four exporters had formed a syndicate and were driving down prices paid to suppliers.

A spokesman for the fishermen said that because the boat owners did not have cold storage facilities, they were forced to sell their catch to the export syndicate at low and unfair prices.

New Delhi sanitation workers continue strike action

Eleven thousand East Delhi Municipal Corporation sanitation workers are continuing strike action after walking out on June 2 over delayed payment of last month's wages. The Delhi Municipal Corporation sanitation workers are maintaining regular sit-down demonstrations outside municipal buildings.

"The government should understand our condition," said a municipal worker. "We have no money to buy food and it is getting very difficult for us to cope with the situation."

The Delhi Pradesh Safai Majdoor Union has now made an additional demand calling for those employed for 10 years on a contract basis to be immediately given permanent jobs. The New Delhi mayor claims that the pay delay was because the Indian government was withholding funds due to municipal corporations.

Maharashtra child care workers protest

Child care workers in the Kolhapur district of India's west-coast state of Maharashtra protested outside the Collector's office on June 9 demanding payment of an additional 1,000 rupees (\$US15.60) to top up their monthly base wage of between 4,000 and 5,000 rupees. Workers said the additional payment has been pending since 2014.

Pakistan: Water and power utility workers continue anti-privatisation campaign

Thousands of workers from the state-run Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and regional power utilities held a one-day national strike in Pakistan on June 3 against the proposed privatisation of power distribution. The largest protest was held in Lahore, the Punjab provincial capital, and organised by the All-Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union. Demonstrations and processions were held in 14 other cities throughout the country.

Union leaders addressed workers condemning government plans to impose World Bank and IMF demands for privatisation of national public utilities in order to secure foreign loans. Electricity, oil and gas, civil aviation, railways and the National Bank of Pakistan are among the state-owned sectors targeted for privatisation. The latest protests followed anti-privatisation strikes and demonstrations last month in Faisalabad, Pakistan's third largest city.

The All-Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union has held various strikes and harmless demonstrations against privatisation. The protests have had no impact on the government but are aimed at dissipating widespread working-class opposition to the privatisation and "free-market" agenda.

Islamabad police arrest protesting government clerks

On June 3, Islamabad police baton-charged and arrested over 200 Punjab government clerks from nearby districts after they tried to enter the city and join a demonstration outside the National Press Club. They planned to link up with 500 other government department employees demanding a wage increase. Another 50 protesters were arrested when they tried to march to the parliament from the press club.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa dam construction workers protest

Construction workers at the Tarbela Dam on the Indus River in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province stopped work on June 9 and demonstrated in Swabi to demand better wages and conditions. The workers are only paid 385 rupees (\$US3.78) per day and are not provided with basic facilities at the project.

A spokesman for the Awami Labour Union (ALU) said workers at the Tarbela and Ghazi Barotha dams were not paid overtime or social security allowance, or provided with health, water, accommodation and transport facilities. Management at the Chinese construction

company, he said, had also reneged on previous promises to improve wages and conditions.

Indonesia: Philips factory workers strike

About 600 unionised workers at PT Philips Industries in the Batam Free Trade Zone, Indonesia have been on strike since June 3. Members of the newly formed PUK PT Philips Batam have accused the company of union-busting after it sacked over 80 founding members of the union. Philips has broken off collective bargaining negotiations with the Indonesian Metal Workers' Union, of which PUK is an affiliate.

Workers are demanding reinstatement of the dismissed union members and the resumption of collective bargaining negotiations covering 1,900 workers at the factory.

Cambodian court orders garment workers to end strike

About 50 striking garment workers representing over 2,000 striking M&V International Garment employees protested outside the Phnom Penh Municipal Court on June 5. The M&V workers want a 2,000-riel (\$US0.50) daily food allowance and \$15 a month for transportation.

The demonstrators were demanding the revoking of an injunction which orders them back to work and imposes a ban on any action that disrupts production at the plant. According to the Cambodian Industrial Union Federation, the order against M&V workers will apply to other factories and be used to ban future action by members of ten unions.

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CSIRO staff to walk out

Workers at Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australia's premier science agency, will begin a series of half-day strike meetings over the next fortnight in protest over stalled pay negotiations. The industrial action, which was announced on Thursday by the CSIRO Staff Association, will commence on June 18 in Sydney, Newcastle, Darwin and Perth and extend to other parts of the country in later days.

The strikes follow overtime bans and other action in protest against CSIRO management's demands for increased working hours and cuts to redundancy pay. Last year's federal budget included a \$115 million or 16 percent funding cut to the CSIRO over the next four years with an estimated 1,000 jobs eliminated from the 5,500-strong workforce by 2018.

While the CSIRO Staff Association claim that the stoppages and work bans are the largest in the science agency's history, the union has assisted management impose all previous cuts.

Australian customs and immigration officers to strike against wage cuts

Customs and immigration department officers involved in so-called "border control" operations have voted for strike action and bans in protest against government cuts to wages and conditions.

Operational customs officers due to be merged with immigration employees in a new "Australian Border Force" next month will be hit hardest in a new wage structure that will eliminate many existing entitlements and allowances. Customs investigators pay is expected to be slashed by \$5,800 a year and by \$3,000 for some immigration officers.

The Community Public Sector Union members at customs and immigration voted overwhelmingly for industrial action, beginning with a half-day strike with workers from other federal departments on June 18. More than 160,000 federal public sector workers have been involved in a year-long enterprise agreement dispute with the Abbott government over wages and conditions. The union has restricted all action to harmless protests and limited strikes.

Australian parliament cleaners to strike over pay

Cleaners at Australia's federal parliament in Canberra have voted to strike for 24 hours on Monday in a year-long dispute for a pay rise. The 41 cleaners, employed by Limro Cleaning Services, want their current \$21.10 hourly rate increased to \$22.90.

According to the United Voice union, the rise would bring them in line with the Commonwealth Cleaning Guidelines, which were scrapped in 2014 as part of the Liberal-National coalition government's "war on red tape." As a result, the cleaners' pay has been frozen since 2013.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Employment Minister Eric Abetz claimed last year that abolishing the "guidelines" would not reduce workers' pay but cleaners at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade building in Canberra have had their wages cut by 15 percent or \$6,000 a year. Cleaners at the Department of Immigration and Border Protection have also had their hourly rate cut by \$2.

United Voice opposes any unified industrial campaign by its membership and has taken no action to mobilise cleaners to defeat these cuts.



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