

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 July 2015

Asia

India: Telangana municipal sanitation workers on strike

Some 70,000 municipal sanitation workers in Telangana state in southern India walked off the job indefinitely on July 6 with a raft of demands. The workers are members of the Telangana Municipal Employees and Workers United Association, which are affiliated with the Stalinist Centre for Indian Trade Unions CITU, and the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation employees union, with 30,000 members affiliated with the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).

The workers are demanding a wage rise for contract employees - from 8,500 rupees (\$US134) to 14,170 rupees - and for permanent employees - from 9,500 rupees to 17,380 rupees. They also want housing for municipal employees, health cards and a 500,000-rupee life insurance scheme.

Andhra Pradesh auto parts workers arrested

Over 300 workers from Samkrig Piston and Rings Limited were arrested following their protest outside the Collector's office on July 6. They were demanding payment of revised salaries and job permanency.

Samkrig Piston and Rings, which has three plants in Andhra Pradesh, produces auto parts for vehicle manufacturers in the US, Europe and the UK. The demonstration follows three months of protests in 2013 and the arrest of 200 workers who were demanding Samkrig honour previous agreements and pay four months' unpaid wages.

Andhra Pradesh jute mill workers locked out

At least 3,000 workers at the Shri Bhajrang Jute Mill in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh were suddenly locked out on June 4 and will lose their jobs after the management announced that the property was being sold to a real estate developer. Workers were informed of the lockout and proposed sale when they turned up for work in the morning and read a notice that management had posted at the factory gate.

Workers held a sit-down protest at the Kankaragunta road-

over-bridge blocking traffic for nearly three hours. Police were deployed to the factory to make sure workers did not try to enter the premises.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers oppose privatisation

Workers from the state-owned Alim Jute Mills in Khulna, Bangladesh established roadblocks along the Khulna-Jessore Highway on July 2 to protest the government's plans to privatise the industry.

The workers had previously formed a Privatisation Resistance Committee and organised a demonstration on June 19. Their demands included adequate funding for raw materials, payment of outstanding wages, a dearness allowance and removal of corrupt officials.

Demand for jute has declined sharply over recent years, forcing at least 60 private mills and nine state-owned operations to close, destroying over 56,000 jobs. Many workers complained that they were not being paid on time.

Dhaka garment workers sacked

FCI (BD) Garments in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone sacked 67 employees on trumped up charges of vandalism and arson following an altercation between workers and company goons on June 30. Management closed the factory for four days. The workers were notified of their dismissal when management posted their names on its notice board on July 4.

Police were mobilised to forcibly disperse the sacked workers when they began protesting outside the factory gate.

Pakistan: Lady Health Workers protest

Employees of the government-run Lady Health Workers (LHW) Program in Hyderabad, Sindh province and Lady Health Visitors (LHV) in Bahawalpur, Punjab province demonstrated on June 6 to demand unpaid wages and allowances.

The protesting workers said they had not been paid for three months and although their 7,000-rupee month salary had been nearly doubled to 13,200 rupees (\$US130), the increase and other allowances had not been paid. This included service related allowances, salaries tied to pay scale and permanency for contract employees.

The All Pakistan Lady Health Workers Association called

off the protest in Hyderabad later that day after authorities agreed to discuss the issues. LHV in Bahawalpur said they would immediately observe a “pen-down” protest and boycott all health department campaigns against polio and dengue until their demands were met.

There are 24,000 people employed in the LHW program in Sindh alone and over 100,000 nationally. The workers have been involved in a long-running campaign for job permanency. The service provides vital but rudimentary health services in rural and remote areas.

Islamabad Capital Development Authority employees protest

Daily-wage workers from Capital Development Authority in Islamabad demonstrated in the city on June 6 to demand three months’ unpaid salaries. The workers told the media that they were unable to afford their basic daily needs. They threatened to stage a sit-in protest in the authority’s offices if the payments are not made immediately.

Australia and the Pacific

Australian seafarers strike over job losses

Thirty-six Australian crew members of the petrol tanker Alexander Spirit, berthed in Devonport, Tasmania have been on strike since July 4 after being told they would be replaced by foreign workers on a new international route. The crew were to sail the ship to Singapore where they would be terminated and replaced by low-wage workers. Caltex Australia has allegedly informed the ship’s owner Teekay Shipping that the tanker is no longer needed to transport fuel from its Brisbane refinery to other parts of Australia.

The MUA is appealing a Fair Work Commission decision on Tuesday ordering the crew to end their industrial action.

About 200 protesters, including Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) officials, ACTU president Ged Kearney, Senator Jacqui Lambie and state Labor Party leader Bryan Green, rallied outside Tasmanian Liberal senator Richard Colbeck’s electoral office, calling for “protection of Australian jobs.”

The MUA’s nationalist campaign has nothing to do with defending jobs. It pits Australian workers against their international counterparts while covering up the union’s collaboration with Labor and conservative governments alike in enforcing cost-cutting and other attacks on maritime workers.

In November, 36 crew members of a Teekay-owned petrol tanker Tandara Spirit ended a 20-day strike and occupation of their ship in Melbourne in a failed attempt to save their

jobs. The Tandara Spirit crew ended their action after they were threatened with individual legal action and were abandoned by the MUA. The union told the media it had no intention of organising any broader industrial action over the dispute.

New South Wales metal workers to vote for industrial action

Four hundred sheet metal workers at major building sites across New South Wales (NSW), such as Sydney’s Barangaroo and Darling Harbour, have been granted permission by Fair Work Australia to take industrial action, including strikes, over a work agreement. Voting on the type of action to be taken will be held on July 14.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) has been negotiating a new agreement for the past three months with the Australian Mechanical Contractors Association, which represents seven large sheet metal companies.

The workers want an hourly site allowance that matches building industry rates, the current award incorporated into the new enterprise agreement and annual wage rises of 5 percent over a three-year agreement. Workers rejected an employers’ offer of 11 percent over three years. An AMWU spokesman told the media that the hourly rate for NSW sheet metal workers was “way behind” that of their colleagues in Victoria and Queensland.

Papua New Guinea port workers maintain rolling strikes

Port workers in Papua New Guinea, including Lae, Rabaul, Port Moresby and Wewak, began 24-hour rolling stoppages on June 29. The PNG Maritime and Transport Workers Union, representing workers at 15 ports, called the action after the PNG Ports Corporation failed to ratify terms of employment it previously agreed to. About 400 of the 700 workers at PNG Ports are members of the union.

A union official said the corporation had agreed to 97 percent of a log of claims, including a 5 percent pay rise over three years. The ports corporation rejected union claims for workers’ leave fares and an end to forced redundancies. A union spokesman said that workers had been waiting for the enterprise agreement and a 5 percent wage rise since 2011 and would not call off action until their demands were met.



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