

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 July 2015

India: Tamil Nadu power generating workers on strike

Up to 13,000 workers from the state-owned Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) in Tamil Nadu walked out on an indefinite strike on Monday evening with a five-point charter of demands. Tripartite talks on Wednesday between the Joint Action Council, representing 13 trade unions, the NLC and the government ended in failure.

The strike was called after 20 rounds of fruitless negotiations. The workers' main demand was for a 30 percent wage rise to compensate for not receiving a wage revision since 2007. The unions, however, reduced the wage claim to 24 percent during talks with the company on July 3. NLC has stuck to its original offer of a 10 percent increase.

Thousands of striking Telangana sanitation workers isolated after union accepts wage offer

The Joint Action Committee (JAC), an umbrella union body for Telangana sanitation workers, has accepted a 47 percent wage rise offer from the state government. The increase, however, is restricted to the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) employees. The JAC ordered the 30,000 GHMC workers to end their strike on July 17, leaving the rest of the state's sanitation workers on strike without any offer from the government.

Left isolated, striking sanitation workers in the Karimnagar municipality returned to work on Tuesday without any resolution to their dispute.

Around 70,000 sanitation workers across the state struck on July 6 to demand a 66 percent wage rise for contract employees—from 8,500 rupees (\$US134) to 14,170 rupees a month—and 74 percent for permanent employees—from 9,500 rupees to 17,380 rupees. They also wanted housing for municipal employees, health cards and a 500,000-rupee life insurance scheme.

Andhra Pradesh sanitation workers maintain strike

Twenty thousand municipal sanitation workers in Andhra Pradesh are maintaining a state-wide strike begun on July 10. A delegation of workers led by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) attended a government cabinet meeting on Wednesday but were ignored. Angry over this response, a group of workers held a sit-down picket outside the Ongole Municipal Corporation office and chanted slogans denouncing the state government. Other workers decided to picket the Collectorate building on Friday.

The strikers want a pay rise in line with the 10th Pay Commission, health cards, general provident fund accounts for permanent employees, and pay scale and dearness allowances for outsourced and contract employees.

Karnataka taxi drivers protest

Uber taxi drivers staged a protest on July 21 in Bangalore over discrepancies in payments by the multinational taxi operator. The drivers said there were various outstanding amounts, including up to 20,000 rupees, and they could not run their taxis. They also said that although customers paid many surcharges, the drivers did not receive any incentives for driving during peak hours or at night time as promised.

Tamil Nadu construction workers protest

Construction workers demonstrated outside government offices in Erode, Salem and Karur on July 21 for pensions and other entitlements. In Erode, 92 workers were arrested during the protest. They are demanding a 5,000-rupee pension, a 60,000-rupee maternity benefit for women workers and 500,000 rupees insurance in case of natural death. The protest was organised by the Stalinist-led All-India Trade Union Congress and the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Pakistan: Punjab government employees protest pay delay

Government employees and family members held a sit-down demonstration in front of the Bahawalpur zoo on July 20 to protest non-payment of salaries before the Eid festival holiday. The demonstrators spilled onto the road blocking traffic for several hours.

Government employees are also campaigning for an increase in the minimum wage, a pay-scale revision and job permanency for daily wage, contract and ad-hoc workers. The All Pakistan Clerks Association, which called Monday's protest, has repeatedly called off industrial action based on false promises from the government authorities.

Striking Cambodian garment workers protest against court order

About 200 striking garment workers from Akeen Tek in western Phnom Penh's Canadia Industrial Park demonstrated outside the Municipal Court on Sunday against a return-to-work order. The workers have been on strike since July 9 over contracts, severance pay and other demands. Currently contracts are for five years with severance pay only \$US40. Workers want one-year contracts and \$70, which is about 2.5 weeks' severance pay.

A spokesman for the Union Federation for Worker Security said garment industry employees also wanted compensation for transportation, an extra \$5 in rent subsidies and an additional 1,000 riel (\$US0.24) for food. Most factories pay these subsidies.

The government has been using the courts and violent police interventions to suppress wage demands by garment industry workers and ensure low production costs attract international investors. Hundreds of garment factories have been established in the past two years with 22 percent increase or 100,000 new jobs created.

Federal public servants' pay dispute continues

Staff at the Murray Darling-Basin Authority (MDBA) and the copyright agency IP Australia, as well as scientists at the Australian Synchrotron research station in Melbourne voted last week for strike action. The workers are all members of the Professionals Australia union. The planned industrial action is part of a long-running pay dispute by 160,000 federal public servants with the Abbott Liberal government.

The MDBA has since made an enterprise agreement offer to pay 4.2 percent over three years while Synchrotron scientists have rejected a 1.5 percent pay increase offer. With Treasury forecasting the annual CPI at 2.5 percent the offers represent real wage cuts.

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members working in the Australian Tax Office's Compliance and RDR section have imposed bans on some data entry work. CPSU members—inspectors and veterinarians—in export meat-processing plants nationally have implemented overtime bans and rolling one-hour work stoppages.

The Agriculture Department's 4,500 public servants are due to vote on an enterprise offer that includes annual 1.5 percent pay rises with cuts to leave entitlements and the axing of a \$300 health and well-being allowance. According to the CPSU, workers will lose their health allowance, face a tougher time accessing personal and other leave, have penalty rates cut and lose time off in lieu and other entitlements.

Enterprise bargaining for federal public servants and covering 118 staff agreements and several unions has been underway since March 2014. Only nine new enterprise agreements have been endorsed up to now by federal public sector workers.

The CPSU and other unions are demanding 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions. The unions organised no industrial action until December 2014 and all actions have been harmless protests, limited strikes and ineffective work bans.

Victorian pharmaceutical factory workers locked out

Up to 160 production workers and 16 fitters from the Aspen Pharmaceutical factory in Dandenong, Victoria were locked out for two days following a 24-hour strike on July 8. The dispute, which is over conditions, has been ongoing for more than 18 months. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members were offered a below inflation

pay increase of 3 percent over three years in return for a 50 percent cut in the number of rostered days off. The dispute is being heard in the Fair Work Commission.

Maritime union shuts down jobs protest in Tasmania

A three-week strike and occupation by 36 Australian crew members of the Teekay-owned petrol tanker Alexander Spirit in Devonport, Tasmania ended last week. Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members on the vessel began industrial action on July 4, after being told they would be replaced by foreign workers on a new international route. The crew refused to sail the ship to Singapore where they were to be terminated and replaced by low-wage workers.

The industrial action was deemed illegal by the Fair Work Commission, providing an excuse for the MUA to wind down the dispute. A series of harmless protests were called by the MUA, including in Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia, to divert attention from the union's refusal to take any serious action to defend their jobs.

In November, crew members on the 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.

Striking radiographers in New Zealand suspended

Thirty employees of Fulford Radio logy in Taranaki , on New Zealand 's North Island, were suspended on Tuesday, prior to a 24- hour strike on the same day. Members of the Association of Professional and Executive Employees (APEX) gave two weeks' notice of their strike action following a breakdown in negotiations for a wage increase. Radiographers want a 2 percent pay r i s e, Fulford refused to offer any increase.

APEX rejected claims by Fulford that the union was not willing to negotiate. A workers' representative said they had provided eight dates for mediation during the past two weeks but company claimed it could not attend.

New Zealand car grooming workers strike

Twenty-five car grooming workers at retailer 2Cheap Cars in East Tumaki, a suburb of Auckland, walked off the job on July 16 and picketed their workplace in a dispute over safety and other working conditions. The mainly Indian-student workforce approached the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union to represent them in the dispute. They said management had ignored their requests for basic safety equipment, such as gloves, masks and safety boots.

The workers are only paid \$14.75 an hour for an eight-hour day and do not receive penalty rates for holidays or overtime. A former manager of the workshop who said he was sacked for asking for better pay, said that because most of the employees needed the jobs for their immigration visas and felt powerless.

Papua New Guinea power workers to strike

PNG Power Limited workers have voted to strike on Monday in protest over management's lack of response to concerns about job security and entitlements. A spokesman from the PNG Energy Workers Association, representing 400 employees, said members would turn up on Monday in civilian clothes and wait for an explanation from management.

The planned walkout follows a strike in May over pay rise demands and government's move to restructure and privatise PNG Power. Workers at the time demanded the immediate payment of an already agreed but still unpaid 17.7 percent pay increase.

Management has refused to talk to workers saying that it would "invite" the union to enter into talks close to the deadline for finalising the enterprise agreement on August 3. Workers want management on Monday to explain what is happening to all outstanding issues, including job security, the enterprise agreement and the current changes that are taking place in PNG Power.



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