

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 August 2015

## **Bangladesh: Locked out garment workers attacked by police**

At least ten employees from the Green Life Clothing garment factory in the Ashulia export zone to the north of Dhaka, were injured when police baton-charged their picket outside the factory. Workers were locked out on Sunday when they protested against the removal of some of the factory's equipment to another factory owned by the firm. Workers accused the owner of temporarily closing the factory to break up the union.

## **India: Local government workers strike in Assam**

Local government workers, including municipal sanitation workers, in India's far north-eastern state of Assam have been on a state wide strike since July 20 over long pending demands. They want pensions for retired employees, recruitment of staff on compassionate grounds and permanency for daily wage workers. Striking workers in Silchar municipality complained that they have not been paid for four months.

While garbage is piling up in the streets of most cities, the state government is refusing to negotiate with the unions who have extended the strike to August 10.

## **Telangana contract municipal workers remain on strike**

About 70,000 municipal sanitation contract workers in Telangana remain on strike action over a raft of demands. The sanitation workers walked off the job 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.

Around 30,000 workers of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) returned to work on July 17 after the Joint Action Committee accepted a 47 percent pay increase, which the government didn't offer to the rest of the state's sanitation workers, leaving them isolated.

Several workers were arrested in Khammam when they tried to occupy the camp office of the minister for roads. Three workers in Warrangal attempted suicide as a part of their protest. Strikers across the state have been harassed and beaten by large deployments of police.

## **Maharashtra couriers strike**

Couriers for the Flipkart and Myntra e-commerce companies struck in Mumbai on July 27 to demand workplace toilets, fixed hours of work and a six-day week. The workers said they had to report to work at 7 am but were given no idea when they would end each day. They said they were not paid extra for drops or pickups at customer's doorsteps. The workers are members of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena party's trade union.

## **Film institute contract workers maintain strike**

Some 150 contract workers of the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune have been on strike since June 16 to oppose the appointment of Bharatiya Janata Party politician Gajendra Chauhan as chairman of the governing council. Management has terminated the services of 80 strikers in an attempt to force them back to work.

## **Karnataka electricity contract workers demonstrate**

Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) contractors demonstrated outside the deputy commissioner office on July 28, to demand job permanency. The protestors said that they had been employed as contract workers for the past five in the belief that they would be made permanent. Existing contract workers have no job security and do not receive provident fund payments and gratuity. They are demanding the state government to abolish the practice of hiring workers on contract and fill all full-time job vacancies with the current contractors.

## **Andhra Pradesh health care workers on strike**

Contract health care workers employed in the Arogyasri Health scheme have been on a state-wide strike since July 25 demanding job security, permanency and a wage increase. On Monday, striking workers protested outside Collector offices across the state. In Hyderabad workers tried to surround the Arogyasri trust office but were obstructed and arrested by police. The industrial action is being coordinated by the Arogyasri Outsourcing Employees Association.

## **Andhra Pradesh jute mill workers locked out**

Sri Bajrang Jute mill workers in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh had been protesting at the plant since July 4 when 3,000 employees were sacked when the plant was suddenly closed in preparation for its sale. The locked out workers have begun a protest hunger strike.

The location became a battleground on July 28 after a government official arrived to evaluate the land and premises (7.5 acres) to be handed over to Aditya Infratech, a Hyderabad based real estate firm. Protesting workers were arrested by police. The unemployed jute workers are demanding that the mill reopened.

## **Kashmir health workers protest**

Workers from the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) department protested in Srinagar on July 26 over jobs, wages conditions. They are demanding recognition as full-time employees, minimum wages, changing-room facilities, life insurance, pre-paid mobile phones, uniforms and better service conditions.

The health workers said they were not paid a minimum wage, even though they worked up to eight hours a day, and are demanding between 10,000–16,000 rupees a month, as per seniority. The workers are affiliated with Stalinist Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

## **Pakistan: Punjab government clerks protest**

Clerks from all state government departments in Lahore marched from the Local Government Complex to the Civil Secretariat on Monday to demand the government implement their demands.

In talks held in March with the Punjab Chapter of the All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA) the government agreed to five of their claims. These included time scale for promotion for all staff from grade 5 to 16, a 50 percent salary increase for special education staff, up-grade of salary scales on par with clerks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and an up-grade for superintendents' positions.

An association spokesman told the media that the government had failed to act on their agreement and in further talks it gave another false promise that workers' demands would be met by mid-July. The government also said it would raise the salaries by an additional 5 percent to bring them on par with the salaries of clerical staff in other provinces, increase the minimum salary of the Zakat and Ushr department staff from 9,000 rupees (\$US88) a month to 12,000 rupees and revise scales after merging the ad hoc allowances with the basic salary.

APCA threatened to call a state-wide strike if the clerks' demands were not met in seven days.

## **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa hospital workers strike**

On July 28, striking Ayub Teaching Hospital workers in Abbottabad shut down the facility in protest against the provincial government's proposed Medical Institution Reforms Act. Only emergency services remained open. The strike was called by the All Employees Coordination

Council and included nurses, paramedical staff technical staff and clerks.

Workers fear that the reforms threaten job security by creating a surplus pool of health workers and withdrawing them from currently appointed hospitals. Other demands were for retirement benefits and timely promotions.

## **Sri Lanka: Professional medical workers dispute resolved**

Professions Supplementary to Medicine (PSM) members, including laboratory technologists, pharmacists, radiographers and physiotherapists, at the National Hospital in Colombo ended a 24-hour strike on Thursday after the government accepted their demands. The health workers' vehicle permits, special grade categories and class promotions have been pending since 2010.

## **South Korea: Migrant workers' union denied registration**

Around 50 members of the Migrants' Trade Union (MTU) protested outside the Seoul Regional Ministry of Employment and Labor building on Monday to demand registration of their union. After a 10-year battle to be legally recognised, the Supreme Court in June ruled that illegal immigrants had the right to belong to a trade union.

The labour ministry, however, rejected the MTU's application, alleging that its constitution "could be used for political purpose" and opposed union plans to legalise so-called "illegal" foreign workers and abolish the employment permit system. While the MTU revised the rules and resubmitted its application, the labor ministry has again rejected it and asked for a list of members involved in drawing up the constitution.

The MTU has about 1,000 members and is affiliated with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, one of the nation's umbrella unions. Most MTU members are undocumented and include workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, Vietnam, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. According to government statistics there are about 700,000 migrant workers in South Korea with 15 percent assumed to be "illegal."

## **More federal public servants begin industrial action**

Staff at the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) will walk off the job on Monday, August 3 in a series of rolling four-hour work stoppages to protest the Abbott government's attack on their rights, conditions and take home pay. The strike will have a major impact on the Monday morning peak at international airports.

Meanwhile, staff at the Department of Agriculture (including Quarantine) will also be taking a range of industrial action, including stoppages and bans during the same period. Australian Border Force Marine Unit staff will be undertaking "in port" bans—loading/unloading stores, rubbish and equipment, pre-departure checks, routines and maintenance activities—over the coming week.

Called by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), the industrial action is part of a long-running pay dispute by 160,000 federal public servants with the Abbott government. The CPSU and other unions want 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions. The government is insisting that annual pay increases be

limited to below 1.5 percent in return for cuts to entitlements. With Treasury forecasting the annual CPI at 2.5 percent the offer represents real wage cuts.

Enterprise bargaining for federal public servants 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.

### **Oil refinery workers locked out in wages dispute**

Workers at Esso's on- and off-shore oil and gas production plants in Victoria have been locked out for two hours each day following the breakdown in negotiations with the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU).

The dispute is over a new enterprise bargaining agreement. Workers have been demonstrating outside Esso's Longford site to protest against the lockout.

The lockout is Esso's response to workers' bans on overtime and call outs in an attempt to stop management imposing attacks on wages and conditions.

The refinery workers have overwhelmingly rejected Esso's demands. The company wants to reduce the number of operators at the Longford plant and increase the shift roster for off-shore workers from one-week rotations to two-weeks-on and two-weeks-off. Their enterprise agreement expired nine months ago and the unions have been in negotiations for 12 months.

### **Western Australian hospital support staff take action**

Support staff at public hospitals in Western Australia have begun industrial action over stalled negotiations for a new work agreement. Cleaners, orderlies, catering and sterilisation staff at the Royal Perth Hospital are refusing to dispose of rubbish, wash dishes or collect bed linen. The industrial action will be extended to other hospitals and also affect the movement of patients to surgeries, the cleaning of wards and meal deliveries.

Enterprise bargaining negotiations with the Western Australian Liberal government have stalled over three key issues. Workers want better job security for casual employees and a \$50-a-week wage increase to keep up with the high cost of living in Western Australia. The public hospital health workers also fear that the state government is planning to privatise their jobs.

According to the United Voice union, the government wants to remove a clause from the enterprise agreement guaranteeing no privatisation of services in established hospitals. The union, however, has previously endorsed the privatisation of hospital support jobs at the new Fiona Stanley Hospital.

### **Laboratory workers in Victoria vote for industrial action**

Workers employed at the flu-vaccine maker CSL in Victoria have voted for industrial action for a better wage deal in a new work place agreement. The laboratory workers want a 4.5 percent pay rise but CSL has offered

just 3.25 percent.

Protected industrial action by workers at the Broadmeadows and Parkville factories will include overtime and 24-hour paperwork bans and refusing to answer phone calls or emails between 11a.m. and 2 p.m.

### **Victoria's firefighters apply to take industrial action**

Firefighters employed by the Country Fire Authority and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade have applied to the Fair Work Commission to take protected industrial action as negotiations over a new work place agreement reached deadlock. The United Firefighters Union has been in negotiations with the state government since the last agreement expired in September 2013.

The union said it would not direct members to strike and would limit action to wearing the union logo on their uniform and sending emails in capital letters.

### **Broken Hill water utility workers vote on strike action**

Maintenance workers at Essential Water in Broken Hill, in the far west of New South Wales, are voting on whether to take industrial action in a wages dispute. The ballot ends on August 14. Negotiations between the company and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union on a replacement enterprise agreement reached a stalemate after more than two years of talks. Workers rejected several offers of annual wage increases that included a reduced redundancy payment.

### **Papua New Guinea power workers on strike**

PNG Power Limited workers downed tools 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 have been waiting since 2003 for their entitlements and they would not return to work until management addressed all their concerns.

The walkout follows a strike in May over pay rise demands and the government's move to restructure and privatise PNG Power. Workers want management to explain what is happening to job security, the enterprise agreement and the current changes that are taking place in PNG Power.

Management has refused to talk to workers, claiming that it would "invite" the union to enter into talks close to the deadline for finalising the enterprise agreement on August 3. The Labour Department was due to begin arbitration on the dispute on Friday.



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