

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 August 2015

India: Maharashtra couriers maintain strike

Around 400 couriers for the Flipkart and Myntra e-commerce logistics companies have been on strike in Mumbai since 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 a.m. but were given no idea when they would finish each day. They are not paid extra for working Sundays or national holidays, except they receive a three-rupee incentive for each delivery.

One courier said he had been working since 2011, receiving a monthly wage of 7,200 rupees (\$US113) for 30 to 40 deliveries per day. The wage has been increased by 3,000 rupees but deliveries were increased to 60 to 70 a day. Workers complained that they had demanded holidays on Sundays and national holidays but the union has stalled on making this claim. The workers are members of the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena party's trade union.

Karnataka fishermen protest against tax-refund system

The port town of Malpe came to a standstill on August 4 when 10,000 fishermen and boat operators of the Malpe Fishermen Association marched from Malpe harbour to the Udupi Taluk office to protest against the tax refund system, which pays a diesel subsidy directly into their bank accounts. While the fishing season started on August 1, the fishermen refused to sail until August 5 as part of the protest.

Under the present subsidy system, diesel sales tax is exempted at the delivery point. Workers fear that under the new system there is no guarantee that the tax department would regularly pay the subsidy, leaving them short of funds.

Andhra Pradesh jute mill workers protest over lockout

Locked out workers from the privately owned Sri Lakshmi Srinivasa Jute Mills protested in Bobbili on the Vizianagaram-Rayagada Road, blocking traffic for several hours on August 3.

Around 1,000 workers arrived at the factory that morning but found the factory locked. The highway protest ended in the afternoon after management assured workers that the closure was temporary due to delayed delivery of raw materials.

Pakistan: Islamabad government hospital workers walk out

Workers at five government hospitals in Islamabad walked off the job on August 4 and demonstrated outside the National Press Club to oppose government moves to slash the health risk allowance. They are demanding the allowance be increased on par with salaries. Workers have been holding daily protests over the issue since July 11. For a grade 17 employee the allowance cut will incur a loss of salary of 7,000 rupees (\$US68) a month.

Up to 10,000 workers at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Polyclinic, Capital Hospital, Federal Government General Hospital and National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine are affected by the allowance cut.

Cambodia: Phnom Penh tour bus drivers continue strike

Fifty drivers for Capitol Tours Bus Company are defying a return to work order handed down on July 31 by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. The drivers walked out on July 22 to demand the reinstatement of five employees they claim were fired for trying to form a union. While the court also ordered reinstatement of the five sacked drivers, the company has refused to do so.

The drivers returned to work after the court order but were told by the company that they had to sign a document admitting "their mistake" and that if they had any problems with working arrangements and resigned they would not any benefits.

Capitol Tours drivers voted to elect the five ousted associates as their union representatives and gave notice to the ministry and the company on July 9. The drivers were informed of their dismissal the following day. The Arbitration Council is considering their case.

Cambodian garment workers end strike

Some 300 employees at the Chinese-owned factory of GIN-SOVAN Fashion at Phnom Penh's Thmey commune in Sen Sok district ended a three-day strike on August 4 after management accepted 10 of their 20 demands. The strike was in response to the sacking of 23 workers.

The company agreed to pay the sacked workers \$30 severance pay, respect the labour laws and reduce food costs, among other demands.

Australian federal public servants continue strike action

Immigration and Border Protection workers walked off the job on Monday in a series of rolling four-hour stoppages to protest the Abbott government's attack on working conditions and take home pay. The strike, which is part of a year-long enterprise agreement dispute involving 160,000 federal public servants, impacted on the Monday morning and evening peak periods at international airports across Australia.

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 by federal public sector workers. They include Treasury, the Australian Public Service Commission, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau and Communications. Most of the agreements accepted have contained pay rises at or near 4.5 percent over three years.

This week workers from the Infrastructure Department, which plans and implements government policy on transport and other infrastructure developments, overwhelmingly voted down a wages and conditions proposal from management. Some 77 percent of staff who participated in a ballot rejected the department's pay offer of 1.5 percent over three years tied to productivity offsets.

Lockout continues at Esso's oil and gas plants in Victoria

Esso Australia is maintaining its two-hour daily lockout of 100 maintenance workers at its Longford and Long Island Point oil and gas plants in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The lockouts, which began on July 30, were in response to Australian Workers Union, the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) bans on overtime and callouts.

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.

Western Australian hospital support staff extend action

Support staff at public hospitals in Western Australia have extended industrial action over stalled negotiations for a new work agreement. Work bans imposed by cleaners, orderlies, catering and sterilisation staff at the Royal Perth Hospital have been extended to include the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Fremantle Hospital. United Voice (UV) union members are refusing to dispose of rubbish, wash dishes or collect bed linen. The industrial action has affected the movement of patients to surgeries, meal deliveries and ward cleaning.

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.

Public hospital health workers fear that the state government is planning to remove an enterprise agreement clause guaranteeing no privatisation of services in established hospitals. UV told the media that it would recommend members agree to the draft enterprise agreement if Liberal Premier Colin Barnett made a public commitment to no-privatisation. The

union has previously endorsed the privatisation of hospital support jobs at the new Fiona Stanley Hospital.

Western Australian construction workers vote on industrial action

Around 1,800 construction workers on Chevron's Barrow Island \$55 billion Gorgon LNG project off Western Australia's north-west coast have begun voting on whether to take strike action over a proposed new work agreement.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and ETU members want the current fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) shift arrangement changed from 26 days on, 9 days off to 20 days on, 10 days off. The contracting companies CB&I and Kentz are refusing to negotiate.

The 20/10 roster is consistent with the recommendations of shorter rosters made by the recent WA Parliamentary Inquiry into the mental health impacts of FIFO work. It investigated widespread depression among the workforce, relationship breakdowns and suicides.

New South Wales: Liverpool Council outdoor staff strike

Around 200 outdoor employees at Liverpool Council, in Sydney's south-west, on Tuesday voted to extend their unprotected strike for another 24 hours. Members of the United Services Union (USU) walked out on July 30 to protest the outsourcing of 12 cleaners' jobs. The council's action follows a move earlier this year to outsource management of white collar work to a private company.

The USU alleges that the plan to outsource jobs is part of the Liberal state government's "Fit for the Future" council mergers and will be extended to all municipal councils. USU members fear that their jobs will be outsourced. The USU agrees with the council's call to reduce costs and has offered to "identify efficiencies that would see the maintenance of council employed cleaners."

Victorian private hospital nurses apply for industrial action ballot

Australian Nurses and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members at Cabrini Health hospitals and clinics have applied to the Fair Work Commission to hold a ballot for protected industrial action in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement.

ANMF members rejected Cabrini Health's last offer of a two percent wage increase, back dated to October 2014 plus 2.5 percent annual increases in 2015 and 2016. The "offer" is linked to cuts in long-standing working conditions, including the imposition of a daily car parking fee. The nurses want annual 3.25 percent wage increases over the life of the three-year agreement with no changes to existing conditions.

New Zealand meat processing workers vote to strike

Workers at eight AFFCO meat processing plants on New Zealand's

North Island have voted to strike on August 10 and 11. About 1,000 Meat Workers' Union members will participate in the walkout. AFFCO, which is owned by the Talley's company, wants a work contract for the coming season that includes an end to seniority for workers and changes to smoko breaks.

AFFCO is also attempting to force its employees to sign individual agreements, which ban workers' meetings without prior approval from the employer and authorise an employer representative to discuss any medical history or work injury claims of employees with any medical practitioner, specialist, ACC employee, insurer or former employer.

AFFCO has applied to legally end negotiations under recent National Party government legislation that allows employers to opt-out of collective agreements. The dispute will not be heard in the Employment Court until October.

Papua New Guinea power workers end strike

PNG Power Limited (PPL) workers ended a four-day strike on July 31 in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement and long-pending wage adjustments. Several hundred members of the PNG Energy Workers Association voted at a mass meeting to accept PPL's commitment to increase the base salary by between 5 and 20 percent based on grades and for outstanding issues to be negotiated before the Department of Labour and Industrial Relations.

An association spokesman said workers' grievances included outstanding pay disparities, structural alignment programme pay rises and a 17.7 percent pay rise from 2013, along with job security and entitlements. At least 400 workers are affected by the agreement.



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