

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

17 October 2015

Philippines Airlines workers file strike notice

The trade union covering over 1,500 employees of Philippines Airlines (PAL) filed a strike notice with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) on October 8 in a dispute over the airline's restructuring plan. The Philippine Airlines Employees Association (PALEA) said it can conduct the strike 15 days after posting the notice. This comes more than a year after the union ended a two-year battle against the outsourcing of 2,600 employees in 2011.

PALEA has accused the airline of discriminating against the union, citing the mass termination of 117 employees, almost all of them union members. PAL said the positions were redundant, but the union said contract employees with security escorts were already on standby and immediately replaced the terminated workers. DOLE has called for a meeting between PAL and PALEA.

Pakistan: Punjab doctors protest against privatisation

Young doctors, paramedics, nurses, clerks and janitors at the Punjab Institute of Cardiology in Lahore demonstrated at the outpatients building on Monday against the privatisation of 669 health facilities in 10 districts of Punjab. Hospital services were severely affected during the protest. The Young Doctors Association said the struggle would continue until the government withdrew its privatisation plans.

Punjab rural health workers rally

Lady Health Workers (LHW) from several districts in Punjab province travelled to Lahore on October 12 and demonstrated on The Mall, a major city road. Traffic was interrupted for several hours. Although the government made permanent the services of Punjab's 48,000 temporary LHWs in March 2014, they still have no service structure, affecting promotions and salaries.

Protesters also demanded immediate payment of unpaid salaries

to several hundred LHWs throughout the province. They said they would not leave the city until their demands were approved.

India: Kerala tea plantation workers still on strike

Close to 300,000 plantation workers at state-owned and private tea and rubber estates in Kerala are maintaining strike action begun on September 28. Production has shut down on all plantations across the southern Indian state. The workers, mostly women, are demanding a 20 percent bonus increase and a daily wage rise from 232 rupees (\$US3.55) to 500 rupees, as well as better living conditions and modern health care facilities.

Wayanad workers began a relay hunger strike on October 13, while strikers from the Harrison Malayalam Limited estate blocked roads at 15 places in Idukki district, bringing traffic in the tourist city of Munnar to a standstill.

Negotiations at the tripartite Plantation Labour Committee meeting on Tuesday failed when the trade unions rejected the plantation companies' pay increase offer of just 33 rupees a day. The companies' first offer was a 25-rupee increase, with increased workloads.

Due to years of betrayals by the trade unions, plantation workers in Kerala are among the most impoverished sections of the Indian working class.

The joint council of unions representing workers includes the All India Trade Union Congress and Centre of Indian Trade Unions—affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) respectively—the Indian National Trade Union Congress, aligned to the Congress Party, and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha, affiliated to the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Daily wage workers at Karnataka schools protest

Around 300 daily wage workers, including cooks and cleaners, of 27 residential schools in Raichur district, Karnataka demonstrated outside the office of the deputy commissioner in Raichur on October 13 to demand permanency and payment of

overdue wages. A spokesman from the Association of Casual Employees of Residential Schools, affiliated with the Trade Union Centre of India, said the workers are paid as little as 180 rupees (\$US2.77) a day and wait up to three months for payment. The law mandates that they should receive a minimum of 288 rupees a day and be paid on a monthly basis.

Tamil Nadu sanitary workers protest

Sanitary workers and overhead tank pump operators demonstrated in Tirunelveli on October 13. They demanded a minimum wage of 15,000 rupees per month, health insurance, job permanency for workers who were recruited after the year 2000, and pension and gratuity for retired workers.

Punjab railway workers protest against privatisation

North Railway Mazdoor Union workers in Ludhiana demonstrated on October 13 against privatisation and foreign direct investment in railways. They also demanded renovation of railway quarters and timely disbursement of pension payments to retired workers. The protest was called by the All India Railwaymen's Federation.

Uttar Pradesh sanitation workers end strike

Around 3,000 sanitation workers of the Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation (GMC), in India's northern state Uttar Pradesh, ended their ten-day strike on Thursday after municipal authorities gave an assurance that their demands, including a salary increase, will be considered. Workers walked off the job on October 5 with 24 demands, including a wage increase from 7,500 rupees a month to 14,425 rupees.

Strikers accepted GMC's wage offer of 10,500 rupees, jobs for family members of deceased employees, women workers not to be deputed for garbage collection, and residential quarters for workers. The demands have been forwarded to state officials for approval. Trade union representatives said if approval were not granted within 15 days they would resume strike action.

Telangana health workers maintain strike

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers have been on strike throughout Telangana since September 2 on several

demands. The state's 25,000 ASHAs are contracted under the National Rural Health Mission and are paid piecemeal, receiving payments such as 40 rupees for a pregnant woman registered, 200 to 250 rupees for a delivery at a government hospital, 150 rupees for a family planning procedure and 200 rupees for a cured tuberculosis patient.

Workers want basic facilities, health benefits and an assured pay of 15,000 rupees per month, as against the current performance-based pay system provided by the state government.

On October 10, as many as 8,800 protesting ASHA workers from eight Telangana districts were arrested while still in their districts when they tried to travel to Hyderabad to demonstrate at the state Secretariat building. The Telangana Voluntary and Health Workers (ASHA) Union, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, is coordinating their actions.

Queensland ferry workers call for strike ballot

Workers operating ferries in Queensland's capital, Brisbane, have directed the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) to apply to the Fair Work Commission for a protected action ballot for industrial action. Their action follows 18 months of failed negotiations over a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with Transdev, the private operator of the Brisbane City Council-run service on the Brisbane River.

According to the MUA, under Transdev's proposed EBA, the average worker would lose hundreds of dollars in take-home pay through attacks on penalty rates and overtime. A spokesman said some masters and deckhands would lose between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a year because they rely on penalties.

Protected action will involve not taking fares for passengers, not wearing uniforms and not turning on ticketing machines.



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