

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

31 October 2015

## India: Gujarat government and union force textile workers to end strike

About 7,000 workers at Arvind Limited's woven and knits division at Santej Complex in Ahmedabad ended a three-day strike on Sunday after the Gujarat government claimed the strike was "illegal" and threatened court action. Their union, the Majoor Mahajan Sangh, opposed the walkout, sided with the government and declared that a 2012 work agreement was current until 2018.

The workers downed tools on October 22, stopping all production at the factory, which employs over 11,000 people. They called for an increase in salaries to an average 20,000 rupees per month, up from 13,000 rupees (\$US200), and a 10,000-rupee bonus.

## Delhi municipal sanitation workers on strike

Delhi sanitation workers have been on strike since October 23 to demand overdue wages. The workers are not taking garbage to landfill sites and instead have begun dumping it on major roads and intersections.

The unions called off the strike on Sunday after Delhi municipal administration falsely assured workers that arrears would be paid within a week. The sanitation strikers resumed their walkout within 12 hours, after learning that funds for salaries would not be released by the municipal government until December.

It is the third time in eight months that Delhi sanitation workers, who are represented by over 20 unions, have walked out over issues such as permanency for daily wage workers, better medical facilities and delayed wage payments. Each time the unions have directed strikers back to work on false promises from authorities.

## Nestlé workers in Goa on hunger strike

A group of former workers from Nestlé's food processing factory at Bicholim in India's west-coast state of Goa have been on a hunger strike outside the factory since October 20 to demand

reinstatement.

Some 500 contract workers were dismissed in June when the Maggi noodle line was shut down over product contamination. While health authorities in Karnataka and Gujarat states recently lifted bans on the product after tests proved clear, the Goa state government has delayed lifting the ban.

The hunger strikers, many of whom have worked at the factory for several years, have not found any other employment since their dismissal. They were employed for a daily average wage of 270 rupees (\$US4.14).

## Tamil Nadu workers protest over wages and conditions

Workers in Tamil Nadu held demonstrations during the past week over various issues. On Tuesday, Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation workers demonstrated outside the corporation's Thiruvannamalai regional office to demand a dearness allowance (DA) on par with central government employees.

The same day, beedi workers (cigarette rollers) in Vellore protested in front of the Employment Provident Fund (EPF) office for guaranteed work six days a week, 50 percent pay for days when there is no work, a provident fund based on the number of beedis rolled, a 3,000-rupee monthly retirement pension and an education allowance for the workers' children.

A day earlier in Salem, weavers demonstrated outside the Collector's office calling for a 50 percent wage rise and 30 percent bonus increase. The protesters cited the rising cost of essential food items, such as lentils, and also demanded medical insurance and access to 200,000-rupee bank loans.

## Karnataka steel plant workers protest

On October 26, workers from the JSW steel plant, a sister concern of Jindal South West Group, demonstrated outside the Deputy Commissioner's Office in Bellary. They demanded an end to the victimisation of workers who had demanded an independent union. Protesters told the media that 14 union leaders had been

illegally transferred or terminated by the company and presented a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner.

### **Pakistan: Doctors in Karachi protest**

Around 200 undergraduate doctors at the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) in Karachi held a demonstration outside the Karachi Press Club on Monday over non-payment of their salaries for the past five months.

The undergraduate doctors warned that if they did not receive their pay within a week they would strike. “In the first phase, we will stop working in wards and operating theatres and in the second phase emergency duties would be boycotted,” a protesting doctor told the media.

### **Sindh primary school teachers protest**

Primary school teachers in Sukkur and Larkana demonstrated on October 27 to demand the Sindh provincial government accept their demands. An All Sindh Primary Teachers Association (PTA) spokesman alleged that teachers hired in 2010 were still not permanent and that those who were appointed eight months ago, after clearing the national testing service, had not been paid. He also said that the 25 percent quota policy for the promotion of primary teachers was not being implemented.

The PTA has told the government that teachers have decided to boycott the upcoming local government elections and will not perform duties during the elections if their demands are not met.

### **Western Australian school support staff impose work bans**

Cleaners, field workers and administrative staff in public schools across Western Australia implemented various work bans on Wednesday in a dispute for a new work agreement. The limited bans include bins not being emptied or administrative areas cleaned, gardeners working to rule, and education assistants not doing yard duty or attending after-school meetings.

The school support workers want job security and a 12 percent pay rise over the life of the next three-year enterprise agreement. After three months of negotiations the government has only offered a 7.25 percent pay rise. A United Voice spokesman said that union members are concerned about privatisation and want a government commitment that it will not outsource jobs.

The workers have voted for strike action if the government does not meet their demands.

### **New South Wales disability workers protest**

Disability workers in Newcastle, 140km north of Sydney, will walk off the job for four hours on November 4 and demonstrate in Newcastle to oppose the closure of government-run disability care centres at Stockton, Tomaree and Kanangra in the Hunter region.

The state Liberal government has called for “expressions of interest” to build and operate group homes to replace the three centres. At least 1,200 workers from the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care Hunter Residences, are affected by the move to privatisation.

The Public Service Association (PSA), which covers the workers, falsely claims that closure of facilities does not reflect the real intent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and attempted to blame the Liberal state government. Privatisations and jobs cuts, however, were part and parcel of the NDIS, which was initiated by former federal Labor government.

### **More strikes at Bunnings in New Zealand**

Bunnings workers and supporters protested outside the Australian-owned hardware company’s stores in Dunedin and Christchurch on October 23. The demonstrations, which are part of limited industrial action by Bunnings workers across New Zealand, are over a new collective agreement.

The FIRST Union claims that under the current collective agreement Bunnings can only alter start and finish times under mutual agreement with workers. The firm wants to insert a clause that will allow individual store management to modify workers’ start and finish times at will.

An overwhelming majority of the Bunnings workforce has voted against the proposed collective agreement, which includes a 4 percent pay rise this year with a further two percent next year.



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