

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

14 November 2015

## India: Delhi municipal sanitation workers maintain strike

Delhi sanitation workers are maintaining strike action which began on October 23 over unpaid wages. Of the three municipal government units in the capital, East Delhi owes its 14,000 workers \$US30 million or more than \$2,000 each. The sanitation workers earn between \$5–\$10 a day.

On Monday strikers staged a protest outside the office of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi. The sanitation workers, who are represented by over 20 unions, have walked out three times this year over the delayed wage payments and demands for permanency for daily wage workers, better medical facilities and insurance. They struck for 12 days in June after months of waiting for their pay.

## India: Tamil Nadu university staff and students oppose privatisation

Staff, students and retired workers from the Avinashilingam University for women in Coimbatore temporarily suspended their four-day strike on November 7 to prepare for the Diwali (Festival of Light) holiday celebrations. They said they would resume their strike after Diwali, on November 15.

The students and staff have been holding a series of protests and boycotting classes since June to oppose the full privatisation of the institution. The university was established to educate women from poor communities and is partly funded by the central government. All fees and salaries were regulated by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The university chancellor and the Avinashilingam Education Trust have moved to break from government control and become self-funded. If this occurs the 540 million-rupee (\$US8.2 million) annual government grant would be withdrawn. Staff and retired workers fear their salaries and pensions will be cut while students have been told that fees could increase from 4,000 to 400,000 rupees.

## Tamil Nadu government pensioners demonstrate

Tamil Nadu Government Pensioners' Association members demonstrated in Tirupur on November 5 over several demands. These included an increase in health insurance coverage, from 200,000 rupees to 400,000, and pension rises in line with the minimum wage of rural health (anganwadi) workers.

Their protest followed a demonstration in September in Vellore, Tamil Nadu by former central and state government employees on a 16-point

charter of demands. The main demands of the Coordination Committee of the Central, State Government and Public Sector Pensioners' Associations were for a 13,000-rupee minimum pension and 2,000-rupee monthly medical allowance and for the government to withdraw its New Pension Scheme.

## Bangladeshi jute workers demonstrate over privatisation and lockout

Alim Jute Mills workers at the Atara industrial area in Khulna demonstrated on the Khulna-Jessor Highway on Tuesday to oppose privatisation of the mill and demand payment of outstanding wages. The road was blocked for four hours. The protest was organised by the Privatisation Resistance Committee.

Production ceased and 2,000 mill workers were locked out in July without wages after the mill administration was privatised.

Both state-owned and private jute mills in Khulna industrial belt are facing closure or restructure and rationalisation. The mill closures began in 2002 leaving thousands of workers without an income. Some plants have been closed and then reopened with limited production.

## Pakistan: Power utility workers continue protests against privatisation

Thousands of All Pakistan Hydropower Electric Workers Union members held a nationwide stoppage on Wednesday in their three-year-long campaign against privatisation of state-owned utilities. Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers locked power utility offices and demonstrated in the major cities. In Faisalabad, hundreds of workers of the Faisalabad Electric Supply Company have been holding daily protests since November 4.

Privatisation of WAPDA and its power distribution companies is in line with International Monetary Fund and the World Bank demands on the Pakistan government.

Union speakers told rallies that privatised companies, such as the Karachi Electric Supply Company (KESC), the Multan Electric Power Company and the Rawalpindi Electric Power Company, did not provide services to rural areas because it was not profitable.

KESC was privatised in 2006 on condition that the new owner upgraded the network. Over 4,000 workers were sacked when the company restructured in 2012 and there have been frequent power blackouts caused by load shedding and faulty infrastructure.

## **Mass sacking at Cambodian garment factory**

About 100 garment workers from the Hong Sen garment factory in Takeo province that supplies Puma and Adidas protested outside the Labor Ministry on Wednesday. They were demanding the reinstatement of about 1,600 staff fired last month for striking.

The workers walked out on October 27 demanding a monthly transportation allowance of \$US12, free medical check-ups for pregnant workers and a \$0.50 lunch allowance.

A Collective Union of Movement of Workers representative said that the strikers were sacked after ignoring a court return-to-work order. The factory owners have had difficulty finding replacement workers and have been forced to enter negotiations with workers' representatives at the Labor Ministry. Management is now offering \$8.00 travel allowance and \$0.25 lunch allowance.

## **Cambodian garment factory closed after worker's death**

The Or Sambath Trading garment factory in eastern Prey Veng province was closed for four days on November 6, following the hospitalisation of 22 workers from suspected work-related causes. All 22 fainted at their work stations and one later died in hospital. The factory employs more than 1,200, mostly women.

Garment and textile production is Cambodia's main export earner with over 700,000 workers at 1,087 factories.

Mass fainting at Cambodian garment factories is common and usually caused by poor health, unsafe working conditions and bad ventilation, combined with exposure to dangerous chemicals used to protect cloth from vermin and insects. At least 600 garment factory workers fainted in the first six months of this year with about 900 collapsing over the same period last year.

## **Tasmanian aged-care workers prepare for industrial action**

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) has approved a protected industrial action ballot for workers at the Queen Victoria Homes (QVH) in Lindisfarne, a suburb of Hobart. Around 100 union members will vote on whether to take industrial action over the next week. The facility has around 200 employees.

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) said it had reached an in-principle agreement with QVH management that workers would retain their entitlement to 14 weeks' paid-parental leave in a new work agreement. Management, however, has removed the offer, telling employees to access their parental leave through a federal government scheme. Negotiations for a new agreement have been ongoing for 17 months.

## **Warehouse workers in Victoria strike**

Eight production workers at the print, packaging and logistics company Vertical Supply Integration in Melbourne walked off the job for 48 hours on November 5 in a dispute over their first enterprise agreement. The

workers have been employed by Vertical for twelve months on individual contracts. The company has refused to improve the existing contracts which workers were forced to sign a year ago when the business changed hands.

An Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) spokesman said the workers were concerned Vertical Supply Integration was about to be sold and they wanted an enterprise bargaining agreement in place before this happened. The company has changed hands three times in the last 20 years.

## **Broken Hill water workers to vote on industrial action**

Water utility workers of Essential Water in Broken Hill, New South Wales will vote on industrial action ranging from a series of work bans and stoppages from one hour to 72 hours over an enterprise agreement. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members have been in dispute with the company for two years over redundancy provisions. Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union members employed by the company began limited strike action in October after rejecting annual wage increases but with reduced redundancy payments, job security and superannuation payments.

## **New Zealand hospital workers strike**

About 500 social workers, physiotherapists, scientists, anaestheticians and other health workers at three District Health Boards (DHB) in the Auckland region on New Zealand's North Island stopped work for two hours on Monday. They were protesting under-staffing and a proposed new weekend roster. Public Service Association (PSA) members also held stoppages this week at different hospitals.

The industrial action was in protest against Waitemata, Auckland and Counties-Manukau DHBs' joint plan to run clinic and elective services on a seven-day work cycle to compensate for under-staffing caused by funding cuts. The health workers are currently paid double time for weekend work after midday Saturday. The DHBs want to establish "sector-standard" time-and-a-half weekend rates for new employees.

Health workers first raised workload issues in 2010 when the National Party government began its \$1.7billion health cuts. A recent report revealed that at least half of the DHBs across New Zealand are running a budget deficit due to funding cuts.

## **Papua New Guinea communications workers threaten to strike**

PNG Communications Workers Union and the Telikom Workers Union officials called on Telikom, Papua New Guinea's state-owned telecommunications provider, to withdraw its "spill and fill" policy or face national strike action. The threat was issued during a three-hour sit-in protest at the Telikom Rumana Building in Port Moresby on Monday. The unions allege that workers will be randomly retrenched under the company's planned restructuring and in breach of a 2010 Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and a court order.

The unions' main demand is not to defend the jobs but for Telikom management to negotiate the job destruction with union officials.



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