

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

21 November 2015

Asia

India: Nurses in New Delhi hospitals on strike

Around 2,000 nurses at four municipal hospitals in India's capital New Delhi walked out indefinitely on Monday over various long-standing demands. Their action follows a series of four-hour stoppages over several weeks at the Bara Hindu Rao Hospital, Swami Dayanand Hospital, Kasturba Hospital and Rajan Babu TB Hospital.

The Delhi Nurses Union want a wage rise and all salaries paid on time, bonuses, the filling of all vacant positions and implementation of pending promotions. At least one of the municipal corporations has begun negotiations.

Andhra Pradesh health workers protest

Health workers in Ongole demonstrated on November 16 to demand that their jobs be made permanent and they receive the government-mandated 21,234-rupee (\$US321) monthly wage. The health workers are members of the II-Auxiliary Nurses Mid-wives Union, which is affiliated with the Stalinist Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

On the same day childcare (anganwadi) workers demonstrated in Vishakhapatnam to demand the minimum wage. The childcare workers previously protested on October 19 for payment of outstanding wages and rent arrears for childcare centres. They were organised by the Anganwadi Workers' and Helpers Union.

Jammu Kashmir hydro power construction workers on strike

Over 3,000 workers at the Baglihar Power Project have been on strike since November 10 to demand their employer, Jai Prakash (JP) Associates, pay wages totalling 650 million rupees (\$US9.8 million).

A Chenab Hydro Project Workers Union spokesman alleges that thousands of sacked workers were not paid termination entitlements and that the company has reneged on agreements made in 2008. The union also said that up to 400 workers had lost their lives on the project but their families had not been paid any compensation. The strikers are maintaining a picket at the site.

Pakistan power workers hold five-day national strike

Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers began a five-day national strike on Monday in protest against privatisation of the state-owned enterprise. Apart from emergencies, work at all WAPDA offices and regional power distribution companies stopped during the strike. The industrial action follows last week's one-day national walkout.

The All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union has threatened to impose a power blackout if the Pakistani government proceeds with its plans to sell the utility. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are demanding the government speed up its privatisation of state-run entities, including the energy sector, which is at the top of the list.

Bangladeshi jute workers continue protests

Alim Jute Mill workers at the Atara industrial area in Khulna have been demonstrating since November 10 against the closure and privatisation of the mill. Workers erected a makeshift stage on Monday next to the Khulna-Jessore highway near the mill and held a protest hunger strike. Many local people joined the demonstration.

In July, production ceased and 2,000 mill workers were locked out without pay after the mill administration was privatised. Workers want production resumed and the private management contract revoked.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand overdue wages

Huda Winty Sweater Fashion workers at Shalna, Gazipur demonstrated on Thursday for unpaid wages for September, October and November. The workers said management had shut the factory without prior notice. Police were called in to disperse the protesters after management claimed wages would be paid by November 30.

Vietnamese garment workers strike

Nearly 1,000 workers at the Japanese-owned garment factory of MLB Tenergy in the north-central province of Nghe An walked out on November 13. The strikers were protesting over poor quality lunches, no bonuses for national holidays and excessive overtime. They also complained about heavy deductions to their salaries for allegedly causing

product faults.

A contingency of police was deployed to the factory. While management agreed to negotiate, the workers said they would remain on strike until their complaints were resolved.

Australia and the Pacific

Australian scientific research workers strike

Hundreds of Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) workers walked off the job for three hours on Thursday following 18 months of failed negotiations for a new three-year enterprise agreement. The protest action at the government agency followed a half-day strike in June over the issue.

A CSIRO Staff Association spokesman said members had endured years of government funding cuts, a 20 percent reduction of the workforce and were frustrated that the Liberal-National government has only offered 1.5 percent annual pay increases in the new enterprise agreement combined with cuts in conditions and workplace rights.

Meanwhile, Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) workers have rejected the federal government's latest proposed enterprise agreement offer, which contained 2 percent annual pay increases but with cuts to entitlements.

Enterprise agreement negotiations covering 160,000 public servants on 118 separate enterprise agreements have been underway since March 2014. Although the government has lifted the annual wage increase to 2 percent it is still demanding cuts to long-standing conditions and entitlements.

Only 4 percent of federal public sector workers have accepted proposed enterprises agreements, leaving the wages of 150,000 workers frozen.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has said it is willing to drop its original pay demand from 4 percent annual pay increases for three years to between 2.5 and 3 percent with no loss of conditions.

The CPSU and other public service unions have kept workers divided along departmental lines during the 18-month enterprise agreement dispute while restricting all industrial action to limited stoppages and harmless protests.

Tasmanian biosecurity staff ban overtime

State public sector workers at Biosecurity Tasmania began an indefinite overtime ban on Monday in a dispute over understaffing. The CPSU says that biosecurity staff are being overworked in response to government funding cuts and increased agricultural inspections and tourist arrivals.

The union says that their members reported significant workload issues with 80 percent concerned that these pressures eventually would lead to burnout.

Biosecurity Tasmania inspection staff, who are stationed at air and sea ports, have said the overtime bans will remain until government funding levels were increased.

Aluminium cargo seafarers ordered to end protest

Aluminium cargo ship MV Portland remains stranded at the Portland harbourside in western Victoria, after 19 of its crew ignored a court order to end their sit-in strike and sail the ship on its last voyage. At least 40 crew members face the sack after the ship is returned to Singapore and replaced by another vessel with an alternative crew.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has lodged a legal appeal against the order. No other industrial action has been proposed.

The MV Portland has hauled alumina from Western Australia to Alcoa's aluminium smelting plant at Portland for 27 years. It is the fifth Australian-crewed ship to be decommissioned with the axing of over 100 jobs in the past 18 months.

Although seafarers on these vessels have taken "illegal" industrial action in an attempt to save their jobs, the MUA isolated the protesting workers and deflected workers' concerns into nationalist appeals to the government and encouraged animosity against foreigner seafarers.

In November last year, 36 crew members of a Teekay-owned petrol tanker Tandara Spirit struck for 20 days and occupied the ship in Melbourne in a failed attempt to save their jobs. The Tandara Spirit crew ended their action after they were threatened with individual legal action. The union told the media at the time that it had no intention of organising any broader industrial action over the dispute.

Queensland rail workers apply for strike ballot

Workers at the state-owned Queensland Rail (QR), which operates suburban and long-distance passenger services in Queensland, have authorised the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) to apply to the Fair Work Commission for a ballot for "protected" strike action.

The union and QR are in dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The dispute is over job security, company demands for unlimited use of casual and contracted labour and recruitment selection rules. The union also wants a genuine career-path and the backdating of any proposed pay rise.

According to an RTBU spokesman, most rail workers have not had a pay rise since early to mid-2013. QR has offered a 12 percent wage increase over four years. The union wants this backdated to 2013. Strike action could begin in December.

New Zealand hospital workers continue strike action

Over 3,000 health workers at three District Health Boards (DHBs) in the Auckland region on New Zealand's North Island held a series of two-hour stoppages at four hospitals during the week to protest under-staffing and a proposed new weekend roster. Their action followed two-hour rolling stoppages last week at various hospitals.

The health workers are opposed to the 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. They want to fund the extra hours worked by forcing new recruits to sign inferior contracts. 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.

The DHBs have agreed to reopen negotiations. The Public Service Association (PSA) in response suspended strike action planned for next week but warned that action would resume with four-hour stoppages in December if talks failed.

Auckland University of Technology staff take action

Some 600 members of the Tertiary Education Union (TEU) at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) began five days of limited industrial action on Monday in a dispute for a new collective agreement. Seventy percent of AUT academic staff are union members and they are refusing to upload students' grades onto the university's online database.

AUT members want a 2.5 percent pay increase from January next year, with a further 2.5 percent rise in 2017. AUT is offering just 1.3 percent next year, with a 1.5 percent increase in 2017.

The TEU members' action follows a stop-work meeting on October 24 over management's proposal to extend the annual compulsory summer shut-down from five to nine days, forcing workers to take extra leave.

Vanuatu national broadcasting workers strike

Some 47 employees at the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation held a two-hour sit-in strike on November 12 over delayed wage payments. A spokesman from the Vanuatu National Workers Union said the walkout was called because of persistent failures by management to pay people on time. All radio and TV transmissions ceased during the strike.

Workers ended the industrial action after they were paid the outstanding amounts and the government assured them that "adequate funding for the corporation would be provided for the rest of the year."



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