

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 January 2016

Hong Kong hospital cleaners end strike

Hundreds of contract cleaners at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong ended a seven-day strike on Monday after winning a pay rise and improved conditions. The cleaners walked out because recent employees were receiving higher wages and had better conditions.

After several rounds of talks with the cleaning company and hospital management, a deal was struck to standardise the basic salary at \$HK9,000 and pay cleaners a “hardship allowance” of \$300 a month for doing “unpleasant” work.

Pakistan: National airline workers continue anti-privatisation protests

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) employees closed down offices nationwide and stopped all bookings and cargo and courier services on Tuesday. The action is part of an ongoing campaign against government plans to privatise the state-owned airline.

The Joint Action Committee of PIA employees has threatened to suspend all flight operations from February 2 if the government fails to meet workers’ demands.

PIA unions, however, have minimised all industrial action and issued appeals to the government to withdraw its PIA Corporation Conversion Ordinance. In return for dropping the plan, the unions have offered to assist the government to “reform” the airline and increase productivity, meaning job cuts and attacks on wages and conditions.

The government’s privatisation policy is in line with its loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Along with the PIA, the government is targeting a long list of state-owned enterprises and putting hundreds of thousands of jobs on the chopping block. The unions have rejected unified action by the state-owned enterprise employees to fight the job destruction.

Government doctors in Karachi end strike

Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre doctors in Karachi ended a four-day strike on Monday after the government said it would negotiate with the Young Doctors Association (YDA). The doctors walked off the job on January 22 to demand six months’ unpaid wages and the same pay scales as government doctors in other parts of Pakistan.

Rawalpindi health workers strike over unpaid wages

About 100 Punjab government employees for Rawalpindi district’s anti-dengue campaign stopped work on January 22 to demand four months’ unpaid wages. Strikers demonstrated outside the Rawalpindi press club and denounced government claims that it did not have any money to pay their salaries.

India: Delhi municipal workers on strike

Thousands of municipal workers from Delhi’s three municipal corporations struck for three days on Wednesday to demand immediate payment of three months of outstanding wages. Other demands included salary increases, permanency for contract-based employees and unification of the three corporations.

The walkout followed months of limited strikes and demonstrations over these issues. The New Delhi, East Delhi and South Delhi municipal corporations have 150,000 employees, including teachers, para-medical staff, administrative staff, engineers and sanitation workers. Sanitation workers walked out three times last year, including a 12-day strike in June, over the same issues.

A union spokesman said that the South Delhi employees were receiving their salaries on time but joined the strike in solidarity with their colleagues from the other municipal corporations.

Jharkhand rural nurses on strike

Rural healthcare nurses under the National Health Mission have been on strike since January 15 in 24 districts of Jharkhand. Around 5,500 contractual auxiliary and general nurse midwives (ANM and GNM) were protesting a recent government recruitment notification to fill 250 vacant positions.

The nurses have denounced it as a betrayal and demanded that the positions be filled by existing contract nurses as previously promised by the health department. Nurses have refused to call off the strike unless the state government initiated a discussion on the issue.

Maharashtra sanitation workers on strike

At least 1,500 garbage collection and transport workers of the private operator Kanak Resources Management Limited (KRML), which is under contract to the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC), have been on strike since January 25. While the NMC is using its own trucks the garbage is piling up in the streets.

The sanitation workers want contract workers' daily wage increased and the provision of safety equipment.

The NMC and KRML have refused to negotiate, claiming that the strike was illegal and that the union—the Vidarbha Mazdoor Sangh Mukesh Shahu—is not registered. The NMC has threatened to invoke the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) on the grounds that workers had struck without prior notice. Under the ESMA, the strike would be illegal and workers fined if they did not end the strike.

Chandigarh college contract staff strike

Contract staff at the Chandigarh College of Engineering and Technology stopped work on January 25 to protest the termination of six contractual assistant professors who had demanded joining the permanent faculty. Strikers complained that 20 temporary posts were approved by the Chandigarh administration but had not been filled. Their demand was for a comprehensive policy for workers who had worked as contract staff for 3 to 12 years.

Tamil Nadu fishermen on strike

More than 200,000 fishermen from seven districts of Tamil Nadu have been on strike since Monday demanding that 75 fishing boats be retrieved from Sri Lanka.

Fishermen from Nagapattinam, Ramanathapuram, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Puducherry and Karaikal said the boats were confiscated by the Sri Lankan military from March 2015 onwards and that at least 18 were destroyed. The fishermen said that they would shut down the fishing industry in the region if Sri Lanka did not return the vessels, which cost around 500,000 to 3 million rupees (\$US43,000) each.

Sri Lankan teachers demonstrate

Several hundred teachers demonstrated outside the Education Ministry in Battaramulla on the outskirts of Colombo on Wednesday to protest against delayed promotions. Teachers said their promotions had been blocked since 2009.

Representatives of the Ceylon Teachers Union held discussions with the education officials and have accepted a vague commitment from the ministry that it would “provide a solution.”

South Australian child welfare workers impose work bans

Hundreds of child welfare workers from Families SA started closing offices for an hour a day from Monday and have refused to work overtime

in protest against working conditions. At least 500 Families SA workers took similar industrial action in November over staff shortages and mounting workloads. Families SA has 1,800 fulltime equivalent employees.

Workers are concerned that thousands of calls to the Child Abuse Report Line go unanswered each year due to under-staffing. Over 85,000 emergency calls for help went unanswered in the four years up to June 30, 2015. A Public Service Association (PSA) spokesman said he understood the number of vacancies in the department had grown to 120. PSA members planned to meet during the week to discuss further action.

Broken Hill water utility workers resume industrial action

Essential Water workers in Broken Hill, New South Wales, held two-hour work stoppages on Friday and plan to walk out for 24 hours next Thursday as part of a long-running dispute over a proposed new work agreement. The strikes were called by the United Services Union, the Town Employees Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Construction, Forestry Mining and Energy Union.

Essential Water has offered 2.5 percent annual pay increases on the condition that voluntary redundancy payouts are capped at 52 weeks. The “offer” has been repeatedly rejected by workers with the most recent vote on January 19. Workers want a 3.5 percent pay increase in the first year to compensate for the long negotiating period, then 2.5 percent annual increases to the end of the three-year agreement, and no changes to existing conditions.

New Zealand meat workers' dispute taken to court

An Employment Court hearing has begun in Auckland over stalled negotiations between Talley's-owned meat processor Affco and the Meat Workers Union (MWU). Two hundred Wairoa freezing workers have been locked out for the past 135 days.

The court unanimously decided in November that Affco's lockout of freezing workers, who had refused to sign individual contracts earlier in the year, was illegal. It also said that Affco had breached the Employment Relations Act by not acting in good faith during collective bargaining.

The MWU divided the freezing workers, sending members at the other plants back to work under the new contracts even though a number of Wairoa workers refused to sign the new contracts, declaring that they were being forced to work longer hours for less pay. While the union and the company were ordered to return to mediation these talks have failed to resolve the long-running dispute.

Affco, the country's fourth-largest meat processor, continues to insist that the locked-out workers should restart work on the nightshift, which the union contends is unreasonable and discriminatory.

Papua New Guinea nickel mine workers strike

Over 600 workers at Ramu Nickel's Kurumbukari mine in Madang province, on Papua New Guinea's north coast, downed tools on January 22 and are occupying the mine. The multi-billion dollar Ramu NiCo mine and smelter project is the largest venture to be operated and owned by

Chinese interests anywhere in the region.

Mining and smelter workers presented the company with 11 grievances two weeks ago and want it to adhere to Australian and New Zealand safety standards. Management, however, has refused to talk directly to the workers and insisted that the Ramu Nickel Workers' Union enter mediation talks with the company and the government. A meeting was scheduled for January 27.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact