

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 March 2016

Asia

Chinese tyre factory workers protest

Some 100 workers at the Korean-owned Hankook Tyre factory in Jaixing, on China's mid-east coast, demonstrated at the plant on March 1 against company plans to reduce the number of shifts from four to three. Local sources said the workers' action was related to Hankook's decision to lay off 300 workers at the firm's Jiangsu factory, which has also reduced its shifts.

Hankook has manufacturing plants in Jiangsu, Jiaying and Chongqing. It wants to establish three shifts in all factories to increase "operational efficiency," a company representative told media. The company has factories in South Korea, Hungary and is expanding to Indonesia.

Cambodian garment workers locked in factory

More than 200 garment workers at the Singaporean-owned Bright Sky factory in Phnom Penh's Por Sen Chey district were locked inside the facility on Monday to prevent them striking. The lock-in was in response to the workers' threat to walk out and protest outside the factory over job security.

According to a Workers Development Union Federation representative workers were concerned that their jobs may be at risk as the factory switches from garment to handbag manufacturing. Workers want job security and adequate training.

Cambodian amusement park workers protest

Around 50 employees from the closed Dream Land amusement park in Phnom Penh protested outside the park's grounds on Monday to demand severance pay. Workers said management falsely told them that the park, which sits on land slated for a 133-storey tower development, would close at the end of March but it suddenly shut down at the end of February and fired all workers. A former worker said employees were seeking one month's pay and a portion of their annual bonus as a severance package.

India: Karnataka village bank workers strike

Village bank (Grameen Bank) employees struck for 48 hours and protested in Mysore, Karnataka on March 10 in a nationwide campaign against privatisation of village banks and other demands. They also called for pension schemes, permanency for daily wage workers, an end to job outsourcing, recruitment on compassionate grounds and wage rises based on qualification.

Workers are represented by the Kaveri Grameena Bank Employees' Union, Kaveri Grameena Bank Officers' Association, and the Kaveri Grameena Bank SC/ST Employees and Officers' Welfare Association.

Karnataka government secretariat workers strike

Karnataka Government Secretariat Employees' Union members stopped work on March 14 and protested outside the State Assembly in Bangalore with several demands. These included equal pay with Central government employees, proper facilities for women working late, filling of all vacant positions and scrapping of the national pension scheme. Protesting workers said they would escalate their action if demands were not met in the state budget.

Karnataka textile mill workers' strike in second week

Around 2,500 textile workers at the century-old Gokak Mill in Balgaum, Karnataka have been on strike since March 10 to demand the mill management stop attempting to force them to leave their jobs. The mill, which used to employ 12,000 people, now has only 2,500 workers.

The government has tried to force the workers and mill management into mediation in the labour department but workers rejected the offer saying they would resolve the issue directly with management. Management has threatened to close the mill if workers do not soon return to work.

Jammu and Kashmir food distribution workers on indefinite strike

Close to 1,300 Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution (CAPD) workers have been on indefinite strike in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, since March 1. They want wages on par with Food

Corporation of India (FCI) workers. CAPD employees are only paid 150 rupees per day while FCI employees receive 450 rupees per day. Other demands include loading/unloading pay to be increased from 3 rupees per bag to 4.3 rupees per bag and reviewed every six months, and the release of wages before the 10th of each month.

The Food and Allied Workers' Union (J&K) members of CAPD walked out across the state for three weeks in January over the same issues. They returned to work on January 28 after a false assurance from authorities that their grievances would be solved within 15 days, which they failed to do. Workers said they will not end their current strike until all issues are resolved.

Tata auto workers reject management proposal and continue strike

Over 400 workers at Tata Motors' Nano plant in Sanand, Gujarat have been on strike since February 22 to demand the reinstatement of 28 employees and the right to form a union. Workers this week rejected a government/Tata offer that would have allowed them to form a union but with no outside connections. Management also proposed establishment of an independent panel to "probe the incidents" that led to the suspension of the 28 workers, before the workers can be reinstated.

Strikers are defying a March 3 decision from the state labour department that "prohibited" the strike, giving them until March 11 to return to work before commencing legal action. Over 280 workers were detained by police during a two-day protest outside the Collector's office on Monday.

Meanwhile, management has brought in 250 scabs from its Pune plant to break the strike. Tata had hoped to produce at least 250 new model Nano hatchbacks per day in March but due to the strike production is down to 100 cars a day.

Striking workers said they would take their struggle state wide after 22 central trade unions expressed support. These unions, however, have not called for concrete industrial action to support the Tata workers. Strikers have established a seven-member committee to organise the dispute.

Madhya Pradesh government employees on state-wide strike

At least 500,000 Madhya Pradesh state government employees held a state-wide one-day strike on March 11 with a charter of 71 demands. Their main demands were revision of pay scales as per pay commission recommendation, an increase in grade pay and interim relief.

They also want pay scale grades on completion of 10 years, 20 years and 28 years of service, salary increases on January 1 and July 1, permanency for daily wage workers and ad hoc employees, and simplification of appointments on compassionate grounds.

Government employees are represented by 19 recognised and 16 non-recognised employee unions with over 700,000 members. The strike was coordinated by the State Employees Union.

Kerala: Container workers in Kochi port end strike

Container trailer crews at Kochi port called off a five-day strike for a wage increase on Tuesday after a state government labour official agreed to their demands. The trailer crews' demand for a pay rise was accepted

and parking facilities assured near the Indian Oil Corporation terminal. Pay for trailer crews handling 40-foot containers will increase from 850 rupees a day to 1,050 rupees (\$US15.58), while pay for crews handling 20-foot containers would rise from 640 rupees to 850 rupees.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers maintain protests

Workers from eight state-owned jute mills in the Khulna-Jessore region demonstrated on Monday morning blocking roads and rail tracks. The jute mill workers want the government to provide funding for the industry, pay salary arrears, establish a wage board and end privatisation of the state-owned industry. Further demands are for reinstatement of retrenched workers and the removal of corrupt mill officials.

Garment workers in Dhaka protest over closed factory

Hundreds of workers from the Madinaple Fashions Craft garment factory at Zamgora in the Ashulia industrial estate demonstrated on Tuesday along the Dhaka-Aricha highway outside the Rana Plaza demanding the reopening of their factory. Factory owners suspended workers and shut the factory without notice on March 7 after workers made several demands. These were implementation of minimum wages, earned leave benefits, a festival bonus increase and yearly increments.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa paramedics stop work

Paramedics and Class IV employees of government hospitals in Hazara division in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province stopped work on Thursday to demand a new service structure that includes a pay-scale upgrade and new health allowance. Their action followed a one-day strike by paramedics in the Mardan division on March 10.

Paramedics claimed that despite promises to implement the new service structure, the government continuously failed to honour its promise. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Paramedics Association, which was coordinating the industrial action, said a strike would be held across the province on March 29 if the government continues to fail to address their demands.

Karachi health workers demand wages

Lady Health Workers demonstrated on March 10 outside the chief minister's house in Karachi demanding unpaid wages and other allowances. The demonstration blocked several main roads in the city. The All Pakistan Lady Health Workers Welfare Association called off the demonstration after the authorities promised to address the issue within a week.

Faisalabad weavers and factory owners reach agreement

Power-loom workers and factory owners have reached an agreement and resumed production in Sidhar and Rashidabad where thousands of weaving units were closed for more than one month. Factories were shut in Sidhar, Lakar Mandi, Chenchal Singhwala, Rashidabad and Jhang Road by the owners who refused to accept the workers' demand for recruitment of oilmen, cleaners and loaders. The extended lockout pushed workers to the brink of starvation, forcing them to accept an agreement far short of their demands.

According to the agreement signed on March 12, workers will perform oilman duties twice a week. Health and safety laws will be implemented in factories. Labour leaders will not contact workers in factories, and owners will review the salary package of the winders. Social security cards of workers whose contribution has been deposited with the social security department will be issued immediately. Factory owners will give 3,000 rupees (\$US28.6) as an advance to workers and the amount will be deducted in instalments.

Australia and the Pacific

Australian public sector workers to strike

Tens of thousands of federal public sector workers plan to hold 24-hour strikes on March 21 and 24 in their two-year dispute for new work agreements. Workers in 11 government departments will strike on Monday, while on Easter Thursday workers in Immigration, Border Protection and Agriculture will strike. Border Protection workers plan to extend strike action to include rolling stoppages at international airports.

Workers in over 100 federal departments have rejected government enterprise agreement offers that would eliminate existing rights, including family-friendly conditions, in return for a two-year wage freeze and 2 percent annual pay increases over three years.

This week 51 percent of staff in the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, for the third time, voted against a proposed enterprise agreement. In other departments, 85 percent of Tax Office workers rejected the government "offer", 81 percent voted no from Immigration and Border Force and nearly 80 percent rejected it from the Department of Human Services.

After two years of negotiations, almost 85 percent of the total federal public sector workforce of 160,000 still do not have a new enterprise agreement. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and other unions have reduced their original pay demand from 4 percent annual pay increases for three years to between 2.5 and 3 percent with no loss of conditions.

Northern Territory LNG plant construction workers protest

Around 500 construction workers from the Japanese-owned \$34 billion INPEX LNG plant at Bladin Point, near Darwin, demonstrated in Darwin last Sunday outside the project construction contractor's office JKC over poor safety and "arduous" rosters.

Workers from several unions, including the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), complained that site walkways are often flooded, there was little traffic management and no "buddy system," meaning workers at times work alone.

Another complaint was a roster system of 28 days on and seven days off, which workers claim was straining family relations. Workers want the new industry standard recently implemented in Western Australia which is 20 days on 10 days off. Workers blame the current system for the suicide deaths of three fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers between 2013 and 2015.

New Zealand: Auckland bus drivers implement work bans

Over 100 bus drivers from Howick and Eastern Buses in Auckland, on New Zealand's North Island, imposed work bans on Thursday in their dispute for a new work agreement. Drivers refused to handle cash payments for 24 hours, refuel vehicles or to drive vehicles with known faults or broken equipment. The drivers' action followed three strikes in February over the dispute.

The drivers are protesting their employers' attempts to remove overtime and weekend rates. A spokesman from the FIRST Union accused the company of attempting to reduce pay in order to maintain its contract with Auckland Transport. Howick and Eastern recently lost their contract in South Auckland after Auckland Transport selected Ritchies and Go Bus as the preferred tenders. Both companies pay poorer wages to their drivers.

Bunnings hardware retailer suspends workers over roster dispute

Hardware chain Bunnings has begun issuing suspension notices to staff members at 29 stores who have taken off their branded aprons on the job and replaced them with union stickers. Around 800 workers represented by the FIRST Union participated in national protests.

The Bunning workers have been in conflict with the company over a new collective agreement since July 2015, after management demanded the right to set rostered hours, rather than come to a mutual agreement with employees on their work times. The FIRST Union has opposed any large-scale, nationwide industrial action, holding months of low-key industrial action, mostly involving protests outside Bunnings stores.



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