

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 March 2016

## India: Hero auto plant workers in Gurgaon protest

Hero MotoCorp autoworkers in Gurgaon, Haryana held a sit-in protest in the factory's canteen at the end of their shift on Monday to demand resolution to their pending wage settlement. According to the Hero MotoCorp Gurgaon Workers Union, which has been in negotiations with management, the three-year wage settlement has been pending since August 1, 2015.

Management called police who arrested the accused protest leader Maruti Suzuki Kamgar Yojna Union president Kuldeep Janghu before breaking up the peaceful event. Police charged Janghu with leading an illegal protest and said he would be held in custody until April 4.

Hero MotoCorp workers want wage parity with Honda Motor Company employees. The two companies were earlier one entity, Hero Honda. Wage settlements at almost all other Hero MotoCorp plants have been finalised.

## Gujarat childcare workers demand better wages

Childcare workers in Surat, Gujarat demonstrated on Monday to demand a wage increase, job permanency, pensions and no privatisation. Protesters said that they were paid a meagre 4,700 rupees (\$US70.2) per month and they wanted a 15,000-rupee wage increase. There are at least 2,000 low-paid childcare workers in Surat city and 100,000 in Gujarat state.

## Tamil Nadu hospital housekeeping contract staff protest

Close to 100 contract housekeeping workers of Dindigul Government Hospital protested in the hospital director's office on March 21 to demand a pay increase. They currently receive 190 rupees per day. They also want provident fund and employee state insurance deducted from their wages.

## Uttarakhand animal reserve workers forced to end strike

Some 150 permanent workers at the Corbett Tiger Reserve near Ramnagar city in India's northern state of Uttarakhand called off a six-day strike on March 20 following a High Court directive. Corbett Tiger Reserve workers accused the government of only being concerned about the strike after employees locked the reserve's gates causing a loss of

revenue from national and foreign tourists.

The animal reserve employees walked out on March 14 to demand job permanency for lower grade workers. The reserve was established in 1936 to protect the endangered Bengal tiger but has since become a major revenue earner for the state government.

## Striking Orissa ambulance workers arrested

The Orissa state government enacted the draconian Essential Service Maintenance Act (ESMA) in Bhubaneswar on March 19 after a group of 108 Emergency Medical Ambulance Service (EMAS) workers took strike action the day before. At least 32 of the state's 420 ambulances were off the road due to the strike.

Two ambulance workers were arrested on Sunday after they refused to follow the ESMA order. A government official threatened that if the workers took any other action they would be disqualified from future government employment.

The ambulance workers want better wages, annual increments and overtime payments. The contract employer ZHCL had offered to increase wages by 8–12 percent based on performance, conditional payment for overtime and an increment next year. Ambulance workers rejected the offer and an Ambulance Employees' Union representative said that the strike would continue until union members' demands are fulfilled.

Each 108 vehicle has three kinds of employees: drivers, helpers and medical technicians. ZHCL currently pays drivers and technicians 240 rupees (\$US3.58) per day (skilled labourers) and helpers 200 rupees (semi-skilled).

## Karnataka paper mill workers protest

Workers from the state-owned Mysore Paper Mill blocked the highway in Shimoga, Karnataka on March 22 demanding the government allocate funds for the modernisation of the mill. The workers' action was sparked by management sending workers on "earned" leave for an indefinite period.

In November, over 1,100 employees were forced to take leave. While the MPM Employees' Association is questioning the legality of the forced leave in the labour courts, MPM began another round of forced leave in February affecting over 600 workers.

## Pakistan: Lahore doctors protest delay in new service structure

Doctors from government hospitals in Lahore held a protest on Monday over long-pending demands that include a pay rise, promotions and implementation of the new service structure which the government had previously agreed to. A demonstration outside the Mayo Hospital blocked traffic on several main roads in Lahore. Demonstrations were also held at Muzaffargarh and Sheikhpura hospitals.

The Young Doctors' Association (YDA) criticised the government for slashing the health services budget by 15 percent. The YDA wants the budget cuts withdrawn and price regulation of medicine.

### **Punjab government school teachers protest**

Punjab government school teachers demonstrated in Lahore on March 17 to demand an end to privatisation and performance pay, and the implementation of promotions without further delay. The government is also deducting teachers' wages for poor performances of students in examinations.

The government has organised a public-private partnership deal and is handing over management of public schools to the Punjab Education Foundation. It will impact more than 5,000 schools.

The central and provincial governments have either slashed or frozen education budget allocations. The already inadequate and crumbling service is on the verge of collapse and teachers fear that the privatisation program will eliminate free education in Pakistan.

### **Rawalpindi government employees strike for pensions**

Rawal Town Municipal Administration workers in Rawalpindi, Punjab district walked off the job indefinitely on Wednesday to demand the release of pensions for former local government employees. More than 19,000 pensioners, including former employees of the City District Government Rawalpindi, have not received their pensions for four months. A government official told protesting workers that there would not be enough funds for pensions for at least another two months.

### **Public sector union cancels industrial action after Brussels bombings**

A planned 24-hour strike on Thursday by Immigration, Border Protection and Agriculture workers at major airports in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane was called off on Wednesday by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) in the wake of the Brussels airport bombings.

On Monday tens of thousands of federal public sector workers from over 11 government departments walked out over their two-year dispute for new work agreements. Those involved included Medicare, Centrelink, the Tax Office, Defence, the Bureau of Meteorology, Department of Education, Department of Environment, GeoScience Australia, IP Australia and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal workers. Immigration, Border Protection and Agriculture staff held rolling stoppages at international airports in Cairns, Townsville, Perth, Darwin and Adelaide.

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. 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. The 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.

Following nearly 12 months of limited, ineffective industrial action, designed to wear down workers' resistance to the government's inferior pay offer, the CPSU is lodging a case in the Fair Work Commission accusing the Turnbull Liberal government of refusing to allow department heads to negotiate in good faith.

### **Victorian power workers apply for strike ballot**

The union representing workers at the Loy Yang A power generating plant in Victoria's Latrobe Valley has lodged an application with the Fair Work Commission to ballot members on possible industrial action over a new work agreement. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has accused AGL Energy of not bargaining in good faith after it failed to attend the last six scheduled negotiation meetings.

The CFMEU says that AGL Energy want to reduce workers' superannuation payments, cut long-service leave and other entitlements, remove minimum staffing levels and change restrictions on some work practices. Workers are also concerned that various cost-cutting measures will endanger work safety.

Salaries under the proposed Enterprise Bargaining Agreement have already been agreed, with workers accepting AGL's wage proposal for a 21.5 percent increase over four years.

### **New Zealand frame and truss assembly plant workers on strike**

Workers at PlaceMakers' frame and truss plant in South Auckland walked off the job on Thursday in a dispute over a new collective agreement. Workers want penalty rates for working more than 40 hours a week and the night shift allowance restored in a new agreement.

The FIRST union said that workers want the company to improve its current offer of a 2.75 percent pay increase over 18 months. PlaceMakers employs over 2,100 people at 58 stores and 12 manufacturing plants nationwide. The strike action follows three rounds of failed negotiations.

### **Auckland health workers issue strike notice**

On Thursday the Public Service Association, which represents over 3,000 workers at three Auckland District Health Boards (DHBs), issued a strike notice to take effect on April 8. Health workers will strike from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Anaesthetic technicians, pharmacists, physiotherapists, mental health workers and occupational therapists oppose the Waitemata, Auckland and Counties-Manukau DHBs' proposed new roster which attacks working conditions and jobs.

Health workers held a series of two-hour work stoppages in November to oppose the DHBs' joint plan to run clinic and elective services on a seven-day work cycle to compensate for under-staffing. The DHBs also want to force new recruits to sign inferior contracts which include "sector-

standard” time-and-a-half weekend rates. Health workers are currently paid double time for weekend work after midday Saturday.

### **Protesting Fijian teachers ordered back to work**

Teachers from Fiji’s Queen Victoria School (QVS), who refused to be reassigned after Tropical Cyclone Winston destroyed much of the school, were ordered to report for work this week or face the sack. The Minister for Education Mahendra Reddy said that if they did not report to their new schools they would be deemed to have resigned. The protesting teachers had been off work for five consecutive days, the limit allowed under regulations.

The teachers want classes to be held at QVS for senior students. But the minister had closed the school and said it was in “bad shape.” The QVS Old Boys association supported the teachers, saying that exam classes should go back to QVS. Its president said the facilities left standing at QVS could cater for students in exam classes.



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