

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 April 2016

India: IDBI Bank workers hold national stoppage

Up to 18,000 employees of the government-owned IDBI Bank (Industrial Development Bank of India) began a four-day national strike on Monday to oppose further privatisation of the bank. Workers demanded a written assurance from the government that its stake in the bank would not be reduced below 51 percent. The national government currently has a 72 percent share.

This is the second strike on the issue in the past six months. The previous walkout was in November when the government first proposed reducing its stake.

On February 29, the Prime Minister Modi's BJP-led government revealed in its budget that the "process of transformation" of IDBI Bank had already started and the government was considering reducing its stake to below 50 percent.

The strike was jointly called by the All India IDBI Employees' Association, IDBI Officers Organisation, United Platform of IDBI Bank Unions, United Forum of IDBI Officers & Employees, IDBI Workers' Union and IDBI Karamchari Sangh.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa paramedics strike

Around 15,000 paramedics at government health facilities in Pakistan's northern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa walked out on Tuesday to demand a new service structure that includes a pay-scale upgrade and new health allowance. Their action followed a one-day strike earlier last month by paramedics in the Mardan and Hazara divisions but which failed to win a response from the government.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Paramedical Association claimed that despite promises to implement the new service structure, the government continuously failed to honour its promise. Paramedics said they would continue to call for a service structure for colleagues who often retired on the same grade that they were originally hired.

Sri Lankan mine workers demand festival bonus

Over 60 mine workers at the Kahatagaha Graphite Mine in Sri Lanka's North Western province ended their three-day protest on Wednesday, after management agreed to their demands. The miners stopped work and occupied the mine—1,100 feet (335 metres) underground—to call for a 15,000-rupee (\$US100) festival bonus. The strikers were also concerned that the government had falsely claimed that the mine was running at a loss and was planning to sell the operation to an Australian company.

Cambodian garment workers oppose new labour law

Garment workers at over 100 factories in Kampot, Preah Sihanouk and Kandal provinces, as well as Phnom Penh, held lunchtime demonstrations outside their factories on Monday in opposition to a draft trade union law due to be presented to the National Assembly on April 4. Workers held banners saying "Don't create a law that oppresses worker rights." The draft law, originally requested by business owners in 2007 to curb strikes, sets rules on how unions are formed, operated and dissolved.

Workers complained that under the new law a strike would be legal only if approved by more than 50 percent of participants at a union meeting where more than half the union members are present—effectively making strikes impossible for unions with several thousand members. The draft law would also enable courts to dissolve unions for infractions committed by union leaders.

Australian immigration and customs workers strike

Federal Immigration and Border Force, and Agriculture and Water Resources workers resumed protected industrial action on Wednesday at international airports throughout Australia in their two-year dispute over new work agreements. A planned 24-hour strike for last week at major airports in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane was called off by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) in the wake of the Brussels airport bombings.

The industrial action impacts on eight international airports and overseas shipping terminals and will continue until April 7. It includes daily rolling stoppages during morning and evening peak

times.

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. Government proposed enterprise agreement offers 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.

Workers in nearly all departments rejected the offers and are seeking a union reduced pay demand for annual pay increases between 2.5 and 3 percent in a three-year agreement with no loss of conditions. This week, staff at the National Library of Australia became the latest to reject the Turnbull government's harsh bargaining policy, with 75.1 percent voting No to a proposed agreement.

The CPSU, which is attempting to wear down workers' resistance to the government's inferior pay offer, has lodged a case in the Fair Work Commission accusing the Turnbull government of refusing to allow department heads to negotiate in good faith.

New South Wales power utility workers vote to strike

Thousands of workers at the state-owned electricity network provider Essential Energy this week voted for protected industrial action in their dispute over a new enterprise agreement.

Over 90 percent of workers who participated in the ballot voted for work stoppages of between one and 72 hours and bans on a work practices, including overtime, training, paperwork, and the use of computers, mobile phones and other technologies. The industrial action will occur this month.

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members rejected management's enterprise "offer" that includes the axing of 800 jobs over the next two years and unlimited job cuts after 2018. Other attacks include a two-year wage freeze, continuation of the current ban on re-employing redundant workers within two years except for casual or temporary positions; halving the amount workers are paid when called in for emergencies from a minimum four hours' pay to two; and cuts to wages and conditions of outsourced contractors.

Workers are standing by their initial claims of zero trade-offs, job security for all employees, and annual wage increases.

The government-owned company has lodged a case with the Fair Work Commission to terminate a range of agreements covering redundancy provisions, staff redeployments, and salary maintenance. While the ETU claims to oppose the enterprise deal it has allowed the destruction of more than 1,000 Essential Energy jobs since 2013.

New Zealand Pak'n Save supermarket workers strike

Pak'n Save supermarket workers in Richmond, on New

Zealand's South Island, walked off the job on March 24 after a breakdown in wage negotiations. The striking workers from the morning fill, bakery and butchery teams made up about half of the total numbers stocking shelves.

A spokesman for the FIRST Union said the union had been trying to negotiate a collective agreement since November but the owner refused to discuss pay rates.

Workers want their hourly rates increased by \$2 to bring them into line with Pak'n Save workers on New Zealand's North Island. Pak'n Save workers at the Invercargill supermarket, also on the South Island, demonstrated outside their store on March 19 over the same demands.

Pak'n Save employees want standard hours of work and no change in working times without a mutual agreement between employee and management. They are also employed on individual contracts and have told the media that the combination of low wages and a working week below 20 hours keeps them on the poverty line.

Papua New Guinea power workers strike

Workers at PNG Power Limited (PPL), the nation's electricity provider, held a nationwide strike this week over outstanding entitlements. Employees at revenue generating centres in Lae, Port Moresby, Yonki and Mt Hagen held a sit-in on March 23. The entitlements owed include a 17.7 percent pay loading.

Most employees have worked for the state-owned enterprise for over twenty years and want their entitlements to be paid out before PPL's key assets are privatised.

PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill this week blamed the striking workers for repeated power blackouts in the nation's main cities. Deliberately cutting the power supply has now been declared a criminal offence.



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