

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 April 2016

Electronics manufacturing workers in China strike

Hundreds of workers at SAE Magnetics in Dongguan in the Pearl River Delta, have been on strike since April 18 in protest against forced layoffs and management attempts to avoid paying compensation. The company, a subsidiary of Japanese-owned TDK, makes parts for hard-disk drives supplying tech companies such as Samsung, Toshiba and Fujitsu. It employs around 10,000 workers.

SAE last week announced that it planned to shut down a large section of the plant, threatening the jobs of workers who had been employed there for over ten years. In an attempt to avoid termination payments, management initially offered employees the opportunity to change departments within the factory.

SAE Magnetics workers rejected the “offer,” pointing out that the other departments were on the verge of closure. They are demanding full termination payments for which they are legally entitled and are picketing the factory’s front gate.

Pakistan: Punjab government hospital doctors walk out

Young Doctors Association (YDA) members at government hospitals in Punjab province have been on strike since April 21. Outpatient departments in many hospitals remain closed impacting on medical services in major cities, including Lahore, Gujranwala, Sargodha and Faisalabad.

YDA members, who have been holding demonstrations across Pakistan, want a pay rise and a new service structure. They have been on lower pay scales since 2012. The government has consistently reneged on promises to resolve these issues. Federal and provincial governments have drastically cut public expenditure in line with budget deficit targets set by the International Monetary Fund.

Doctors said that the crumbling and inadequate facilities in Pakistan’s public hospitals has led to increasing tension with senior doctors and other health workers, as well as patients and their relatives, and frequently led to physical clashes.

Pakistan: FATA government school teachers on strike

Around 25,000 government school teachers in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) remain on strike after walking out on April 20 to demand service upgrades. They also want a risk allowance for working in war-affected areas.

The All Teachers Associations-Fata Mohmand Agency said that while teachers in settled areas in Pakistan were upgraded four years ago, FATA teachers had been ignored.

Talks on Tuesday failed when government representatives insisted that teachers return to work before their demands were resolved. The teachers are maintaining protest camps outside the National Press Club and at the headquarters of the tribal agencies in Islamabad.

India: Punjab co-operative society workers demonstrate against police attack

Around 500 co-operative society workers in Bathinda protested against the police atrocity on Sunday, demanding the release of co-workers. Police had arrested 37 of their colleagues on April 22 during a peaceful demonstration to meet an Indian government minister, Harsimrat Kaul Badal, over their demands.

The co-op society workers want job permanency, grade pay, leave and other benefits on par with other state government employees. They said that the January 2006 Pay Commission recommendation had not been implemented for co-operative society workers.

India: Unions end Brandix workers strike in Andhra Pradesh

On Monday, the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), which is affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), called off 10-day strike action by Brandix India Apparel City (BIAC) workers in the Vishakhapatnam Special Economic Zone. Union officials ended the strike after a vague assurance from the Andhra Pradesh government that workers’ demands would be met.

Factories affected by the strike included Quantum Clothing, Ocean India, Seeds Intimate Apparel, Pioneer Elastics and Shore to Shore. A large police contingency was deployed to the special economic zone in an attempt to intimidate workers.

BIAC is run by Sri Lanka’s Brandix apparel group. Factory owners in the SEZ have been provided tax exemptions, subsidised water and electricity, and the “right” to impose restrictions on the formation of workers’ unions.

The strikers’ main demand is for doubling of the minimum wage—from 4,200 rupees to 10,000 rupees—better working conditions and continuation of current Provident Fund entitlements.

Bangladeshi water transport union ends strike

Thousands of water transport workers across Bangladesh ended a six-day strike on Wednesday after the Bangladesh Water Transport Workers Federation (BWTWF) accepted a “promise” from vessel owners and the government that their demands would be met. BWTWF leaders called off a strike in January after vessel owners gave false assurances that they would “consider” their demands.

Around 150,000 workers from 20,000 inland water transporters walked out indefinitely on April 21 with a 15-point charter of demands. All cargo vessels and most commuter services were affected.

The union federation demanded a 10,000-taka (US127.5) minimum monthly wage, an increase in overtime pay, festival bonuses and other benefits. The minimum wage was last increased in 2013, from 3,000 to 4,100 taka. The union ended the latest strike on April 27, however, after accepting the vessel owners’ offer for a 9,000-taka minimum monthly wage and revision of the salary structure.

Police baton-charge Rana Plaza anniversary march

Thousands of workers from at least 20 garment factories in Savar were baton-charged by police during a march towards the Rana Plaza in Dhaka on Sunday. They were demanding April 24 be made a “national mourning day” and official holiday for all Bangladesh garment factory workers in remembrance of victims of the Rana Plaza disaster. At least 30 protesters were injured when police attacked their march.

The Rana Plaza building, which contained several floors of garment factories, collapsed in April, 2013 killing at least 1,134 workers and injuring about 2,500 others. A recent study noted that 58 percent of survivors, mostly women, are still suffering from long-term psychosocial difficulties. Relatives and workers placed wreaths in front of the Rana Plaza site.

Australian industrial court bans strikes at international airports

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) this week suspended industrial action for 90 days by Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) workers at Australia’s nine international airports. The commission claimed that strikes by Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members over an enterprise agreement dispute posed a “serious and compelling” risk.

The CPSU called off strike action at international airports on March 24, following the terrorist bombings at Brussels airport. On March 28, DIBP staff held rolling stoppages at international airports in Cairns, Townsville, Perth, Darwin and Adelaide on March 28. On April 3, the FWC, acting on an application from the government, issued an interim order stopping further protected action by border protection workers.

The DIBP walkouts were in line with strikes by thousands of federal public sector workers over the long-running enterprise agreement dispute. 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 offers that 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.

New South Wales TAFE workers strike

TAFE (Technical and Further Education) non-teaching staff walked out for three hours at campuses across New South Wales on Thursday in protest against a state Liberal government proposal that cuts wages and conditions. Public Service Association (PSA) members, including librarians, store persons, clerks and laboratory assistants, claimed that the government wants to force them onto part-year employment.

Last September, TAFE non-teaching staff overwhelmingly rejected an enterprise agreement offer from management. A PSA spokesman said the management “offer” slashed conditions and jobs, increased working hours for no extra pay, removed rostered days off and changed workers from permanent to temporary employment. Enterprise agreement negotiations began in June last year.

The Liberal-National state government’s “Smart and Skilled” program, which commenced in January 2015, deepens cuts and closures initiated nationally by the federal Labor government in 2012. Last September, TAFE announced plans to sell off 27 campuses, or almost 1 in 5 of its sites. Over 2,000 TAFE teachers have lost their job since 2011.

Asciano waterside workers strike in Melbourne

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at the Asciano-owned Patrick Stevedores container terminal at East Swanson Dock in Melbourne walked off the job for 48 hours yesterday as part of a national enterprise agreement dispute over wages and working conditions. Patrick’s East Swanson Dock is Australia’s largest container terminal.

The Melbourne walkout followed a two-day strike by Patrick’s wharves in Brisbane and Port Botany in Sydney on April 20 and two 72-hour strikes at the company’s terminal in Fremantle, Western Australia earlier this month.

Year-long negotiations between the company and the MUA have failed to resolve differences over a new rostering system. The union has agreed to allow its members to work more midnight and weekend shifts and forgo higher penalty rates in exchange for the reduction of the working week—from 35 to 32 hours—with no loss of pay. The union claims to oppose further casualisation of work.

Over the past two years the MUA has collaborated with Patrick’s to introduce remotely controlled cranes and other technology, slashing the company’s Port Botany workforce from 440 to 260. It also endorsed the axing of jobs at DP World’s and Hutchison’s Australian port facilities. Last November the MUA negotiated a deal with Hutchison to eliminate 65 jobs, extend the working week from 30 to 32 hours and expand the number of casuals. Union officials claimed it was a “victory.”



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