

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 May 2016

India: Haryana urban housing development workers end strike

Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) workers called off a weeklong strike on Tuesday after the government accepted some of their demands. The HUDA workers, including those involved in water supply, sewerage, storm-water drainage, streetlights, roads, horticulture and sanitation, stopped work on April 26 to oppose the shutdown of HUDA and their transfer to the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG).

The workers fear that they will not receive a pension, which is guaranteed under HUDA—the MCG has no such provision—other concerns were over seniority, reduced promotion prospects and the loss of government accommodation. While HUDA has living quarters for all its employees, MCG has none.

The Huda Karamchari Ekta Union accepted vague guarantees from the government that it would delay the full transfer of HUDA property to MCG and that only “critically important” employees sent to MCG, on deputation for three years.

Goa fertilizer plant workers strike

Workers at Zuari Industries Limited in Zuarinagar, Goa walked out on Tuesday to oppose the suspension of four union leaders accused of attacking a security officer.

The workers denied the accusation, saying that the security guard attacked their meeting outside the factory on April 29 where they were planning a May Day rally. They demanded suspension of the security guard who they said continually harassed them.

Zuari Industries workers said the security guard ripped up their banners and forced them to disperse. The union leaders were suspended when they reported for duty on Monday morning. The strike ended in the afternoon after management agreed to lift the suspensions of the union leaders.

Jawaharlal Nehru University students and teachers strike

Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) teachers in New Delhi joined a week-long strike of students on Tuesday. The students were on a hunger strike protest over discipline and discrimination. They complained that a 10,000-rupee (\$US150) fine against the Student Union president and the suspension of two other students over a disturbance in the hostel in February were excessive. Students also claimed they were being punished for supporting a hostel warden who was being harassed by university management and the Hindu-chauvinist BJP’s student organisation.

The JNU Teachers’ Association said other issues to be resolved were a continuation of the seniority-based rotation system in the appointment of deans and chairpersons, intimidation of colleagues and victimisation of elected union representatives.

Pakistan: Government doctors in Balochistan on strike

Young Doctors Association (YDA) members at government hospitals in Balochistan province boycotted out-patient departments on Tuesday in a province-wide dispute for increased wages and job permanency, positions for unemployed doctors, and for the provision of basic facilities in the hospitals.

Their action followed a two-day strike on April 10, after the government falsely claimed it would “immediately address their demands.” The doctors said they would continue their boycott until all their demands are met.

Punjab teachers continue protests against privatisation

Government school teachers in Multan and Jhang districts in Punjab province held demonstrations on Tuesday and Wednesday to oppose the continued privatisation of Punjab schools. Their action followed several anti-privatisation demonstrations by teachers this year.

The government has organised a public-private partnership deal and is handing management of public schools to the Punjab Education Foundation. It will impact on 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.

Lahore domestic workers demand legal cover

Dozens of home-based workers demonstrated outside the Lahore Press Club on April 28 for the third time in as many weeks over several demands. These included recognition of legal rights for all domestic workers, defined working hours and a complaints mechanism.

The domestic workers also called for better wages, health cover, social security, a housing scheme and entitlements available for other workers. Domestic workers are not paid the minimum wage and their work is not regular. They accused the government of delaying legislation that would recognise them as workers.

Rawalpindi City government workers protest for unpaid salaries

Over 100 Rawalpindi local government contract workers demonstrated at Katcheri Chowk on April 30 against the non-payment of salaries and termination of their contracts.

More than 500 workers, mostly women, have been sacked and those remaining are not being paid and do not have a contract. The union called off the protest after a government official gave an assurance that the salaries would be paid next week. Many workers criticised the government saying that they need salaries not “mere assurances.” Increasing numbers of local governments are being affected by budget cuts imposed throughout Pakistan under government agreements with the International Monetary Fund.

Queensland water utility workers vote to strike

Some 700 employees of Unitywater, a statutory firm that provides water and sewerage services to Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast and Noosa on Queensland’s south coast have voted unanimously for industrial action over a new work agreement.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), the Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union (CEPU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) will decide on industrial action by mechanical fitters, operators and electricians. The action will range from strikes of between two and 24 hours and indefinite maintenance bans.

The unions said the company was attempting to slash wages and conditions and place new employees in worse working conditions than those of existing employees. This included the elimination of

one rostered day off per month and restriction of allowances paid to those working in sewage. A union spokesman claimed that cuts could reduce workers’ annual earnings by as much as \$30,000.

Unitywater’s CEO and its top managers have shared in more than \$1 million worth of bonuses since the water utility was established in 2010. Workers’ wages, however, have lagged behind inflation rates.

Queensland construction workers down tools

At least 600 workers at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital construction site downed tools on Thursday, declaring that they were on an “indefinite” strike. One hundred and seventy Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members decided to strike after six-months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement (EA) with Nilsen, the electrical contracting company.

Nilsen sacked 100 labour hire workers for no apparent reason during the enterprise negotiations. The company offered 5 percent annual pay rises for three years and wanted to include Building Code 2014 in the agreement. Electrical contractors who do not comply with the code, which relates to union delegates’ rights, could find themselves excluded from securing government jobs if the law is passed.

Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union members joined the strike to protest the Turnbull federal government’s plans to re-establish the Australian Building Construction Commission (ABCC). The commission has wide draconian powers that restrict workers’ common law rights and can impose heavy penalties on unions and workers who fail to obey federal industrial laws.

French Polynesian unions call for general strike

Several unions in the small Pacific colony of French Polynesia have issued a general strike notice over job cuts and falling employment security. The walkout will begin on May 9 and affect thousands of businesses.

Over 17,000 workers have lost their jobs and about 80,000 are living in poverty since the 2008 global financial crisis. The unions have ten demands, including job security, better wages and creation of social welfare for unemployed workers. Unlike in France, there are no unemployment benefits in its Pacific colony.



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