Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

21 May 2016

Asia

Taiwan flight attendants protest

Over 150 China Airlines flight attendants protested outside the Ministry of Labor in Taipei on May 13 over what they called an “enslavement contract.” The Taoyuan Flight Attendants’ Union said it had received complaints about the contract from nearly 1,900 China Airlines staff—two-thirds of the airline’s cabin crew workforce. Another protest is planned for May 31.

Workers claimed the new agreement, which the airline asked the attendants to sign last week, could increase their working hours to 220 per month. A union representative said the new work-hour rules would slash attendants’ rest time from 24 hours to 12 on certain long-haul flights.

Cambodian garment workers protest

One hundred former Galey Global garment factory workers protested outside the Preah Sihanouk provincial governor’s office on Wednesday and Thursday to secure wages owed to the company’s 900 workers. The factory shut down in April. The estimated monthly salary for the employees ranges from $US100 to $300.

Workers were informed by a Sihanoukville labour department official that the government had decided items from the factory would be sold and that each worker would receive $71 in a first step towards resolving the issue.

India: Mysore paper workers demonstrate

Employees of Mysore Paper Mills (MPM), a public sector firm in Bhadravati, Karnataka, protested inside the factory on May 15 over salary payment delays. Workers have accused the government of starving the mill of operating funds resulting in the elimination of 50 percent of the 2,300 jobs at the mill. Plant production has ended with MPM sending workers on “earned” leave for an indefinite period in November.

An MPM Employees’ Association official told protesting workers that management had agreed to pay an “advanced salary” to those sent on leave. Permanent workers would receive 9,000 rupees ($US134) a month and contract workers 4,500 rupees a month. The official blamed the delay in payment of salaries for workers still employed on the “negligence” of senior company officials.

Haryana power distribution workers strike over sackings

Thousands of workers from state-owned power distribution companies—Uttar Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam and Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam (DHBVN)—held a state-wide strike on May 16 to oppose the sacking of 7,472 contract workers and some permanent employees on May 11. The sacked workers were among the 23,000 power workers who had struck over the hiring of private contractors for the maintenance and operations of transmission lines.

The power workers are members of the Haryana State Electricity Board (HSEB) Workers’ Union and the All Haryana Power Corporation (AHPC) Workers Union. The Joint Action Committee has planned demonstrations at each subdivision office till June 28 and threatened that if the government failed to act, all power department employees would strike for 48 hours on June 29.

School midday-meal workers in Jalandhar protest

Midday-meal workers held a protest march in Jalandhar on May 14 and demonstrated outside a government minister’s residence. Midday Meal Workers Union members demanded a wage increase and other allowances and benefits on par with other government workers. They also want an increase in their allowances to 10,000 rupees a month, identity cards and service books, maternity leave, insurance, permanency and at least two workers per school and one worker for every 25 students.

Sri Lanka: Jaffna municipal workers end strike

Temporary health assistance workers and garbage removal workers of Jaffna Municipal Council (JMC) ended an eight-day strike on Wednesday following assurances from the Municipal Commissioner that he will resolve their demands within the next three months.

The municipal workers struck to demand permanency and held daily protests in front of the Jaffna Municipal Council premises from May 10. They are sceptical about the commissioner’s assurance, saying that when they struck work last year on the same demand he falsely promised to solve the matter within 100 days.

Around 120 garbage removal workers have been working for seven

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years on a temporary basis and 11 among them are more than 50 years old. They are paid on a daily basis and do not receive paid leave. They are not provided with safety gear such as shoes or gloves. Most of them are living in shanties close to the city without any amenities.

Pakistan: Islamabad municipal workers demand wages

Capital Development Authority (CDA) contract sanitary workers demonstrated in Islamabad on Monday demanding three months' outstanding wages. Workers burnt tyres and blocked roads in protest. The demonstration ended after the authorities promised to pay their overdue wages on Friday.

These contract workers are only paid between 10,000-12,000 rupees per month by private contractors. CDA began outsourcing its sanitary work last year to compensate for government funding cuts. Government payments to the contractors, however, have been delayed.

Doctors at a major teaching hospital in Lahore on strike

Doctors at the Lady Willingdon Hospital in Lahore boycotted the Out-Patients Department on Wednesday demanding three months of unpaid salaries. Around 100 doctors are affected. They also provided free life-saving drugs for patients and for repairs to all air-conditioners and fans. They said the strike would continue until their demands are met.

Lady health workers in Peshawar protest

Lady Health Workers (LHW) employees in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, demonstrated outside the district health office on Monday to demand three months' unpaid salaries and job permanency. LHWs have been fighting for many years to be made permanent but the provincial government has continued to ignore an order from the Supreme Court of Pakistan to do so. The protest ended after authorities issued a written notice to make their jobs permanent. The government has regularly reneged on its promises.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers in Khulna protest

Workers of privately owned jute mills in the Khulna industrial belt demonstrated on the Khulna-Jessore highway on Tuesday demanding the reopening of all closed jute mills before the holy month of Ramadan.

The Private-Owned Jute, Yarn and Textile Mill Workers' Federation is demanding immediate payment of all outstanding salaries, allocation of funds for ongoing operation of the mills and reinstatement of all retrenched workers.

The workers have also complained that the private jute mills have yet to implement a new wage rate issued by the pay commission three years ago in 2013. The federation has threatened to hold another demonstration blocking the highway if workers' demands were not met by May 31.

Thousands of workers from eight state-owned jute mills in Khulna staged strikes in April to demand adequate fund allocation for the jute industry, payment of their arrears, formation of a wage board and stopping the move to privatise state-owned mills. The trade unions continue to separate private and state-owned mill workers.

Australia and the Pacific

Essential Energy workers to walk out for five days

Thousands of power workers in New South Wales will walk off the job for 20 consecutive four-hour stoppages commencing Monday May 23 and ending Friday. Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members are in dispute with the state-owned power distributer Essential Energy over a new enterprise agreement. Negotiations for a new agreement began 18 months ago.

The strike, which follows two four-hour stoppages in April and a 24-hour strike last week, will involve 120 depots and control centres. Unlike previous action, the union said it would not provide a skeleton staff during the stop work period.

Workers have rejected management's enterprise "offer" that includes the axing of 800 jobs over the next two years and unlimited job cuts after 2018. The company also wants to reduce emergency duty pay and cut wages and conditions of contractors, among other changes.

Essential Energy has refused to resume negotiations and launched a case in the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to terminate various agreements currently covering the workers. These include axing redundancy provisions, staff redeployment and salary maintenance. The FWC case is set down for a six-day hearing from June 14.

Canberra garbage truck drivers strike again

For the second time in as many weeks 39 garbage truck drivers employed by collection contractor SUEZ in Australia's capital Canberra will walk off the job for two days on May 23. Curb-side garbage bins will not be emptied in 44 suburbs. The strike follows failed negotiations between the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and SUEZ over a new enterprise agreement.

The drivers rejected the company's modified offer following last week's strike. The new offer included a 2.2 percent pay increase (down from 3 percent in its original offer) with a so-called improved redundancy payment of three weeks' pay capped at ten years' service. Current severance pay is two weeks' pay for each year of service. A union spokesman said overall the new offer was not an improvement. Negotiations are continuing.

Hospital radiographers in South Australia impose bans

At least a dozen radiographers at the Flinders Medical Centre, a major public hospital in South Australia's capital Adelaide, have begun imposing bans over what they say are unsustainable workloads. Industrial action includes not completing paperwork or answering phones after hours and on weekends.

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The Public Service Association (PSA) said a lack of staff meant that CT radiographers were forced to work full-day shifts and then remain on call overnight, with insufficient rest and recovery breaks. Staff want the facility manned 24 hours as per other major Adelaide hospitals.

A union spokesman said funding for the facility had not increased for ten years and that the number of patients serviced by radiographers had doubled in the past five years.

New Zealand: Pak'n Save workers picket Porirua store

Around 25 Pak'n Save supermarket workers in Porirua, in the Wellington Region on New Zealand's North Island, picketed their store on May 14 in a dispute over pay. FIRST Union members demanded pay parity with Pak'n Save workers in inner Wellington stores. Management has offered a collective average pay rise from $16.20 to $16.52 per hour across two years. Staff in inner Wellington stores are paid an average of $17 per hour.

In March, Pak'n Save workers in Invercargill, on New Zealand's South Island, picketed their store over the same issue. Invercargill workers were paid as little as $14.75 an hour. They demanded a pay increase of $2 an hour to give them pay parity with colleagues on the North Island.

Waikato community support employees stop work

Some 200 Community Living Trust workers who provide caregiving services for the elderly and intellectually disabled in Waikato, a region on New Zealand's North Island, stopped work for two hours on May 19. Members of the Primary Services Association and E Tu unions voted for industrial action after the employer offered a pay increase of just nine cents per hour or 3.60 a week.

French Polynesian airline workers on strike

Over 20 Air Tahiti workers began rolling strike action on May 13 over fears of job and pay cuts due to falls in domestic travel. The strike occurred a few days after French Polynesian unions cancelled a planned general strike over mass job cuts and loss of purchasing power since the global financial crisis of 2008.

Air Tahiti, which services international and domestic routes, including 46 of the colony's 67 islands, employs over 700 workers. Airline management wants to cut flights to some regions from once a week to once a fortnight, a move that would cut jobs and cause major inconveniences for outlying island residents.

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