

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 July 2016

China: Beijing police detain hundreds of protesting teachers

Beijing police used 18 buses to forcefully remove hundreds of school teachers demonstrating outside the State Council complaints office on Monday. More than 1,000 former teachers were protesting over years of service with unequal pay. The teachers called on the government to retroactively implement its promise to award them civil service pay and benefits, which include a retirement pension and healthcare.

Teachers in China can be hired on civil service or non-civil service contracts. Those on the latter frequently complain that their wages are below minimum living standards. A directive issued by the central authorities in 1997 called on local governments to put all teachers on civil service contracts, which carry higher wages and more benefits. Many local authorities failed to implement the new rules.

Protesting teachers were appealing to the ruling Chinese Communist Party in Beijing after being turned away from complaints offices closer to home.

Cambodia: Picket at Chung Fai Knitwear factory in fourth week

About 200 workers at the Hong Kong-owned Chung Fai Knitwear factory in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district are maintaining their 24-hour vigils outside the factory amid suspicions the company is bankrupt and trying to sell off assets. Workers caught a transportation company removing equipment from the factory on July 1.

Around 100 workers protested outside the municipal courthouse on Monday demanding the court issue an arrest warrant for the factory owners who fled the country last month without paying wages and benefits. Workers said they would maintain the protest in front of the building until arrest warrants were issued along with an injunction on the factory assets.

Lockout at Cambodian footwear factory

Aerosoft Summit Footwear workers in Battambang's Sampov Loun district struck on July 1 and protested outside the factory to demand permanency and entitlements. After 300 workers protested outside Battambang city hall on July 18, and city officials agreed to mediate their case if they returned to work, Aerosoft has locked them out and is ignoring a court order directing management to end the lockout.

Workers' demands include an \$18 attendance bonus, \$7 for transportation and accommodation, an end to wage cuts when workers are

sick or protesting, and for the company to accept responsibility for any accidents that occur at the factory.

Bangladesh: Chittagong police attack striking garment workers

Ten workers were hospitalised and others injured when police used tear gas in an attempt to break up a demonstration by 300 striking workers at the Chowdhury Apparels factory in Chittagong city's Bayezid area on July 21. Workers were forced back into the factory seeking refuge. The strike was sparked due to the sudden sacking of two supervisors in the morning.

Sri Lanka: Non-academic university workers on indefinite strike

Following their two-day strike and mass rally in Central Colombo on July 13-14, 130,000 non-academic workers at universities throughout Sri Lanka walked off the job on Wednesday to demand an increase in wages and other entitlements. Workers want an increase in the monthly compensation allowance, a 2,500-rupee salary rise, medical insurance scheme, reinstatement of the language-proficiency allowance, the pension age increased to 60 and a new agreeable pension scheme.

Their action followed several unsuccessful appeals to the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government. A representative from the University Trade Union Joint Committee said they would continue the strike until demands are met.

India: Karnataka public transport workers end strike

The state-wide strike by 125,000 workers of four public transport corporations of Karnataka—KSRTC, BMTC, NEKRTC and NWKRTC—ended on the third day on Wednesday after unions reached agreement with the Karnataka government for a wage increase. Bus drivers and other public transport workers struck on Monday demanding a 35 percent wage increase. The government initially offered just 8 percent, later increasing it to 10 percent. In talks on Wednesday the unions accepted a pay rise of only 12.5 percent.

Nearly 25,000 buses were off the road during the strike. Fifty workers were dismissed when the government enforced the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), which provides for arrest without bail against government employees if they refuse to show up for work. The

arrested employees could face a year in jail, a fine of 5,000 rupees (US\$75), or both.

Tamil Nadu garbage workers protest

Hundreds of garbage workers demonstrated in front of the collector's office in Madurai on Monday to demand regular work. The workers, who collect rubbish door to door, are part of solid waste management in village panchayats. Protesters demanded that the government keep a promise made when employees were recruited into the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS). The workers were told that they would be given permanent jobs, 300 days' work and 203 rupees a day.

They have now been told that they will be terminated after 100 days while the remaining 200 days will be covered by another two batches of workers, with each covering 100 days. Their work is labour intensive, backbreaking and also nauseating.

Former workers of closed Tamil Nadu spinning mill seek compensation

Close to 50 workers of the Salem Cooperative Spinning mill demonstrated outside the Salem collector's office on Monday to demand the reopening of the mill and payment of outstanding wages. Some 252 workers lost their livelihoods when the mill closed in 2004. The protest was sparked when workers heard that the government had called for tenders for the sale of the mills machines.

Punjab government transport workers protest

Punjab Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) workers demonstrated in front of the PRTC workshop in Bathinda on Monday to protest over the government's failure to pay pensioners their entitlements. Several transport unions, including the PRTC Retired Workers Bhaichara Union, formed an action committee to demand the immediate payment of pensions to all retired workers and an increase in pension in line with a 2011 order that lifted all state pensions by nearly 30 percent.

Other demands included retired and working employees' gratuity, a medical allowance, general provident fund and leave encashment owing since January 1. The workers also complained that after January 15 although, all newly-recruited employees would receive basic pay, they would not get any travel, dearness and medical allowances, or grade pay, house rent and other benefits.

Pakistan: Punjab government hospital doctors call off strike

The Young Doctors Association (YDA) representing hundreds of government hospital doctors in Punjab province withdrew its call for a strike at outdoor departments on July 22 after the health department agreed to some modifications to its Centralised Induction Policy (CIP).

The policy enforced a merit-based selection for training and that postgraduate positions in the province would only be filled on a needs basis.

Three hundred doctors had rallied in Lahore on July 21 calling for the strike and declaring that the policy was a step toward privatisation and restricted the number of seats for postgraduates to 400. In last-minute talks with the government the YDA accepted amendments that would increase the postgraduate positions to 1,132 for 2016, decentralise the application procedure allowing applicants to choose which hospital they wanted to be trained at, and gave a guarantee that trainees could move to specialty training after two years under the PG training process.

Victorian mental health employees stop work

Mental health nurses and support staff at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne stopped work for two hours on July 26 as part of ongoing enterprise bargaining negotiations with the Victorian state Labor government. Health and Community Services Union members have been conducting rolling regional half-day stoppages in support of demands for improved safety and wages.

Their log of claims calls for more mental health beds and staff, especially in Melbourne's population growth areas. This includes one nurse for every two beds in high dependency units, regardless of the number of patients, to reduce pressure on the system and violence. A 2014 report revealed that 88 percent of mental health employees experienced violence at work. Workers also want Victorian mental health salaries on par with their counterparts in New South Wales.

Melbourne supermarket warehouse workers on strike

Around 650 workers at a Melbourne distribution centre for one of Australia's largest supermarket chains Coles walked off the job on Wednesday for an indefinite period in a dispute over a new work agreement. National Union of Workers (NUW) members employed at the Polar Fresh warehouse site in Truganina are demanding more pay and better job security.

Workers established pickets outside the company's warehouse and at secondary sites in Melbourne set up by Coles. At least 70 delivery trucks were left stranded on the side of the road unable to make deliveries. Supreme Court injunctions against the pickets were issued on Thursday that remain in force until Monday.

Polar Fresh workers want a \$3 pay rise to increase their wages to \$30 an hour and for an end to the increasing casualisation of the workforce. They are demanding a "zero-casual site," saying that casualisation is a "model of under-employment" and which leaves casual workers struggling to survive on short shifts and unpredictable rosters.

NUW delegates and organisers met on Thursday night with Polar Fresh management and said a mass meeting was scheduled for Friday morning. Hearings on the dispute will resume in the Fair Work industrial commission on Monday. Coles claim the pickets were illegal and the Victorian Farmers Federation has demanded that the Victorian state Labor government intervene in the dispute.



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