

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

17 September 2016

## India: Uttarakhand government school teachers on strike

Government schools across India's northern state of Uttarakhand closed on Tuesday when 25,000 teachers walked out for an indefinite period over a raft of 18 demands. Schools remained closed the following day. Teachers vowed not to return to work until their demands, which the government has agreed to in three meetings since 2015, are fulfilled.

The main demands advanced by the Government Teachers Association are assured career progression and two additional leave periods. Other demands include regular yearly transfers, amendments in the transfer policy to give everyone a chance to serve in hills and plains, expedited promotions and salary rises. The trade union is also seeking grade pay parity between all teachers and no disciplinary action against any teacher without thorough investigation.

## Striking Gujarat sanitation workers arrested

Over 600 contract sanitation workers from the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), New West Zone have been on strike since August 22 to demand permanent jobs. Around 170 were arrested on Sunday when they participated in a cultural program of song and dance held in their support outside the Vastrapur Lake area's open air theatre. The AMC has begun firing striking workers and hired strike-breaking contractors to remove hundreds of tonnes of garbage accumulating in the city.

The AMC employs around 6,000 contracted sanitation workers on a wage of 6,000 rupees (\$US90) a month. Many have been on a contract basis for 15 to 20 years. Despite several protests in the past, the AMC refuses to make them permanent. Strikers say their demands for permanent jobs and wage increases are according to law. Under the slogan, "No Rights, No Work," they have refused to go back to work until their demands are met.

## Gujarat oil refinery workers strike

Some 3,000 workers at the government-owned India Oil Corporation's Gujarat refinery refused to start work on Tuesday after talks with management failed to resolve their long-pending issues. Their grievances were first raised three years ago. Demands include decent toilet amenities, proper drinking water and canteen facilities, and parking space. Other grievances were ongoing delays in the payment of contract workers and delays in issuing gate passes.

Strikers returned to work the following day after management gave a

vague assurance that it would "resolve their issues."

## Karnataka rural health workers maintain protest

Anganwadi (rural health) workers and their assistants began a hunger strike in Kalaburagi city on September 8 demanding time-bound promotions and an end to the "punishment transfers" of militant anganwadi workers to distant centres. A Karnataka State Anganwadi Workers and Assistants Federation spokesman said assistants in Kalaburagi district who have passed qualification exams and have three years' service are being denied promotion.

Their action is part of a state-wide campaign by anganwadi workers demanding permanency, government employee status and an 18,000-rupee minimum monthly wage.

## Uttar Pradesh contract health workers on strike

Thousands of contract workers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) have been on strike across Uttar Pradesh for over a week. Strikers include paramedics, lab technicians, nurses and auxiliary nurse midwives. Their demands are job security, better salaries, an end to outsourcing, accident insurance and a provident fund.

A protesting doctor told the media that many colleagues had full qualifications and ten years' service but the government refused to appoint them to permanent positions. A union spokesman said workers ended protests in March after authorities gave an assurance that demands would be met.

More than 75,000 NRHM contract workers have been demanding permanent jobs since 2005.

## Odisha steelworkers maintain protest

Hundreds of retrenched contract workers of multinational steelmaker Tata Steel have been protesting in front of the company's newly-built ferrochrome plant in Gopalpur port, Odisha since August 2, demanding jobs. The plant has not yet started production.

The workers are from displaced and affected families, who were earlier employed by Tata Steel. They formed a negotiating group, the Gopalpur Tata Steel Prakalpa Prabhavita Chasi Manch and held three meetings with the administration but failed to secure any jobs.

Under a program initiated by the government in 2013, Tata Steel recruited 1,800 unskilled workers on a daily wage basis. The government revised the project in 2015, making 860 ineligible for assistance and they were retrenched.

### **Pakistani steelworkers strike over unpaid wages**

Workers at state-run Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) have been on strike since August 4 over unpaid wages. On September 7, the government approved payment of two months' salary and gratuity funds due since April 2013 and provident funds due since April 2015 for retired workers. However workers claim they were owed four months' salary.

The delay in paying wages has been ongoing for over a year. The steel mill has been allowed to run down and jobs are being axed in preparation for privatisation. Previous attempts to privatise PMS met with strong opposition from workers, while the government continued to cut production.

The government has agreed to implement the demands of the International Monetary Fund, including plans to privatise state-run enterprises such as power, airlines, airports, mining and manufacturing, along with health and education.

### **FATA teachers announce intention to strike**

Government school teachers in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) announced on September 7 they would shut down all schools in the region if the government continued to delay time scale promotions and payment of allowances. Their demand follows a three-week strike in May by 25,000 teachers over the demands, which would bring them in line with teachers in other provinces. The strike ended after the federal government agreed to implement upgrades in accordance with a July 2012 four-tier formula.

The All Teachers Associations-Fata Mohmand Agency alleged that while some teachers have received promotions, about 22,000 are still waiting for the upgrade. Teachers also complained they have not been paid deputation allowances since 1972.

### **South Korea: Strike by KB Autotech workers in tenth week**

Hundreds of workers at the auto parts manufacturer KB Autotech in Asan have been occupying the factory since July 8, when they were told they would be locked out for attempting to form a union. The company has withdrawn hired goons from the factory but demanded that workers cease their union activity before bargaining on wage and job security issues can begin. Workers have insisted that the lockout be lifted first.

### **Taiwan railway workers protest**

As part of ongoing protests over low staff numbers, long working hours and forced overtime, members of the Taiwan Railway Workers Union

demonstrated in front of the Executive Yuan in Taipei on September 10 and presented officials with a petition signed by 1,800 of its members. The petition demanded that the Taiwan Railways Administration (TRA) increase its overtime pay and provide a higher allowance for workers forced to work overnight away from home.

Following failed negotiations over the issues on August 17, the Railway Workers Union and the Train Drivers Union threatened to strike during the mid-autumn festival holiday (September 15 to 18).

TRA has around 4,000 employees. Train drivers claim that the state-owned rail operator currently has 1,074 drivers, plus 74 in training, well short of the full staffing requirement of 1,345 drivers. Rail workers want staffing levels increased or the number of passenger and cargo services reduced.

### **China Airlines flight attendants protest**

Flight attendants from Taiwan's flag carrier China Airlines (CAL) demonstrated in front of the Taoyuan City Hall in Taipei on Wednesday, protesting against the city's delay in confirming an agreement signed by the Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union (FTAU) and CAL in June. The union alleged that CAL has violated commitments it made to end a five-hour strike on June 24.

Flight attendants decided to strike in June against CAL's new deal, which the airline asked them to sign in May. The deal would increase their working hours to 220 per month and slash rest time from 24 to 12 hours on certain long-haul flights. All flight attendants would have to report for duty at the nation's main airport in Taoyuan, instead of Songshan Airport in Taipei. They would not be paid for the extra travel time.

The FTAU alleged that CAL reneged on the agreed increase in guaranteed days off, saying that while the airline followed through with providing a guaranteed 123 days off each year, it cut the number of attendants working on each aircraft from 12 to 10, increasing the workload of those on duty.

### **Filipino Pizza Hut workers in Quezon protest**

Some 30 employees of the fast food restaurant chain Pizza Hut who were dismissed demonstrated in front of the company's head office in Cubao, Quezon City on Tuesday to demand reinstatement. Workers alleged that Philippines Pizza Incorporated (PPI), the mother company of Pizza Hut, illegally terminated 285 permanent workers and replaced them with contract workers. The PPI Workers Union claimed that PPI is ignoring a Supreme Court order directing it to reinstate all terminated workers.

### **South Australian metro train drivers reject pay offer**

At a three-hour stop work meeting by Adelaide Metro train drivers on Wednesday, members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) rejected the state Labor government's latest offer in their long-running negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The offer came after the RTBU called off two four-hour strikes in late August and re-entered talks with the government.

Adelaide Metro drivers, train controllers, station staff and ticket inspectors have not had a pay increase for nearly three years since their old agreement expired in December 2013.

The government has offered 2.5 percent annual pay increases over three years but wants the agreement to include a provision allowing forced redundancies. In the latest offer the government wants to replace the redundancy clause and offer workers job relocation within a reasonable distance, at 75 percent of their pay.

The union has called for a higher pay rise, better rostering arrangements and improved job security provisions, but hinted that it is open to do a deal on the redundancy clause if other offers are improved.

### **Queensland coal miners' strike entering fifth week**

Workers at Anglo American's German Creek coal mine in the Bowen Basin, central Queensland have been on strike since August 22 in a dispute over a proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). The previous EBA, covering 140 workers, expired in early April 2014. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has held 16 meetings with the company since then.

The CFMEU has a charter of demands that include an end to casualisation of the workforce, an improved redundancy process, higher accident pay, and maintenance of the current wage rates. The miners have already suffered a considerable reduction in income due to roster changes implemented last year.

In a move to break the strike, the mine operator Capcoal has engaged labour hire company WorkPac to advertise for excavator operators. According to the union, they are being offered \$60 an hour, along with free accommodation and meals, plus an extra \$2 per hour back-paid if they stay on for three months.



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