Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

12 November 2016

Pakistan: Strike by model college employees in Islamabad in third week

Teaching and non-teaching staff at the government-run Islamabad Model Colleges have been on strike since October 25 over the government's failure to resolve promotion procedures and other issues. Called by the Joint Action Committee (JAC), the strike brought academic and administrative activities at 20 colleges to a halt.

Demands include a range of issues affecting teachers as well as non-teaching staff including pay-scale upgrade, time scale promotions and revision of promotion formulas, and allowances on par with other government employees. Another main demand was the timely payment of salaries to, and permanency for, daily wage workers who were frequently forced to wait weeks if not months to draw pay checks.

The JAC, formed by several unions, has warned that the strike will continue as long as the Capital Administration and Development Division and the Federal Directorate of Education continued to ignore the unions' demands.

Bangladeshi garment workers locked out

Around 100 demonstrating garment workers formed a human chain on the Dhaka-Chandra highway in Ashulia on Monday to demand that their factory be reopened and wage arrears be paid.

CNB Composite workers alleged that management responded to their demonstration outside the factory on October 15 by illegally sacking 20 workers. Two days later the company closed the factory for an indefinite period. The workers were organised by the Trade Union Federation.

India: Tamil Nadu highway toll collectors strike

Over 120 highway toll collectors from the Samayapuram Toll Plaza on the Tiruchi Chennai Highway suddenly walked off the job on Wednesday in a dispute over wages and bullying. The workers, who were organised by the Tamil Nadu General Workers Union, which is affiliated with the Stalinist All India Trade Union Congress, allowed vehicles to pass through the tolls for free.

The toll collectors demanded an increase in basic salaries, a dearness allowance, job guarantees and bonuses and an end to victimisation of their maintenance supervisor. They presented a memorandum to the Labor Commissioner and returned to work later in the day when management agreed to consider their grievances.

Rural childcare workers protest in Punjab and Haryana

Rural childcare (anganwadi) workers demonstrated in Bathinda (Punjab) and Amritsar (Haryana) on November 7 and 9 respectively to demand wage-scale upgrades, increased benefits, a retirement benefit and improvements in rations supplied to the anganwadi centres.

A march by protesters in Amritsar was stopped by police, blocking the road for several hours. In Bathinda, demonstrators sat outside the Public Works Department minister's residence. They have threatened to hold more protests in front of the homes of other cabinet ministers.

Punjab government employees remain on strike

District administration employees in Ludhiana have been on strike since November 2 in a dispute over poor staffing levels, for a salary increase, dearness allowance and the recruitment of an additional 45 to 50 workers. All administration work, including registration of marriages and land transactions, has ceased. The pay demands are in line with the seventh pay commission recommendations.

A Deputy Commissioner's Office Employees Union spokesman said that the strike was indefinite and pointed out that the sixth pay commission recommendation had still not been implemented and that dearness allowance payments were three years outstanding.

Punjab sanitation workers end state-wide strike

Sanitation workers from 200 urban local bodies across Punjab called off their four-day strike on Tuesday after the state government accepted most of their demands. The workers wanted a cashless health benefit up to 50,000 rupees ($US752) under the Mai Bhago scheme; establishment of a separate unit of sanitation workers and sewer-men; provision of homes under the central government's housing scheme for the poor; and the removal of existing stringent conditions for job permanency.

Sri Lanka: Jaffna Municipal Council cleaning workers on strike

For the second time this year, temporary and permanent cleaning workers of Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka, walked off the job on November 7 to demand permanent positions for 127 workers who have been

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employed on a temporary basis for ten years.

The previous strike was called off after union leaders accepted false promises from the government. The strikers told *World Socialist Web Site* reporters that they have been isolated and ignored by the government.

Cambodian garment workers demand unpaid wages

Around 250 employees from the Chinese-owned garment factory, Kiang Yan, in Phnom Penh's Por Sen Chey district have been protesting outside their closed factory since November 4 to demand wages for October. The owners closed the factory claiming they were bankrupt. A delegation of 200 workers has filed a complaint with the ministry of labour on Wednesday seeking assistance to recover their pay.

Seventy factories have shut down so far this year in Cambodia, according to the garment industry's employers' association. Prime Minister Hun Sen arrogantly declared this week that garment workers had to improve their productivity in order to prevent local factories from moving to other cheaper labour neighbouring countries.

South Australian shipbuilding workers stop work

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members from the government-owned Adelaide-based ship and submarine builder ASC in Adelaide held a stop work meeting on Thursday to decide on future strike action in a dispute over a new work agreement. The workers recently voted overwhelmingly in a "protected industrial action" ballot for strike action.

The shipbuilding workers are concerned that the federal Liberal-National coalition government is attempting to impose its public-sector bargaining policy to a new agreement. According to the AMWU, hard-won rights, such as the workforce being consulted on hours of work and changes to shift patterns, are under threat. The union claims that 98 percent of members have rejected ASC management's proposed new agreement.

The Turnbull government recently announced that ASC would be split into three separate companies, falsely claiming that existing work conditions would be maintained. The dispute comes a week after the union rubber-stamped the destruction of 120 jobs. Management has threatened that more jobs would be eliminated.

New Zealand: St John ambulance union calls off work bans

Paramedics employed by the government-subsidised ambulance service St John New Zealand ended five days of work bans on Tuesday evening. The bans included not wearing uniforms, completing paperwork or covering extra shifts.

The Ambulance Professionals First union, which cover over 1,000 ambulance workers, called for low-level industrial bans commencing on November 4 after members rejected a one percent pay rise in return for the elimination of time-and-a-half for extra work which is used to cover under-staffing. The paramedics want the extended working hours cut, complaining that it is unsafe because they are near breaking point from exhaustion.

St John's latest offer includes a 1.25 percent pay increase. The union wants a 2 percent pay rise and benefits of all 11 official public holidays, saying that on average its members are restricted to seven because of St John's rostering practices. St John has offered an increase to eight. No further action has been proposed.

New Zealand hospital doctors threaten to strike again

Following a 48-hour strike on October 18, junior doctors at government hospitals of 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) across New Zealand this week threatened to strike again, after rejecting the DHBs' revised offer in their dispute for "safer rosters and safer hours."

Doctors said that the DHBs' "expectation" that safer rosters could be implemented within six months after negotiations, provided all DHBs were in agreement, was unacceptable. This open-ended commitment would be implemented only if doctors accepted annual pay cuts of between $5,000 and $7,000 in their new contract.

The New Zealand Resident Doctors Association (NZRDA), representing 3,200 doctors, wants major changes to rosters. It wants the seven consecutive nights roster changed to a maximum of four nights, followed by three days off, and the 12 consecutive days roster, followed by two days off, changed to rosters with a maximum of 10 days in a row and four days off.

A government spokesman confirmed that resident doctors work an average of 53 hours a week but claimed that safer working hours would cost $60 million and require the recruitment of another 160 junior doctors.

The NZRDA announced that it intends to issue a strike notice for another 48-hour period commencing 7 a.m. on November 23.

Papua New Guinea nurses walk out

The Papua New Guinea (PNG) Nurses Association called nurses out on strike on Thursday after the government failed to pay outstanding wages by Monday as promised. According to the nurses association, the government's budget management committee had agreed to pay the nurses award in accordance with the agreement signed in 2015.

The agreement included salary increases, nurses' work-value study and establishment of a housing committee. Nurses are still receiving wages and conditions set under their old contract, which expired in 2013.

At least 700 nurses spontaneously walked off the job over the issue on September 14 after the association decided to cancel a strike planned for that day. The nurses told the media that they were "not confident that the association was taking necessary action."

The PNGNA insisted that the official strike was called off because the association's executive and the government had reached "a near positive outcome."

The government later claimed that it could not honour the agreement because there was no appropriation in the 2016 budget for an upgrade in the nurses' award.

In the 2017 national budget handed down last week by Prime Minister Peter O'Neill, however, has slashed health spending from 1.5 billion kina to 1.2 billion.

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