

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 November 2016

## Pakistan: Model college employees in Islamabad end strike

On November 10, the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of teaching and non-teaching staff at the government-run Islamabad Model Colleges called off a 16-day strike by its members without any concrete agreement.

The strike brought academic and administrative activities at 20 colleges to a halt. The JAC called off the industrial action after accepting a verbal promise from the Capital Administration & Development Division that union members' issues would be "addressed."

College workers' demands covered teachers as well as non-teaching staff and included a pay-scale upgrade, time-scale promotions, the revision of promotion formulas and allowances equal with other government employees. They also wanted the timely payment of salaries to, and permanency for, daily wage workers, who often wait weeks before they receive their pay.

## Karachi police use water cannons against irrigation workers

Police used a water cannon and batons against 1,000 workers from the provincial irrigation department demonstrating outside the Karachi Press Club on Monday. Over 100 protesters were taken into custody. The workers were demanding the payment of salaries and permanency for Right Bank Outfall Drain (RBOD) construction project employees.

The RBOD is a new diversion system to drain excessive flood water from the River Indus.

## Khyber Pakhtunkhwa tobacco workers protest sackings

Pakistan Tobacco Company workers and their supporters in Nowshera marched from Shobara Chowk to the Nowshera Press Club on November 11 to protest the sacking of over 140 employees.

The company, which is owned by the multinational British American Tobacco, is ignoring a court order for the workers to be reinstated. The demonstration disrupted traffic through the city. Workers said they would hold an indefinite demonstration in front of the company's plant if the sacked workers were not reemployed by November 15.

## Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government college teachers demand pay rise

Professors and lecturers of government-run colleges demonstrated in several districts on Tuesday over the government's delays in upgrading pay-scales and allowances. The academics want to be paid the same as other government employees, including university teachers, and for teaching assistants and ad-hoc lecturers be made permanent.

The protest, which involves over 6,000 teaching staff, was organised by the Pakhtunkhwa College Teachers Association and the Pakhtunkhwa Professors and Lecturers Association. The unions warned that they would continue protests if the government did not resolve their grievances by November 17.

## India: Uttar Pradesh university daily wage workers' strike in fifth month

About 1,700 daily wage workers from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Varanasi have been on strike for over 19 weeks to demand permanent jobs. They have established a protest tent outside the university gate and held a 38-day hunger strike until some workers fell ill and were hospitalised.

The protesting workers said many of them had been working as daily wage employees for three decades. "Every 89th day we are fired and rehired the next day," one worker said.

As daily wage workers they receive between 117 rupees (\$US1.7) and 197 rupees, according to their skills, and are denied benefits paid to central university permanent employees, who receive health benefits, housing and pensions.

## Telangana government hospital nurses on strike

Nurses at the 1,400-bed government run Osmania General Hospital in Hyderabad walked off the job on November 13 in a dispute over inadequate staffing levels. Nurses want their numbers increased from 310 to 1,000.

Their action follows several limited strikes since September last year over the issue. The hospital had begun recruiting contract staff but nurses are demanding permanent recruitment. A representative from the Telangana Nurses Association said nurses would not withdraw their strike until the issue was resolved.

## Punjab government workers' walkout in third week

The Punjab State Ministerial Workers Union said its members would maintain their state-wide industrial action until the government accepts their pay demands.

Workers from the ministries of education, health, excise and taxation, roads, irrigation, agriculture, social security, treasury and cooperative departments have joined the strike, which started with government employees in Ludhiana on November 2. They are demanding pay increases in line with the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations.

A Deputy Commissioner's Office Employees Union spokesman in Ludhiana said that the walkout was indefinite and pointed out that the Sixth Pay Commission recommendation had not yet been implemented and that dearness allowance payments were three years outstanding.

### **Karnataka college guest lecturers protest**

Over 14,500 guest lecturers from 412 government first grade colleges are threatening to boycott classes in December over the non-payment of salaries and to demand job security. On Tuesday, they marched from the City Railway Station to the chief minister's residence in Bengaluru. A spokesman from the Karnataka State Government First Grade Colleges Guest Lecturers' Association said they had not been paid for five months. Union members will meet on December 15 to decide on strike action.

### **Cambodian garment workers protest**

Around 2,000 garment workers at the Winmag Shoe Manufacturing plant in Takeo province's Tram Kak district walked off the job and demonstrated on the National Road 3 on November 11 and 13 over the sacking of 50 workers without notice or compensation.

The protesters said that under Cambodian law sacked employees, who were on contracts between two and four years, must be given 45 days' notice before termination. The workers rejected management claims that they were fired because their contracts had expired.

### **Queensland: Caltex workers' union reveals sell-out deal**

The National Union of Workers (NUW), which covers workers at Caltex's lubrication manufacturing plant and distribution centre in Brisbane, has released details of a deal it negotiated with Caltex management that ended a 10-day strike by its members on November 2.

Fifty workers walked off the job on October 24 after rejecting management's proposed enterprise agreement. The management "offer" would have reduced the working week from 42 to 38 hours and axed two hours of overtime work, currently paid at 160 percent of the standard rate. The union said that wages would be reduced by between 15 to 20 percent and that the company wanted to cap redundancy payouts at 55 weeks, down from 63, and cut superannuation contributions.

The NUW resumed negotiations with management and cut a deal with the company, which cut take-home pay for a standard week by over \$100. The union claimed this new enterprise agreement was a gain because the company's original proposal would have cut the weekly wage by around \$250.

Under the new deal, which was rejected by about 20 percent of workers

at the plant, there will be a 6 percent pay increase over the life of the three-year agreement but the working week reduced by four hours to 38 hours. Any time worked beyond that would be paid at 200 percent. NUW also accepted a two-tier agreement on redundancy with entitlements reduced for new starters but preserved for the current workforce.

### **Queensland health administrative workers strike**

Twenty IT support (eHealth) workers at the state-run Rockhampton Hospital took protected industrial action and walked off the job on Wednesday in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The Hospital and Health Services eHealth employees are stationed at various hospitals throughout Queensland to provide IT support.

Workers fear that the new agreement could lead to the loss of 100 part-time jobs across the state. Their union, Together Central, wants a job security clause inserted into the new agreement. After 11 rounds of negotiations, Queensland Health (QH) offered annual pay increases of 2.5 percent during the three-year agreement. The union wants 4.5 percent annual pay increases.

The walkout by Rockhampton eHealth workers is part of a state-wide campaign by QH administrative workers in pursuit of new enterprise agreements. Agreements for four separate sections expired on August 31. Stop-work meetings have been planned for major regional centres over the next two weeks, with a mass rally at state parliament in Brisbane on November 29.

### **New Zealand railway workers call off strike**

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) on Wednesday called off a strike by its 32 members at Taieri George Railway planned for November 25.

The union members' collective agreement expired in August, and negotiations with Dunedin Railways stalled as the union pushed for a 4 percent pay increase in the first year of a two-year agreement and a further 2 percent in the following year.

Dunedin Railways offered a 3 percent pay increase in the first year with an additional pay rise for nine low-paid members. According to the union one third of the workers are paid below the living wage of \$19.80 per hour.

An RMTU official justified cancelling the strike by claiming that Dunedin Railways had come back with a "very positive" offer but added that further meetings were scheduled to "tidy up" detail.



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