Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 November 2016

India: Telangana power utility workers on relay hunger strike

Telangana electricity department contract workers held a five-day relay hunger strike outside the Collectorate in Nizamabad on Monday over several long outstanding demands. The Telangana Electricity Trade Union Front (TETUF), which covers the workers, wants permanency for all 23,000 contract employees and abolition of the contract system, increased recruitment to the department, a pension scheme and reliable salary payments.

A TETUF spokesman said many workers had been on contracts for 20 years. He claimed that although the contractors work longer hours than permanent employees their salaries were lower. The protesting workers said they would continue demonstrating until their demands are met.

Raichur iron ore processing workers protest

Iron ore processing workers from Surana Industries Limited demonstrated at the Tipu Sultan gardens in Bangalore on Tuesday to demand unpaid wages. The company closed two years ago. The workers allege that management had abruptly stopped payments in March 2015, without any final settlement. The company had also ignored subsequent directives from the Deputy Labour Commissioner that it pay up all pending wages.

While some workers resigned in order to receive their back wages, over 160 employees are continuing their protests to demand a final settlement, in line with existing labour laws.

Rajindra Hospital workers in Punjab protest

Nurses and ancillary staff at the state-run 9,100-bed Rajindra Hospital in Patiala, Punjab walked out and demonstrated in front of the out patients department on Tuesday to demand job permanency and a pay increase. They were supported by family members and members of the Class IV staff union who decided to stop work in all three shifts to support the nurses.

The Rajindra Hospital is attached to the Punjab Government Medical College which also has a 1,600-bed TB hospital.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers demand allowances

Class-IV health sector workers at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province hospitals demonstrated in Peshawar to demand a health professional allowance on Tuesday. The workers rallied outside the Lady Reading Hospital and at Jinnah Park and then marched towards the provincial assembly blocking key roads in the city.

The allowance is granted to some categories of health workers. The Class-IV category covers about 20,000 public sector health workers who have not been paid the allowance. The protest was called off by the Paramedical Association (Class-IV) after a meeting with the government, which promised to grant the union's demand.

It was the latest in series of limited strikes and protests this year over the issue. Government doctors, nurses and paramedics walked out and demonstrated in August and October demanding the same allowance. While the government has promised on numerous occasions to grant the allowance, it remains unpaid to most workers.

Bangladeshi mobile telecommunications workers protest

About 150 employees of private mobile phone operator Citycell demonstrated at the company's premises on Tuesday for unpaid salaries, bonuses and overtime from July. They demanded the outstanding amounts be paid by November 27. The workers confined the chief executive officer and five other top management officials to their offices and threatened to strike if the company failed to fulfil their demand.

Citycell (Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited) is owned by SingTel, Pacific Motors, and Far East Telecom, and is the only operator using CDMA long range technology. It has been operating since 1989.

China: Walmart workers organise for strike action

Following a series of isolated strikes earlier this year at Walmart chain stores in China, over 20,000 employees organised in internet WeChat groups are preparing for coordinated industrial action covering all stores.

Walmart Chinese Workers Association (WCWA), an unofficial union formed by several Walmart employees, walked out in July over company attempts to impose a more exploitative work system. The new system would allow managers to schedule an unlimited number of working hours per day, totalling up to 174 hours per month (an average of just over 40 per week), without any overtime pay.

While the majority of the 100,000-strong Walmart workforce has not, as yet, taken strike action, more than 40 WCWA WeChat groups covering over 20,000 members, or 20 percent of Walmart's Chinese employees, have been established.

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Walmart was pressured by the government in 2006 to create Stalinist Communist Party controlled trade unions. The organisations are run by store managers and have little support amongst Walmart employees.

Coca-Cola workers in three Chinese cities strike

Coca-Cola workers in Chongqing, Chengdu and Jilin walked off the job and occupied their factories on Monday after the company announced that it was selling its bottling operations in China. Police moved into the plants on Monday evening and began forcefully removing striking workers. Several workers claimed to have been beaten by police.

The company wants to divest its bottling stakes between Swire Beverage Holdings Ltd. and China Foods Ltd., which is part of state-owned COFCO. Workers are concerned that COFCO will cut staff when it takes over and are demanding no changes be made to existing conditions, which include regular wage increases, staff positions, benefits and other entitlements within two years. The Coca Cola workers have also called for a termination offer from the company.

Korean shipbuilding workers' union threatens to call strike

The union representing workers at one of South Korea's three largest shipbuilding companies Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) has threatened to call strike action if the company continues with its plan to sell-off "non-core" units. The union has said that withdrawal of the planned sell-offs was a precondition for the settling a wages deal it has been negotiating with HHI since May.

The strike threat follows a rally by HHI workers on November 10 outside the company's headquarters in Ulsan over the restructure plan. In June, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye called for "bone-crushing" overhauls of the three shipbuilding companies, HHI, Samsung Heavy Industries (SHI) and Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME).

The proposed restructure includes major cuts to wages, jobs and conditions. Samsung plans to axe 1,500 positions this year and reduce its workforce by 40 percent by the end of 2018. DSME wants to slash wages by 20 percent, sell two of its five floating dry-docks and reduce its workforce to 10,000 positions.

Australia's federal government workers continue rejecting pay offers

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) employees last week rejected the department's latest pay offer, for an unprecedented fourth time. The 54 percent no vote was a slight increase on previous ballot results.

Public servants at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the National Museum of Australia have also reject proposed enterprise agreements offered under the Liberal-National coalition government's restrictive pay policies. Both ballots returned 55 percent no votes. Earlier this month staff from the government's largest agency, the Department of Human Services, rejected a proposed enterprise agreement for a third time in 14 months, with 74 percent voting no.

Nearly 75 percent of the 160,000-strong federal public sector workforce remains without a new enterprise agreement (EA) after nearly three years of union negotiations.

The Liberal-National coalition government has ordered that all federal public sector EAs annual wage increases be no more than at 2 percent, that these should be combined with cuts in benefits or working conditions and no back-pay from the last agreement, over three years ago.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and other public service unions want to retain all current conditions and entitlements but have reduced their original pay demand from 4 percent annual increases for three years to between 2.5 and 3 percent.

South Australian shipbuilding workers strike

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members from the government-owned Adelaide-based ship and submarine builder ASC in Adelaide are taking protected industrial action following two years of failed negotiations for a new work agreement. Action includes an overtime ban on Friday, Saturday and Sunday to be followed by a 48-hour strike on Monday.

The shipbuilding workers are concerned that the federal government is attempting to impose its public-sector bargaining policy to any new enterprise deal. 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.

New Zealand railway workers accept new pay deal

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) called off a strike by 32 of its members at Taieri George Railway planned for November 25 after reaching a tentative agreement with Dunedin Railways. The agreement was ratified by workers on November 19.

Workers planned to strike for pay increases of 4 percent in the first year of a two-year collective agreement and a further 2 percent the following year. Dunedin Railways offered only a 3 percent pay increase in the first year with an additional pay rise for nine low-paid members. According to the union, a third of the workers are paid below the living wage of $19.80 per hour.

Under the accepted agreement workers will receive an immediate minimum wage increase of 3 percent, backdated to the expiry of the previous agreement, and two further increases of 3 percent in August 2017 and 2018. Workers on minimum rates of pay will receive higher increases.

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