Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 January 2017

India: Contract workers at government information centres maintain protest

Contract workers from the Punjab government's Suwidha (Single User-friendly Window Disposal & Helpline for Applicants) centres in Bathinda demonstrated with other government contract employees outside the Governance Reforms director's office in Chandigarh on Tuesday. Punjab State Suwidha Centre Contractual Employees' Union members have been protesting for over 120 days for permanency and an end to contracts and the same pay rates as other civil servants.

Workers said that a government assurance that 27,000 contract workers would be made permanent was an election stunt. They ended a mass protest last September after the government falsely claimed it would consider their demands. A union spokesman said the workers have been on contracts since 2003 and were hired on the assurance that their jobs would be made permanent after a few years.

The protest was part of an ongoing state-wide campaign by Punjab government contract workers for permanent jobs. The campaign is coordinated by a coalition of 21 different contract employees' organisations.

Police used water cannon and batons to break up a demonstration in Bathinda on October 13 and forcefully stopped a protest march in Lambi on October 24.

Jammu and Kashmir government workers strike

As part of their two-day strike from January 3 to 4, Jammu and Kashmir government employees, including regular, contract and casual workers, demonstrated outside the divisional commissioner's office in Jammu on Tuesday. Organised by the J&K Government Employees, Casual Labours, Workers & Pensioners United Platform, the workers want payment of outstanding wages, job permanency and implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission.

Protesters said that the government had done nothing about promises to improve the conditions of about 60,000 daily rated, casual and need base workers. Simultaneous protests were held throughout the state, with more planned.

Gujarat fertiliser factory workers walk out

Contract workers from the state-run Gujarat State Fertilisers and Chemicals (GSFC) plant in Vadodara downed tools on Tuesday and walked out to protest recent sackings. Workers said that GSFC had laid off 1,165 contract employees without issuing a "show-cause" notice. The strikers demanded all terminated workers be reinstated immediately.

The fertiliser manufacturing workers said they would continue their protest at the factory gate until their demand was met. Most of the sacked employees had worked at the factory for 15 to 20 years.

Tamil Nadu: Bank employees in Tiruchi protest

All India Bank Employees Association and All India Bank Officers Association members demonstrated in Tiruchi on Tuesday in protest against the government's de-monetisation policies and what they claimed was political favouritism in the supply of cash to certain banks. They demanded the Modi government ensure supply of sufficient money to all banks.

Banks across India are suffering cash shortages since the Indian government declared all 500- and 1,000-rupee notes illegal. The law is aimed at forcing people to open bank accounts and deposit these notes into these accounts. The government's demonetisation program has led to thousands of workers, particularly in rural areas, not being paid until they open a bank account. Most rural areas do not have banking facilities because workers were always paid in cash.

Telangana government contract lecturers protest

State government contract lecturers from various government junior and degree colleges in the Khammam district demonstrated in Khammam on Wednesday over the government's delay in resolving their long-outstanding grievances.

Organised by the Joint Action Committee of the Telangana State Government Colleges Contract Lecturers Association, the lecturers want job permanency and basic pay and dearness allowances as per the tenth pay revision commission recommendations. They said they would maintain their protest until their grievances are resolved.

Pakistan: Sindh school teachers protest arbitrary transfers

Government teachers at the Mirour Khas high school have been on a hunger strike since December 24 to protest arbitrary transfers of teachers to remote areas. The Teachers Action Committee said the protest would

© World Socialist Web Site

continue until the government withdraws all transfer orders.

Karachi dock workers' union closes down strike

The Karachi Dock Labour Board (KDLB) ordered its members at the Karachi Port to end four days of "go-slow" industrial action on December 30 claiming it had an assurance from government authorities that their concerns would be addressed once the dockers resumed regular work. The dock workers had decided to take action to demand job security, accusing port authorities of using new technology to slash jobs. This and other outstanding issues have not been resolved.

Bangladeshi government continues witch-hunt against garment workers

Apparel factory authorities, in collaboration with the police, are witch-hunting garment workers in the Ashulia industrial belt in Dhaka who participated in a two-week mass protest for a wage rise. At least 3,500 workers have been sacked while factory owners have filed several cases against 1,500 employees. Police have arrested 30 workers, including seven union leaders and a television reporter.

The Ashulia industrial belt contains about 4,500 garment factories employing a total of more 3.6 million workers who produce 77 percent of the country's export earnings. The garment workers want their poverty wage of 5,300 taka ($US67) a month increased to 16,000 taka.

Taiwan teachers protest over changes to pension scheme

National Federation of Teachers' Unions members demonstrated outside the Parliament Office building in Taipei on December 30 over proposed changes to the civil servants' pension scheme. Protesters accused the government of attempting to shift the responsibility for preventing the scheme from going bankrupt to public employees and challenged President Tsai Ing-wen's administration to a public debate on pension reform.

The government's proposed changes include increasing the civil servant insurance premium, cutting pensions and lifting the age that public school teachers can start receiving pensions to 60, and forcing older teachers to delay retirement. Under current rules, a public school teacher can retire after 25 years of service.

Burma: Yangoon government orders lockout at plastic factory

The Yangoon regional government has ordered management of the strike-hit Shwe Mi plastic factory in West Yangoon to temporarily close the factory after inspectors reported that the premises "reeked of chemicals" and some sections of the manufacturing floor lacked proper lighting and ventilation. The government claimed the lockout was a response to complaints from striking workers and that the factory should remained closed until workers' complaints were resolved.

Around 300 workers walked out on November 30 over several demands. While five of the seven points of dispute were resolved only 130 employees returned to work. The remaining workers, who maintained a picket line, demanded a wage increase of 40,000 kyat ($US30) and compensation for exposure to dangerous chemicals.

Workers allege that many of their former colleagues suffer from tuberculosis, blood cancer and miscarriages, which they attribute to the chemicals used in plastic production and for printing on plastic bags. They also claim that the company had reduced the workforce from 420 to 310 but kept the same production targets. Workers want their wages lifted in line with the increased workload.

Victorian professional firefighters to march on parliament

The United Firefighters' Union (UFU) announced this week that off duty firefighters would march on Victoria's state parliament later this month to protest the "more than 1,360 days of constant litigation and vilification" against its members in their dispute with the Country Fire Association (CFA) over a new enterprise agreement (EA).

While the state Labor government has approved the proposed EA advanced by the UFU, this has been rejected by CFA, which wants major changes. The CFA, which is mostly manned by volunteers in rural and country areas, claims that a tentative agreement with the UFU has been reached and has asked the Fair Work Commission to intervene in the dispute.

The UFU counter-claimed that there was no tentative agreement and that long-running negotiations over the wages of career firefighters, working conditions and safety measures should continue outside the commission. The union is demanding clauses that would affect the relationship between the union and the CFA, and between career and volunteer firefighters. The CFA wants to retain full control over the state's 60,000 volunteers and has rejected the UFU proposed agreement, claiming some of the proposed clauses are "unlawful."

South Australia: Mount Gambier medical staff protest

Doctors and nurses at Mount Gambier Hospital, South Australia's largest regional health facility, have lodged cases in the Industrial Relations Court (IRC) over critically low staffing levels and the stressful working environment.

A spokesperson from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation claimed that conditions at Mt Gambier Hospital have become "untenable and unworkable." The federation lodged complaints against Country Health SA in the IRC on December 21, while the SA Salaried Medical Officers Association (SASMOA), representing "overworked doctors" met with the state Labor government in the IRC on the same day.

A representative for the nurses said the hospital was failing to fill 14 nursing shifts, or an eight-hour shift every day, over a fortnight period, which was "ultimately putting patients' lives at risk," she said, adding: An SASMOA officer told the media that junior and senior doctors were experiencing "untenable and unworkable workloads to the point where they've felt they've had to leave hospital and no longer work there."

The hospital made headlines in July after reports that junior doctors were working unsupervised in the emergency department and several senior locum doctors quit amid safety concerns. Emergency Physician Group, which provides the locum doctors, will end its contract with

© World Socialist Web Site

Country Health SA from June 2017 following a “growing list” of doctors refusing to work at the hospital.

New Zealand hospital doctors to strike again

Following a 48-hour strike action in October, junior doctors at government hospitals of 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) in New Zealand have voted for strike action after negotiations for “safer rosters and safer hours” in a new collective agreement failed. Members of the NZ Resident Doctors’ Association (NZRDA), which represents 3,200 resident doctors, voted on December 30 for a three-day strike starting on January 17.

Negotiations were focused on 140 rosters, which include seven consecutive nights and 12 consecutive days. Doctors say the work schedules contribute to staff fatigue and dangerous levels of exhaustion.

Doctors rejected a revised offer in November saying that the DHBs’ “expectation” that safer rosters could be implemented within six months after negotiations, provided all DHBs were in agreement, was unacceptable. The 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 doctors’ association 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 a maximum of 10 days in a row and four days off.

The government has 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.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site