

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

21 January 2017

Burmese garment workers on strike

Around 200 workers from the locally-owned Hallmark garment factory in Yangon struck on January 9 after not receiving their December wages on January 6, the factory's official pay day. In an attempt to end the walkout factory management claimed that wages would be paid on January 12 and threatened workers that their pay would be docked for the days they were on strike.

Garment workers told the media that they are concerned that the company has been recently cutting jobs and selling sewing machines, cars and other equipment, while assuring employees that production will continue at the plant.

Cambodian garment workers on strike

Around 800 workers at two Chinese-owned factories in Kbal Koh, Kandak province, have been on strike since January 10 over unpaid wages. A spokesman from the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union said that many workers had not been paid their full salaries since June.

About 200 strikers marched to the parliament in Phnom Penh on January 13 after the factory owner claimed he had no money for wages. The demonstrators submitted petitions to several government representatives seeking their help in obtaining the unpaid wages.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa hospital workers strike

Class-IV employees (sweepers, midwives, watchmen and labourers) at major government hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stopped work and closed down outpatient departments on January 12 and 13 to demand payment of the health professional allowance (HPA).

Members of the Class-IV Employees Association locked consultant rooms and stopped doctors and patients from entering the facilities. Affected hospitals included Lady Reading Hospital, Khyber Teaching Hospital, Hayatabad Medical Complex and Mardan Medical Complex.

A spokesman for the workers said that the government promised in November to pay HPA to the Class IV workers. The allowance is paid to doctors, paramedics and nurses.

India: East New Delhi sanitation workers end strike

East New Delhi Municipal Corporation (ENDMC) sanitation workers ended an 11-day strike on Monday. Over 16,000 sanitation workers and other employees walked out on January 6 over the non-payment of three months' salaries. Unions representing the workers ordered to end the strike last week after the corporation claimed it would pay two months' wages. Many workers, however, refused the offer saying they would only end the strike when paid the full amount.

On Monday, ENDMC paid the full salaries and assured workers that their other demands would be accepted. These included timely payment of salaries as well as arrears for contract employees who had been given permanent jobs.

Contract workers at Hero Motorcorp factory protest sackings

Contract workers from the Hero Motorcorp motorcycle factory in Gurugram, a financial and technology hub near New Delhi, demonstrated outside the mini-secretariat building on Monday over the sacking, without prior notice, of 1,000 employees. One protestor told the media that over 600 of the dismissed workers were eligible for permanent jobs under existing laws. "It seems the company did not want to regularise the workers," he said.

Karnataka local government village workers protest

Several hundred gram panchayat workers employed on a daily wage basis in Mandya district villages in Karnataka demonstrated outside the deputy commissioner's office in Mandya on Monday. They were demanding the payment of minimum wages and other benefits due to them under existing labour laws. Other demands were for permanency and pay rises for pump operators, sweepers and tax collectors.

Kerala fruit-processing workers strike

Over 100 workers at the state-owned Vazhakulam Agro and Fruit Processing Company near Muvattupuzha are on strike over unpaid wages. A spokesman from the KHDP Employees' Association said workers had not been paid for the past five months and that their statutory payments to the Employees' Provident Fund were also outstanding.

While the fruit-processing workers have been assured by management that their salaries would be paid, the promise had not been kept. A farmer

told the media that the plant has been idle for three months after the company stopped purchasing fruit.

Dairy-processing workers locked out in Victoria

Sixty workers at the Parmalat dairy-processing plant at Echuca in northern Victoria were locked out indefinitely on Wednesday in retaliation over a planned four-hour strike. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members had voted for a “protected” four-hour strike, starting 3 a.m. Wednesday.

Negotiations for a new enterprise agreement at the Echuca plant have been underway since August. In November, Parmalat applied to have the existing enterprise agreement cancelled and employees placed under the inferior industry award. The Fair Work Commission (FWC) is due to consider the company’s application in February.

The AMWU claims that if the company is successful employees would have to work an extra two hours a week, wages would be almost halved and redundancy and other entitlements cut. The unions and Parmalat resumed negotiations on Thursday while workers remained locked out.

Last week the FWC granted an application by energy giant AGL to terminate the existing workplace agreement at its Loy Yang A power plant in Victoria’s La Trobe Valley. The ruling clears the way for AGL to impose massive pay cuts—estimated at between 30 and 65 percent—on its 570 employees, and tear up long-standing working conditions and entitlements. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy union (CFMEU) and the ETU have appealed to the company to resume negotiations.

South Australian bus workers to vote on protected strike action

Some 98 percent of around 600 members of the Transport Workers Union employed by Light-City Buses in Adelaide rejected a proposed enterprise agreement last week. A TWU spokesman said management had rejected all of the workers’ demands and wanted various basic conditions removed from the current agreement.

The TWU lodged an application in the Fair Work Commission for a “protected action” ballot of its members on industrial action, including work bans and strikes. Industrial action is likely to be in late February or early March.

According to the TWU, drivers want pay parity with others in the Adelaide metro network, a reduction in broken shifts, no broken shifts on weekends, and regular start and finish times. Light-City Buses wants wage increases limited to 1.9 percent, extension of an unpaid break in broken shifts to five hours, increased casualisation of the workforce—from 15 percent to 30 percent—and other demands.

Light-City Buses is a private company that operates a third of services in the Adelaide Metro network under contract to the state government. It is a subsidiary of Broadspectrum. In April 2013, Light-City Buses was stripped of eight routes for poor performance.

South Australian nurses to take action over bed closures

Nurses at the Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) and the Queen Elizabeth

Hospital in Adelaide have threatened not to accept patient admissions to hospital wards unless they can be placed in spaces that cater to their specific needs. The proposed ban and other actions are in response to bed closures announced by the South Australian Labor government.

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (South Australian branch) members on Wednesday voted overwhelmingly to take “professional action” from January 21. Nurses want the government to reverse its decision to close 55 beds across the RAH and QEH, including 16 beds in a general medical ward at the RAH.

An Australasian College for Emergency Medicine (ACEM) spokesman supported the nurses’ action, saying that on most days last year there would be 15 to 20 patients waiting for beds at seven o’clock in the morning at both hospitals.

Yesterday the Labor government sought an injunction from the state’s Industrial Relations Commission to stop the industrial action. The nurses’ union responded by agreeing to delay limiting admissions at emergency departments until Monday.

Ambulance paramedics have complained for over 12 months about ramping at Adelaide’s hospitals. In September they told the media that overcrowding at the RAH emergency department was common and they were often forced to treat patients in their ambulances outside the hospital.

New Zealand government hospital doctors walk out

Junior doctors at government hospitals of 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) in New Zealand walked out for three days on Tuesday in a dispute over a new collective agreement. Members of the NZ Resident Doctors’ Association (NZRDA), which represents 3,200 resident doctors, want “safer rosters and safer hours” included in the agreement. Their action followed a 48-hour strike in October over the issue.

Doctors say that the current work schedules, which include seven consecutive nights and 12 consecutive days, contribute to dangerous levels of staff fatigue.

NZRDA members 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 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.

The Council of Trade Unions estimates a funding shortfall in government health expenditure of at least \$NZ1.2 billion since 2009. The Canterbury DHB revealed in October that it is \$35 million in debt, with budget deficits forecast every year until at least 2021.

Lyttelton Port workers extend strike action

Over 160 members of the Maritime Union of New Zealand at the Lyttelton Port of Christchurch (LPC) container terminal have been striking each weekend since December 24 over a proposed new work agreement. The union this week issued strike notices for weekends up to and including the first weekend in February after negotiations last week failed to reach agreement. Talks are to continue on January 25.

Workers are opposed to management’s demands for rostering changes

in the current work agreement. The proposed collective agreement will cover about 60 percent of the terminal's workforce. Union members are maintaining weekend pickets outside the port terminal.



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