

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 April 2017

Bangladesh: Dhaka police use firearms against protesting garment workers

At least 20 workers were seriously injured on March 23 when Dhaka police, using batons and firing shotgun pellets, attacked their demonstration outside the Lyric Industries garment factory in Rampura, a suburb of Dhaka. Close to 400 workers were involved in the protest which erupted after management suddenly closed the plant.

Workers said factory authorities paid wages in advance and said their benefits package would be paid when the factory relocated to an industrial zone in Gazipur.

To prevent further action by the terminated workers the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association claimed it had met with factory management and that the benefits package, once calculated, would be paid through the association.

Pakistan: Punjab sanitary workers strike over unpaid wages

Sanitation workers from the Gujranwala Waste Management Company (GWMC) in Gujranwala city, Punjab province walked out indefinitely early this week to demand two months' unpaid wages.

GWMC management said it would not pay the overdue wages anytime soon, claiming that it faced a "serious financial crisis" and that many vehicles were out of order. The private company was formed in 2014 as part of the municipal administration's restructuring of the city's sanitation services.

Punjab workers for the visually impaired demand unpaid wages

Workers for the visually impaired from various government departments in Dera Ghazi Khan demonstrated on March 23 to demand four months' unpaid wages. The affected employees are non-permanent daily wage workers from the special education and social welfare department of the Municipal Corporation. They previously demonstrated over the same issue on March 9. On March 20 municipal sweepers and water supply workers demonstrated because they had not been paid for four months.

Non-payment of government employees is commonplace in Pakistan. The Pakistan government, in line with International Monetary Fund demands, has slashed spending, forcing many institutions, especially at local government level, to delay wages to the lowest paid workers. Workers are forced to turn to loan sharks to feed their families and pay school fees.

Sindh province government workers demand wages

Employees of the government-run Sindh Small Industries Corporation demonstrated outside the Bhutto mausoleum in Larkana on Monday to demand 12 months' wages. About 1,000 employees of pay scales between 1 and 19 are affected. About 180 retired employees who have not been paid their pensions joined the protest.

Sri Lankan medical lab technicians walk out

Sri Lankan government hospital laboratory technicians held a one-day strike on Wednesday. The walkout was over ten demands, including for a pay increase and the abolition of salary anomalies. Dispensing of drugs and basic laboratory functions stopped during the strike. Strikers told the media that they would hold an indefinite strike if the government fails to address their demands within a month.

Burmese workers protest over cuts to New Year holiday

More than 5,000 manufacturing workers demonstrated in Yangon on Sunday against government cutting the New Year's Thingyan holiday from ten to five days.

A Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar spokesman said most factory workers in the Yangon region are from distant towns and villages and cannot return to their homes within five days. Over 1,000 workers at the Ever Sunny Foods factory in Yangon walked out on strike last week demanding the restoration of the ten-day holiday break.

Meanwhile, 650 workers at the Korean-owned Myanmar Gun San factory were sacked on March 25 after demanding the full ten-day New Year holiday, the issuing of social welfare cards and for security guards to stop mistreating employees. Workers complained that they have not been allowed to take leave since the factory opened eight months ago.

Victorian insulation manufacturing workers' continue strike

The strike by over 90 workers at Fletcher Insulation in Dandenong, Victoria has entered its fifth week. Australian Workers' Union (AWU) members walked off the job after being offered an enterprise agreement that slashes working conditions and imposes a four-year pay freeze. The

union told the media that Fletcher Insulation wants to increase working hours—the current glass industry standard is 35 hours a week—and remove minimum manning levels from the agreement.

Workers are also concerned that Fletcher, which took over ACI Glass several years ago, wants unlimited use of casual workers and slash existing redundancy provisions.

On Tuesday, Fletcher applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to terminate the workplace agreement which will reduce workers' pay by over 50 percent. This tactic, which is used to force workers to accept union-brokered wage deals suitable to employers, has become the norm. Striking Parmalat workers in Echuca and striking garbage collection workers in New South Wales faced similar threats if they failed to accept employers' demands.

In January the FWC terminated the expired enterprise agreement of striking Victorian workers at AGL's Loy Yang A power station after they failed to accept the company's proposed enterprise agreement. According to the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, the decision could cut Loy Yang workers' wages by over 60 percent.

Victorian food processing workers strike

More than 100 food-processing workers at the McCormick Foods plants in Clayton South and Moorabbin in Melbourne walked out for 24 hours on Wednesday after rejecting the company's proposed new enterprise agreement. The company "offer" included a 6 percent pay cut each year for the next three years. A National Union of Workers (NUW) spokesman said McCormick Foods also wanted to remove paid breaks from afternoon and night shift and completely change rosters.

McCormick Foods claimed the cuts were in the "best interests of our overall business in Australia." According to the NUW, the company made a \$472 million profit last year. The union has not indicated if any further strike action is planned and instead has made a useless appeal for a boycott of McCormick Foods products.

NSW: Central Coast garbage collectors' union ends industrial action

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) has negotiated a cost-cutting deal with the Central Coast Council in the Fair Work Commission. The deal, which was endorsed by garbage collection workers on March 24, followed eight months of limited industrial action, including strikes and demonstrations.

TWU members began industrial action last year after their employer Remondis received permission from the FWC to cancel the current enterprise agreement if a negotiated agreement could not be reached by 2018. The workers would then come under the inferior basic industry award, cutting their wages by \$300 a week.

Remondis proposed a new enterprise agreement with a 25 percent pay cut to secure its contract with the Council, which expires in February, 2018. The union called for a clause to be inserted into the council's tender for waste services that protected local jobs and existing workers and their conditions. They also called for temporary outsourced employees to be paid the same as other depot workers.

Little information has been released about the latest agreement. The council has reportedly agreed to insert a clause in its tender documents requiring tenderers to offer ongoing employment to employees of the current contractor and ensure all existing employee statutory leave

entitlements are recognised. The TWU and council administration have refused to release full details of the deal claiming the information remains "commercial in confidence" until the council makes public its proposed tender document.

South Australian bus workers to resume strike action

Drivers for the privately-owned Light-City Buses (LCB) in Adelaide, the South Australian capital, plan to walk off the job for 24 hours starting at 3 a.m. on April 4, in a dispute over a proposed enterprise agreement.

Drivers will also impose bans on collecting fares, which is expected to cost the government an estimated \$50,000 a day in revenue. Light-City Buses is a private company that operates a third of services in the Adelaide Metro network under contract to the state government.

Previous industrial action was suspended by the Transport Workers Union after it reached an "in principle agreement" with LCB on March 15. The deal was rejected by members.

According to the TWU, drivers want annual 3 percent pay increases to give them 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. The LCB 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.

New Zealand retail car parts workers strike again

For the sixth time in four months, employees of car parts supplier Brake and Transmission (BNT) in Auckland walked off the job on Wednesday following management's ongoing refusal to negotiate a wage rise. The 20 workers are members of the FIRST union.

The union initiated negotiations in August but management has yet to make a pay offer. The workers, who are only paid the minimum wage, want wage parity with other workers in Auckland doing the same job.

Papua New Guinea power utility workers begin limited action

Some 2,000 workers from PNG Power Limited (PPL) began limited strike action on March 24 over their longstanding dispute for a wage increase and other issues. The workers are refusing to respond to service fault call-outs.

The PNG Energy Workers' Association said its enterprise agreement was signed in November 2015 but had not been implemented. On Monday, PNG Power management directed its enterprise consultative committee to meet before the end of the week to facing PPL employees' demands.



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