

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

29 April 2017

## Bangladeshi tea plantation workers strike

Thousands of Chaplapur Tea Garden workers in Bangladesh's Moulvibazar district struck on April 25 and demonstrated outside the manager's office over several issues including immediate repair of their houses battered by recent storms. Workers said their houses were unliveable and they did not have any money to repair them. One worker complained that he had been working for the last thirteen years and received just 85 taka (\$US1) per day.

The workers also demanded jobs for their children, an increase in tea plucking rates—from 2 to 5 taka per kilogram—a hike in their daily allowance and provision of gratuity funds. The workers were organised by the Bangladesh Tea Labour Union's Chaplapur Tea Garden unit.

## Bangladeshi garment workers demonstrate in Dhaka

Thousands of garment workers from factories in Gazipur and Ashulia demonstrated in front of the offices of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments in Dhaka on April 20 over various demands.

Around 2,700 workers from Shade Fashions International, Shade Fashions Limited and P&O Attires in Ashulia, had been demonstrating for a week demanding unpaid wages from February and March, tiffin (lunch) bills, holiday allowances, maternal leave allowances and payment of wages within the first week of every month. The Garment Workers' Trade Union members have been locked out since the beginning of April.

Workers from the Gazipur-based Suhcheon Company Bangladesh, who were organised by the National Garment Workers' Federation, have also demanded restoration of 687 jobs and payment of overdue wages. A protester claimed that workers had been sacked on trumped-up criminal charges so management could avoid paying delayed wages.

## India: Tamil Nadu government workers strike

Most state government offices in Tamil Nadu were closed on Tuesday when over 250,000 government employees began an indefinite statewide strike over various demands. The main demands were for abolition of the contributory National Pension Scheme (NPS), higher wages and the filling of all government department job vacancies. They also called for a separate time scale for noon-meals scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services workers and that road workers be guaranteed 41

months continuous work before they can be dismissed.

The strike was coordinated by the Tamil Nadu Government Employees Association (TNGEA), a coalition of 68 public sector unions. The TNGEA has threatened to extend the strike if the government fails to respond to their demands.

The TNGEA called off a 10-day strike of over 200,000 government employees in February 2016 without winning a single demand from its 20-point charter of claims. Rank-and-file members of the union had no input or vote on the return-to-work decision.

## Tamil Nadu auto parts workers' strike in 13th week

A strike by 56 permanent workers at the Korean-owned Jintech auto parts factory in Ponthur Village near Sriperumbudur are maintaining a strike they began on February 1. The company produces spare parts for Hyundai, Renault, Nissan, Ashok Leyland and Daimler and employs 86 permanent workers and 300 contract workers.

The workers are demanding better wages, job permanency and reinstatement of eight victimised colleagues (four suspended, four sacked) for their involvement in union activities that lead to a 13-day strike in 2015. Management offered a 1,500-rupee (\$US23.32) pay rise but no reinstatement of the sacked workers. The strikers have rejected this and want a 4,000-rupee increase and are adamant that the sacked workers be reinstated.

The workers are members of the Stalinist-Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU). At least 30 workers left the union after the company offered them a 5,000-rupee bonus (\$US78) and promotions. A worker at the plant with nine years' experience only earns 17,400 (\$270) per month.

The CITU is desperately trying to reach an agreement with the company and end the strike. The union has said it is prepared to end the conciliation process and pursue the case of the dismissed workers in the labour court if the company takes back the suspended employees. Jintech has rejected the offer and another conciliation meeting is scheduled.

## Punjab sanitation workers strike

Outsourced contract sanitation workers from the Mohali Municipal Corporation stopped work for two hours and demonstrated at the corporation's office building on Tuesday to demand permanent jobs and equal pay with district corporation workers.

A Safai Karamchari Union spokesman said the state government had completed the formalities to make the contract sanitation workers permanent but the Mohali mayor and commissioner had failed to

implement the decision. Workers said they would strike again if their demands were not met.

### **Pakistan: Islamabad hospital health workers strike**

About 100 technicians at the Federal Government Polyclinic Hospital in Islamabad stopped work on April 19 to demand the immediate payment of nine months delayed wages and for permanent jobs. The workers are attached to the pharmacy, laboratories, blood-bank and operation theatres and employed on the lower grade 9 pay scale. The strike severely affected all departments at the hospital. The strike followed several other day-long walkouts and demonstrations.

The government has ignored an Islamabad High Court order to make the workers permanent and to distribute wages. The workers were recruited after passing written entry exams in 2013. The Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD), which oversees the hospital, however, justified the failure to pay wages despite the workers continued service, claiming there were anomalies in the recruitment procedure. CADD claimed it is trying to resolve the issue.

### **Burmese cement factory workers protest**

Workers from five Sin Min Cement Industry Company factories in Kyaukse are maintaining demands for unpaid wages, a bonus and other claims. The company is owned by Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) which is run by the Burmese military.

On April 10, more than 200 workers from the five factories demonstrated for workers' rights, payment of annual bonuses, equal treatment, safer workplace conditions, permanency for long-term service employees and transparency in transferring workers from one factory to another. One worker told the media that the factory owners offered to pay only 60 percent of their one-month's wage.

### **New South Wales dock workers impose bans**

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has held a 24-hour work stoppage and imposed work bans on handling certain containers at Patrick Stevedores' Port Botany terminal in Sydney since April 20.

The dispute began earlier this month when Qube Logistics, which took over Patrick last year, began shipping containers through what was previously an unused part of the terminal. The terminal is not covered by the MUA's current enterprise agreement and truck drivers are performing the work. MUA members have refused to load any containers onto Qube trains which come from the recently opened container park.

Patrick has begun legal action against the union claiming the "unprotected industrial action" is costing it \$500,000 per day. It alleges that the union has continued the bans in defiance of Fair Work Commission orders issued and a Federal Court injunction naming more than 200 stevedores.

The MUA has said that Qube is threatening "national peace" on the docks by opening a small, effectively non-unionised container yard at the port. The union has a long record of using threats of draconian legal action by employers to shut down industrial action and doing back room deals

that accommodate the employers' aims.

The MUA has enforced round after round of job losses that have decimated the waterfront workforce and eroded its conditions. In 1998 it struck a sell-out deal with the Howard Liberal-National government and Patrick Stevedoring to end a six-week waterfront dispute. The betrayal was rapidly followed by the elimination of more than 650 jobs—almost half of the company's permanent workforce—and opened the way for successive work agreements that increased casual work, jobs cuts and ever-greater automation.

### **Victorian plywood mill workers lockout in second week**

Some 160 full time workers and 47 casuals at Carter Holt Harvey plywood mill at Myrtleford in Victoria's northeast remain locked out since April 19 in a dispute over a new work agreement. The lockout at Australia's largest plywood mill was management's response to planned rolling stoppages and an overtime ban by workers following 12 months of stalled negotiations.

Security guards have erected temporary fencing at the plant while locked out workers maintain a picket outside. All production at the plant has ceased. The workers are members of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Electrical Trades Union of Australia and Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union.

Workers want a 3 percent pay rise annually over three years, one week's annual leave allowable in the Christmas holiday period and better access to income protection insurance. A CFMEU spokesman said the company wanted one nationwide agreement for all its sites and has imposed a 2 percent pay increase at its Tumut and Morwell mills. The company and unions were scheduled to meet on May 28.

### **New Zealand disability support workers strike**

Over 2,000 workers from IDEA Services, which is funded by the New Zealand government through the Intellectually Handicapped Children's Association, struck for one hour on Thursday to protest lack of progress in bargaining for a new collective agreement. Their action followed six months of negotiations by their union, the E tu, for a pay rise for administration and support workers.

The E tu claimed that some progress was made in getting better rights around full time jobs, service reviews and health and safety but IDEA refused to negotiate on wages and has not resolved critical health and safety issues around current staffing levels and job protection.

The union claims that these employees are only paid a maximum of \$18 an hour, which is less than the official Living Wage. The workers were due for a pay increase last October. A two-hour strike is scheduled for May 11 if talks with IDEA on May 5 fail to reach agreement.



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