

Strikes and protests in India and Pakistan

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 May 2017

Pakistan: Punjab health workers protest

Hundreds of employees of the government run Lady Health Workers (LHW) program demonstrated in Rawalpindi on May 3 demanding payment of long-pending arrears, permanent jobs and the implementation of a service structure including raising their pay scale based on qualifications. Another demand was for a 50 percent ad hoc relief amount in their regular monthly salary.

Two days later hundreds of LHWs and supervisory staff protested outside the District Headquarters Hospital demanding three months of unpaid salaries.

The federal government uses these workers to run various vaccination campaigns and primary health care for women in rural areas. Each worker cares for about 200 families, forcing them to work seven days a week on low wages. Their wages are frequently held back while a large number of workers are not permanent.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa school teachers hold more protests

Government school teachers in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province are continuing demonstrations begun last month over long pending demands for better wages and conditions. Responding to the call from the All Teachers Coordination Council (ATCC), a combined body of all primary, middle and high school teachers, over 2,000 teachers demonstrated outside the district education office in Timergara on Sunday.

The union's demands include a pay increase, time-scale promotions, teaching allowances and paid leave, and a job quota for deceased teachers' children. Demonstrations were held in Peshawar, Nowshera, Mardan, Charssadda and Swabi last month on these issues. The ATCC said a mass demonstration would be held in Peshawar on May 15 if the government continued to ignore its demands.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa salt mine workers strike

Salt mine workers in the Lakani area of Karak tehsil struck again for 24 hours on Monday to demand death and casualty grants and for the provision of safety equipment. They also called for marriage and death grants for workers' sons and daughters, accurate identity records of workers on duty in the mines, frequent mine inspections and age benefit

cards. The walkout followed strike action in December.

Workers said that miners had been killed and injured in work accidents over the last two years but the affected families and the injured had not been properly compensated in line with industrial laws. A union spokesman said that a nominal compensation amount of just 10,000 rupees (\$US155) had been paid for deceased workers and 4,000 rupees to injured workers.

A long-standing complaint was that there were no ambulance facilities at the mines and that access roads were in disrepair, causing delays in getting injured workers to hospital.

India: Telangana power-loom workers on walkout

More than 6,500 power-loom workers at Textile Park in Sircilla downed tools on Monday to demand a wage rise. Some 500 weavers affiliated with the Stalinist-Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) returned to work on Wednesday after loom owners agreed to pay wages as per their previous agreement.

Over 6,000 operators of polyester power-looms at the park, however, remained on strike. The polyester loom owners have claimed that they required more time to reach an agreement. The workers are demanding that they be paid according to the Minimum Wage Act.

Coal India miners call strike

Five peak unions, which cover almost 90 percent of workers of state-owned Coal India, have given notice for a three-day nation-wide strike from June 19 over wages, pensions and other demands.

Negotiations have been ongoing for several months although revised salaries were due to be implemented last June. The current agreement was settled in 2012 and expires this June.

The unions want a 50 percent pay increase, implementation of all clauses agreed during the 2012 negotiations, pensions increased, equal wages for contract workers and that contract workers not be used to replace permanent workers.

The five unions—the CITU, Indian National Trade Union Congress, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Hind Mazdoor Sabha and the All India Trade Union Council—also oppose the merger of the Coal Miners Provident Fund with the Employees Provident Fund

Delhi University teachers protest

Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) members demonstrated outside the vice chancellor's office on May 9 with their long pending demands. The vice chancellor has refused with DUTA members for the last ten months. Teachers allege that there are unfilled vacancies and no promotions and that no pensions have been provided over several years. A DUTA spokesman said the teachers would continue their protest until the vice-chancellor agreed to meet the teachers.

Indonesia: Freeport mine workers' strike in second week

Over 8,000 permanent and contract workers from Freeport's massive Grasberg copper mine in West Papua have been on strike since May 1 over mass lay-offs.

The company claims the walkout is illegal, that strikers would be considered absent without leave and that all those who struck for five days would lose their jobs. So far over 170 jobs have been terminated.

Freeport, which had already laid off 10 percent of 32,000, has warned that it could axe another 5,000 positions due to production cuts caused by an ongoing contract dispute between the company and the Indonesian government.

Under new government rules the company has to obtain a new mining permit, divest a 51 percent stake, build a second copper smelter, relinquish arbitration rights and pay new taxes and royalties. Freeport claims that production at Grasberg could be reduced by 60 percent.

Indonesian dock workers issue strike notice

The union representing 2,000 PT Jakarta International Container Terminal (JICT) workers has announced that its members at the Tanjung Priok port will strike for six days on May 15.

The walkout is to oppose a decision by state-owned port operator Pelindo II to extend JICT's container-handling contract with Hong Kong-based Hutchison Ports Holdings to 2039. Workers walked off the job on April 6, claiming Hutchison had previously attacked workers' legal rights and cut bonuses.

Hutchison currently controls 51 percent of JICT with Pelindo II holding 48.9 percent. A parliamentary committee in February claimed the contract extension could potentially cause state losses of 36 trillion rupiah (\$US2.7 billion) and that it was awarded without the government's approval.

Striking Filipino banana plantation workers picket company

Contract workers at the banana plantation of the Korean-owned Shinsun Tropical Fruit Corporation in Compostela Valley, Mindanao have been on strike since April 6 to demand permanent jobs. Strikers are picketing the company's locked main gate. Some 200 other employees are not crossing the picket line.

The company has filed a damages case against the workers and the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), which organised the walkout, claiming the strike had cost \$US200,000 in lost production.

The strike began after the agency that supplied contract workers terminated 37 employees. After Shinsun rejected the workers' demand for reinstatement as permanent employees other contract workers decide to strike for permanent jobs. The company offered to reinstate 32 workers during negotiations but this was rejected by the KMU. It wants all sacked workers, plus 80 existing contract workers, to be made permanent employees.

Last month, hundreds of banana plantation workers at eight packing plants in the Compostela Valley walked off the job demanding abolition of the piece-rate wage system. The system, also known as "pakyawan," forces workers to labour for 12 hours a day for just 310 pesos (\$US6.22). This is less than the official 330 pesos per day for agricultural workers in the region.

Australian industrial court blocks strike by Victorian power workers

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) on Tuesday ordered cancellation of a planned May 15 strike by Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members at one of the feeder coal mines of the Loy Yang A and B power stations in Victoria's Latrobe Valley. The FWC order was in response to an application by the state Labor government to ban the strike on the pretext of protecting the state's power supplies. The power stations produce 50 percent of Victoria's electricity.

AGL, the Loy Yang A plant owner, told the commission that it would lock out indefinitely all 570 workers at the mine and power plant if the strike went ahead.

The ETU and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) have been in negotiations with AGL over a proposed Enterprise Agreement (EA) for nearly two years. Workers overwhelmingly rejected two previous company agreement "offers" that removed clauses relating to overtime, manning levels, pay and working conditions. AGL also sought to tear up job security provisions, paving the way for forced redundancies.

AGL successfully applied to the FWC in January to terminate the existing enterprise agreement, clearing the way for the energy giant to impose massive pay cuts, estimated at between 30 and 65 percent, and tear up conditions and entitlements.

A CFMEU spokesman said the FWC new order triggers a "workplace determination process" where an arbitrated outcome could put workers under the 2010 Electrical Power Industry Award, with massively reduced conditions. The unions now have 28 days to negotiate a new enterprise agreement, allowing them to put workers under pressure to accept conditions demanded by the company.

New Zealand disability support workers' union calls off strike

The E tu, the union covering over 2,000 workers from IDEA Services, called off a strike planned for Thursday after negotiating a sell-out deal for a new collective agreement. IDEA Services is funded by the New Zealand government through the Intellectually Handicapped Children's Association.

The workers took limited strike action in April after six months of negotiations failed to deliver a pay increase for administration and support staff or resolve staffing and safety issues. The union says 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 rise last October.

The E tu claims its deal “addresses the major issues in dispute.” This is a lie. Under the new deal, the work agreement will only run until October 20, instead of the normal two-year agreement, and in place of annual percentage pay rises, workers will receive \$150 (before tax). None of the other issues were resolved and are left to future resolution through negotiations or the setting up of committees.

Future negotiations are to discuss an increase in working hours up to 80 hours a fortnight, for those who want it, a review of contracted hours, new work rules and an increased focus on safety with safety representatives getting extra pay. IDEA workers are yet to vote on the sell-out deal.



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