

Miners walkout in Indonesia and Australia

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 May 2017

Indonesian dock workers' union withdraws strike notice

The union representing over 2,000 workers at Tanjung Priok port withdrew plans to strike from May 15–20, claiming it had reached a “constructive agreement” with the company. The container port, the country’s largest, is administered by PT Jakarta International Container Terminal (JICT). The state-owned Pelindo II owns 48.9 percent of the facility, and Hong Kong-based Hutchison Ports Holdings (HPH) owns 51 percent.

The walkout was to protest JICT’s extension of HPH’s contract to 2039. The union accused JICT’s board of directors of cutting workers’ benefits to pay fees related to the contract extension. Dock workers struck on April 6 claiming HPH had previously attacked workers’ legal rights and cut bonuses.

No details of the agreement have been made public. A vague statement released by the union said JICT directors had agreed to reduce workers’ losses related to the contract extension.

Indonesia: Freeport sacks striking miners

Over 8,000 permanent and contract workers at Freeport’s massive Grasberg copper mine in West Papua remain on strike, after walking out on May 1 over mass lay-offs. The one-month strike was called by the Chemical, Energy and Mining Workers Union (SP-KEP) of Freeport Indonesia.

Freeport claims that the industrial action is illegal, that strikers are absent without leave and all those who had struck for five days would lose their jobs. So far over 840 jobs have been terminated. It is illegal to sack striking workers in Indonesia.

The company, which had previously laid off (furloughed) thousands of employees, claims it could axe another 5,000 positions due to production cuts caused by its ongoing contract dispute with 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.

Freeport had introduced a furlough policy, putting workers on long-term leave at short notice. Although the furlough is paid, workers lose out on many benefits, including overtime and accommodation. Workers were evicted from company barracks on two days’ notice.

Cambodian garment workers protest

Around 300 garment workers blocked National Road 21 in Takhmao on Wednesday for the fourth time in the past week to demand their April salaries from the South Korean-owned Gawon Apparel Factory. The workers began blocking the road on the evening of May 12, after the factory owner failed to pay the full \$US153 April salary. Workers only received between \$20 and \$50.

Management told workers the factory was facing financial difficulties and had arranged for a loan to pay salaries in full on May 20. The garment workers said they would not return to work until their wages were paid in full.

India: Hospital sanitation workers in Hyderabad on strike

Contract sanitation workers in all government medical colleges in Telangana’s capital Hyderabad walked out on an indefinite strike on Tuesday to demand a wage increase as per the official minimum. Workers want Government Order 68 implemented, which in 2012 mandated a minimum monthly salary of 9,300 rupees (\$US145). Their current pay is between 6,000 and 7,000 rupees. There are about 2,000 hospital sanitary workers in the city and 5,000 throughout the state.

Peak union bodies end Tamil Nadu bus strike

Peak union bodies, representing ten commuter transport unions, called off the indefinite strike by 100,000 government transport workers after just 24 hours with only minor gains. The Labour Progressive Front, Stalinist-controlled Centre for Indian Trade Unions and the All India Trade Union Congress accepted a deal from the government in which outstanding salaries would be paid through the release of 12.5 billion rupees. This only partially satisfied one of the workers’ demands.

According to workers, the State Transport Corporation owes 14.8 billion rupees to its retired workers, 2.5 billion for current employees’ entitlements and 47.3 billion rupees in unpaid wages.

Corporation workers walked off the job on May 15 with four major demands. These included payment of delayed wages and a new wage agreement; repayment of 60 million rupees of workers’ money (including deductions from wages for the provident fund) used by the corporation to

cover operating debts; and funds for new buses.

At least 22,000 buses were grounded by the strike. The government had threatened to declare the walkout illegal, exposing workers to heavy fines and possible jail terms.

Pakistan: Sindh paramedics protest hospital conditions

Pakistan Paramedical Staff Association members at the Chandka Medical College Hospital Complex in Larkana boycotted duties on Tuesday to protest attacks on working conditions and to demand maintenance work on medical equipment and the hospital. The strike forced the closure of crucial services such as the outpatient department, laboratories and medicine dispensary.

Paramedics said that the X-ray units were closed down for over a month and air-conditioning units were out of order in theatres. They demanded the removal of the medical superintendent whom they accused of bullying and imposing forced transfers.

Punjab government clerks protest

Government clerks in Multan demonstrated on May 11 to demand a 50 percent wage rise and reduced taxes on living essentials. Rallies involving hundreds of workers were held in the city. A combined mass meeting of the All Pakistan Clerks Association threatened protests outside the parliament if the government failed to address their demands. The demonstration was one of many held over recent years to call for a significant pay rise.

Punjab teachers demonstrate

Teachers from Punjab government schools protested outside the Punjab Assembly in Lahore on Tuesday over several long-pending demands. These included a pay rise, in-service promotions, teaching allowances and other incentives. They accused the government of failing to meet previous promises to upgrade their pay scales and resolve other issues. Some teachers have not had a pay scale increase for over two decades.

The teachers also protested against the government's school privatisation program. They have been holding protests since early 2016 over the issue. The Punjab government's public-private partnership deal hands management of public schools to NGOs and private operators administered by the recently created Punjab Education Foundation. It will impact on more than 5,000 schools.

The central and provincial governments have either slashed or frozen education budget allocations. The already inadequate and crumbling service is on the verge of collapse and teachers fear that privatisation will eliminate free education in Pakistan.

The United Teachers Council has threatened to hold more protests during Eid religious holidays if its demands are not met.

Lockout at Victorian plywood mill enters fifth week

Over 200 workers from the Carter Holt Harvey (CHH) plywood mill at Myrtleford in Victoria's northeast remain locked out since April 19 in a dispute over a new work agreement.

While the workers, who are members of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Electrical Trades Union of Australia and Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, are currently picketing the mill, they have been isolated by the unions. Union members at CHH's other plants in Tumut and Morwell have continued working.

The current union claim is for 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.

Oaky North miners strike in Queensland over pay and conditions

Miners at Glencore's Oaky North Lodge in Queensland's Bowen Basin struck for four hours on May 10 in protest against company attempts to slash wages and conditions in a new enterprise work agreement. Glencore employs 900 workers at the mine, which has two underground operations and a coal preparation plant.

According to the CFMEU, the company wants to cut wages, eliminate miners' right to workplace representation when stood down or during disputes, change rosters without arbitration, remove various safety clauses, increase accommodation costs, slash severance and retrenchment arrangements and other hard won conditions.

Glencore used contract workers and staff employees to maintain production duties during last week's walkout. Miners said they would continue taking industrial action until the company withdrew its attacks on wages and other hard-won conditions.

Tasmanian construction workers impose work bans

About 70 workers employed by commercial builders VOS and Hanson Yunken have imposed work bans after failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. These include limiting working hours and bans on pouring concrete and the movement of pre-cast sheets. At least two building sites in Tasmania's capital Hobart are affected.

The CFMEU members want a \$10 an hour pay rise to bring them up to par with construction workers in other states. VOS and Hanson Yunken workers in Tasmania are currently paid around \$28 an hour.

Saipan casino construction workers' pay dispute ends

Over 90 Chinese construction workers at the multimillion-dollar Imperial Pacific Resort on the Pacific island of Saipan in the Northern Marianas have been paid in full after months of protests and limited strikes.

The workers, who entered Saipan on tourist visas, left the island on Tuesday after being told by their families that their back wages and compensation had been deposited in their bank accounts.

The workers who first took action in April over unpaid wages, "sub-standard" living conditions, and broken promises, had not been paid by

Gold Mantis Construction Decoration (CNMI) since February. The construction site was managed by contractor MCC International Saipan, a unit of state-owned Metallurgical Corporation of China Ltd.



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