

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 August 2017

India: JK Tyres factory workers on strike

Around 600 workers from the JK Tyres factory in Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu have been on strike since July 24 demanding recognition of their union which is affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). The striking workers had refused to join the company union which they say does not represent them.

The CITU has demanded that JK Tyres hold a secret ballot under the Industrial Disputes Act to determine which union has majority support. There are an estimated 1,500 workers in the factory, including 420 permanent workers, 250 probationary workers, 250 trainees and the rest contract workers.

The workers' grievances range from low wages to excessive productivity demands and lack of amenities on the shop floor. They complained that even when production targets are met management demands that they continue working.

According to workers, a worker with six years of experience only receives about 16,000 rupees a month, less company deductions of 400 rupees for transport and the canteen. Workers are not paid overtime for attending management meetings at the end of shifts.

Management is maintaining production using contract labour while negotiations continue between the CITU, JK Tyres and the Labour Department.

Utter Pradesh contract teachers on strike

Tens of thousands of contract teachers in twelve Uttar Pradesh cities boycotted work and demonstrated in their respective cities on July 27 in protest against a Supreme Court order that effectively cancelled their permanency and made it contingent on their clearing the Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET). Large numbers of police used water cannon and tear gas against the protesting teachers.

Uttar Pradesh has over 173,000 contract teachers who work in primary schools with hundreds of schools only manned by contract teachers. Their jobs were made permanent by the state government in 2014 and they became assistant teachers on the state payroll. The court ruling, however, quashed their appointments and declared that their contract positions would not be converted into government jobs unless they passed the TET.

A representative of the Adarsh Samayojit Shikshak Sangh union told the media that the demonstrations would not stop until the government resolved the crisis. He said the court order was like a "death warrant" for the thousands of contract teachers.

Kerala nurses' unions end state-wide strike

Over 80,000 nurses from 326 private hospitals ended a state-wide strike in Kerala on July 20 after the state government said it would implement the Supreme Court directive and pay a 20,000-rupee (\$US314) minimum monthly salary to nurses. The government and private hospitals, however, only agreed to apply the court directive to hospitals with less than 50 beds.

The United Nurses Association (ANU) and Indian Nurses Association (INA), representing nurses in private and government hospitals respectively, sent nurses back to work without resolving low wages and the poor working conditions facing a majority of nurses.

Bengaluru information technology workers protest

Hundreds of IT workers from local and multinational companies protested at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on July 29 against what they claimed were illegal mass layoffs since the beginning of the year. Former employees at the protest claimed they were coerced into resigning by employers wanting to cut jobs in the midst of an industry slowdown. By forcing the workers to quit the companies did not have to provide any severance pay. According to the media, over 40,000 workers have been terminated with major companies such as Infosys, Wipro, Cognizant and Tech Mahindra among others downsizing in recent months across India.

One worker said employees were threatened that if they refused to resign they would be fired on the grounds of poor performance, making it difficult for them to get other employment.

India's \$150 billion IT outsourcing industry is battling an economic slowdown caused by rising automation and the growing threat of protectionism in the United States, its biggest market.

The protesters were organised by the Information Technology Employees Union which has appealed to the Karnataka government to force companies to follow the labour law and pay compensation.

Pakistan: Abbottabad student nurses maintain strike

Student nurses from the District Headquarters Hospital (DHQ) in Abbottabad have been on strike since July 22 demanding five months' unpaid wages and that the current 5,000-rupee (\$US47.47) monthly wage be increased to 20,000 rupees. This would bring them into line with their counterparts in other Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa districts.

On Monday the nurses marched from the DHQ to the deputy commissioner's office. Nurses said that the relevant authorities had

promised them early payments many times but the promises turned out to be false.

Azad Kashmir dam construction workers on strike

About 300 contract workers from Neelum-Jhelum Hydroelectric Project Company (NJHPC) in Muzaffarabad have been on strike since July 24 over several demands. These include job permanency, overtime allowances, leave compensation and the payment of outstanding wages. The workers are employed in the building of a dam and a powerhouse on the junction of the Neelum and Jhelum rivers in Azad Kashmir.

The NJHPC is run by the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) with the contractors recruited by WAPDA and assigned to the NJHPC, which was created to build the dam, a ten-year construction project.

A NJHPC representative said workers' calls for overtime, leave compensation, unpaid wages and other demands had been accepted but ruled out job permanency.

Pakistan: Gadani shipbreaking workers threaten to strike

The Ship Breaking Workers Union, representing over 20,000 workers at the massive Gadani shipbreaking yard, have threatened to call a strike in mid-August if employers and the Balochistan government failed to provide adequate health and safety facilities at workplaces, increase pay and wages and introduce special legislation for their industry.

The government promised to improve safety and regulate the industry following the death of 20 workers from an explosion on an old oil tanker at the yard last November. The promises have not been fulfilled.

The shipbreaking yard, which runs for 10 km along the Pakistan shoreline, has 132 shipbreaking units and is extremely dangerous. Medical facilities are inadequate and there is no education for workers' children or basic amenities like clean water, gas and electricity. A union spokesman said two to three workers are injured each day.

The promised hospital for the town has not been built, there are no drivers for the two ambulances at the yard, no doctor at the medical facility and firefighting equipment consists of what can be salvaged from the ships being dismantled.

Nearly 850 workers have lost their lives since the yard became operational in 1968 and more than 1,000 workers have lost limbs or suffered other serious injuries.

Sri Lankan train drivers' union calls off strike

The Locomotive Engineering Operators' Union (LEOU), which covers Sri Lankan train drivers, called off a 24-hour strike scheduled for Wednesday after talks with the transport ministry.

LEOU members wanted the enrolment of driving assistants and called on management to overcome frequent braking problems associated with Chinese train compartments. Drivers also complained that management was planning to issue charge sheets to the engine drivers and related officials for derailments and other runtime issues despite the faults with the braking system.

Union officials told drivers at a meeting Tuesday night that the transport ministry agreed to their demands. The union suspended a planned strike over the same issues in early July after false promises by the transport minister.

Queensland: Brisbane bus drivers continue strike action

Brisbane City Council bus drivers held a four-hour strike on Wednesday in protest against a proposed enterprise agreement offer by the council. The strike followed two two-hour stoppages and a four-hour stoppage over the past two weeks. Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members want the agreement to improve wages and safety and allow workers to have a say in shift arrangements.

The council's offer included 2.5 percent annual pay increases over three years, back pay and a \$400 bonus. The council said it has budgeted for the 2.5 percent annual pay increases and would not change the offer. It also said it would double the number of council-funded security guards and survey drivers and other improvements to safety.

The RTBU said that the offer did not address demands for the replacement of the outdated pay structure, increase the hourly rates for lower-ranked drivers or allow any input into rostering schedules. Bus drivers planned not to collect fares yesterday.

Brisbane City Council workers protest

More than 500 workers from Brisbane City Council, represented by seven unions, walked off the job on Wednesday and demonstrated outside City Hall in a dispute for new enterprise agreements. As well as pay increases, the unions want improvements to safety, working conditions and job security.

The Services Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Electrical Trade Union, Professionals Australia, the Plumbers' Union, the Australian Workers Union (AWU), the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, RTBU and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) are all involved in the council's enterprise agreement negotiations.

Truck drivers represented by the TWU want job security and accuse the council of undermining transport jobs through labour hire and contracting.

Librarians, who are covered by the Services Union, want higher pay, pointing out that the Reserve Bank of Australia was predicting a 3 percent rate of inflation after 2018–19. The council has only offered a 2.5 percent yearly increase. The librarians implemented work-to-rule in July and called for reductions in the use of labour hire and temporary workers and for the council to hire permanent staff.



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