

## Pakistan: Punjab government field health workers protest

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

4 November 2017

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

### Pakistan: Punjab government field health workers protest

Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department contract and daily wage field workers in Lahore boycotted the ongoing government-run polio vaccination campaign on Monday, demanding that their jobs be made permanent. Their street protest in Lahore was joined by more than 400 affected workers. Workers were also protesting against outsourcing and privatisation of health facilities.

Authorities were forced to postpone the planned five-day vaccination campaign but the boycott was called off on its second day after authorities agreed to the workers' demand for permanency.

### Karachi hospital workers end four-week strike

A four-week boycott of duties by house officers, paramedical staff and final year students at the cash-strapped Abbasi Shaheed Hospital run by the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) was called off by workers on October 26 after the mayor of Karachi gave an assurance that wages would be paid within 24 hours.

Workers were demanding the immediate payment of overdue wages. Paramedical staff had not been paid for two months, while house officers and final year students were not paid for five months. The outpatients department and most other hospital services were severely affected during the strike.

The 850-bed teaching hospital is the third largest public hospital in Karachi and services over one million residents in the city's north. It is barely functional as a result of a decade of funding cuts, impacting not only on its ability to pay salaries but also availability of facilities, equipment and medicine. Staff complained about the appalling conditions in the hospital, including shortages of beds, no air-conditioning system in the intensive care unit, lack of

functional x-ray and MRI machines, and a shortage of medicines.

### PIMS hospital medical staff end 25-day strike

Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) workers in Islamabad suspended 25 days of strike action on October 26 in their dispute demanding to be classed as government employees.

PIMS workers lost their status as civil servants, as well as government accommodation and other benefits, in 2013 when the hospital—a 1,200-bed facility—was upgraded and affiliated with the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Shaheed Medical University. Workers demanded that the affiliation be reversed. More than 4,000 employees were affected.

PIMS Employees Association said it decided to suspend the strike after a government minister gave an assurance that a bill would soon be passed in parliament to separate the two entities.

### Sindh province doctors protest

Hundreds of doctors from various districts in Sindh province demonstrated in front of the Karachi Press Club on Tuesday to demand promotions, permanency and salaries and entitlements on par with doctors in other provinces of Pakistan. The Sindh chapter of Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) further demanded the implementation of a Supreme Court ruling to give effect to proforma promotions of doctors retired since August 7, 2015.

### FATA hospital workers protest privatisation

Workers from the Landi Kotal Hospital in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), in northwestern Pakistan stopped work on Monday and set up a protest camp to oppose the planned privatisation of the hospital. Workers fear that jobs will be

lost and “poor” people will be deprived of medical facilities.

Health services are only scarcely available in the semi-autonomous region as the federal government is increasingly restricting its funding of public services and pressuring local governments to adopt similar measures. This is affecting public services such as health and education, and eliminating a large number of jobs.

Landi Kotal Hospital staff complained to the media in June 2016 that specialist doctors’ positions remained vacant for several years. The empty posts included gynaecologist, orthopaedic surgeon, dental surgeon, ENT specialist, pathologist, radiologist and cardiologist. Power to the hospital was regularly cut also, due to non-payment of utility bills.

### **India: Karnataka ‘D’ group government workers strike**

Members of the District Unit of ‘D’ Group Employees Association held a protest march in Bengaluru on Monday to demand job permanency. The protesters, including drivers, domestic and court workers and other civil servants, demonstrated in front of the deputy commissioner’s office, accusing him of not keeping his previous assurance to make them permanent employees.

### **India: Pune metal engineering factory workers protest**

More than 900 workers and family members from the multinational metal engineering plant of Bharat Forge in Pune, Pondicherry marched from the factory to the assistant labour commissioner’s office at Wakdewadi on Monday. They submitted a memorandum to the commissioner demanding a wage increase and recognition of their newly formed trade union, the Bharat Forge Karmachari Sangathna.

The workers formed the union earlier in the year in opposition to the company-controlled union. Their union is registered with the state government but not recognised by the firm’s management. Workers complained that the company discriminates against them by paying wages and entitlements well below those of members of the company union.

Workers have demanded the reinstatement of nine dismissed co-workers whom they alleged were dismissed for their activity in the new union.

### **Burmese garment workers sacked after strike**

Ten workers from the Solamoda Garments factory at Shwe Than Lwin industrial zone in Yangon were sacked last week on a charge

of alleged theft. The sackings—seven were union leaders—followed the ending of a four-week strike by 500 of the 800 workers at the Chinese-owned factory.

Workers walked out on September 18 and picketed the factory with 13 demands, including an additional 1,000 kyat to their daily wage. The official minimum daily wage is 3,600 kyat (\$US2.64). Other demands were maintenance of the 10,000 kyat bonus for not taking leave for a month and abolition of daily quotas.

Factory management accused the sacked workers of stealing 700 garments during the strike. The workers denied the allegation. They demanded their jobs back and have taken their case to the Yangon regional arbitration council.

### **Australian oil workers’ picket at Esso in fifth month**

Close to 200 oil production workers at Esso’s onshore facilities in Victoria and offshore platforms in Bass Strait are maintaining a protest camp established in mid-June outside ExxonMobil’s Longford gas plant. The company is attempting to impose new maintenance contracts that could reduce wages by 30 percent, as well as reduced allowances and annual leave and the scrapping of other hard-won working conditions.

Esso awarded a five-year maintenance contract to UGL, but workers were told to sign up with MTCT Services, a UGL subsidiary, at significantly lower wages or risk losing their jobs.

The Esso workers are members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Australian Workers Union (AWU).

Following threats of court action against picketers by MTCT in July, the trade unions wound down members’ protests and removed protest banners and other picket equipment. The workers have been isolated by the unions. There has been no campaign to mobilise other union members in concrete industrial action.

The unions have likened the dispute to the six-month Carlton United Breweries (CUB) picket last year, which saw maintenance workers retrenched and invited to sign up to a new contractor on substantially lower pay. That dispute also was isolated by the unions, which dragged it out until workers agreed to be rehired as CUB employees on an inferior enterprise agreement.



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