

Indian telecommunication workers strike, Australian coal terminal workers impose bans

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 December 2017

## India: BSNL communication workers strike

About 1,300 workers from the state-owned national communications provider BSNL struck work on December 12 and 13 in Madurai, Tamil Nadu to oppose Indian government plans to sell off the company's 72,000 mobile phone towers. BSNL's mobile network accounts for 75 percent of its revenue.

The Indian government announced its privatisation plan in 2015 but deferred it in the face of strong opposition from BSNL employees. Workers fear that the loss of the profitable mobile towers will cut BSNL's earnings and cause the loss of jobs.

BSNL unions are also demanding a pay rise. In July they held a one-day nationwide strike to demand a 15 percent wage increase as per the third Pay Revision Committee. The government approved the committee's recommendation on July 19 the increase was only paid at public sector enterprises that made a profit during the last three financial years.

The unions said that the company became a loss-making entity because of "anti-BSNL" measures adopted by the government that benefited the private telecom corporations. BSNL, for example, was not allowed to procure equipment for its mobile network expansion between 2006 and 2012.

## Assam tea estate owners shoot protesting workers

At least 10 tea garden workers were hospitalised with bullet wounds, two of them seriously injured, after tea garden owners indiscriminately fired on a large group of protesting workers at the Bogidhola tea estate in Assam's Golaghat district on December 13.

The workers were demonstrating outside the estate office over unpaid annual bonuses, which the owners previously promised to pay by December 12. The workers have accused the tea worker's unions in Assam of defending the estate owners' interests.

## Indian banking sector unions postpone national walkout

The All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) and All India Bank Officers' Association (AIBOA) have called off their national strike

planned for December 27, after accepting bank authorities' "assurance" that there would be a pay increase within a month.

The two associations, the biggest unions in the banking sector, want outstanding salary increases—from November 2012 until the end of October this year—paid in full.

Bank workers held a two-day strike in October over the issue. Bank authorities offered a pay rise of up to 8 percent but workers demanded 15 percent. Details of the latest offer have not been made public.

## Chandigarh government hospital contract security workers protest

Contract security workers at the Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) in Chandigarh demonstrated on December 22 over several demands. The Government and MC Employees and Workers Union want job permanency for workers who have completed 10 years service, implementation of equal pay for equal work, adherence to labour laws, separate lockers and changing rooms for men and women, and the 17,000-rupee (\$US265) pay commission allowance given to security workers.

## Sanmina factory workers demonstrate in Chennai

Over 100 workers from the US-owned Sanmina electronics factory in Chennai, Tamil Nadu protested outside the US consulate in Chennai on Tuesday to demand that the US government pressure the company to compensate retrenched workers.

Around 300 Sanmina workers walked out on November 21 to demand a wage rise, union recognition through secret ballot and reinstatement of 30 workers on "compulsory rest" and other suspensions following a sit-in protest at the factory in March.

The electronics workers want their current 12,000-rupee (\$US186) monthly pay increased to 21,000 rupees in line with workers at the neighbouring Foxconn and Nokia Siemens factories. Management arrogantly responded to their demand by ordering them to do more overtime or face voluntary retirement. The Sanmina employees allege that at least 150 workers have been retired through this management tactic.

## **Pakistan: Islamabad government hospital medical workers strike**

Twenty-four contract medical staff, including doctors and paramedics, at the Federal General Hospital in Islamabad have been on strike for over two weeks. They have been working at the hospital on contract for five years and want permanency. The hospital was forced to close its outpatient department on Monday because of the strike.

The hospital, which was constructed in 2012, caters for people from rural areas adjoining Islamabad. While most new recruits were placed in permanent positions, doctors and paramedics were hired on contract basis only.

## **Sri Lankan power utility workers protest**

A group of Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) workers have been demonstrating and holding a protest fast outside the company's head office in Colombo since December 10. They are demanding a salary increase to overcome pay anomalies and are opposing cuts in overtime payments and bonuses.

A spokesman from the Joint Trade Union Alliance (JTUA) previously threatened a nationwide strike on December 20 if the overtime payments and bonuses were not restored. JTUA, however, failed to organise any action and in September called off a week-long strike after doing a secret deal with management for a meagre allowance of 4 percent. CEB workers rejected the deal.

## **Hyundai Motor union endorses lower wage rise**

Hyundai Motor's labour union, which covers 51,000 workers, has reached a tentative deal with management, ending 39 rounds of negotiations and several weeks of strike action at the company's assembly plants in Ulsan. Workers were due to vote on the deal yesterday.

Hyundai Motor has said it will increase workers' basic monthly salary by 58,000 won (\$53) and give bonuses worth 300 percent of basic pay plus 3 million won in extra compensation. The union's initial demand was for workers' basic monthly salary to be increased by 154,883 won and a bonus payment of 30 percent of the company's 2016 net profit of 5.72 trillion won.

## **Burmese garment workers protest**

Panda Textile factory workers demonstrated in Mandalay, Burma on December 17 to demand management implement a 28-point agreement between the union and company executives last year. The deal organised to end an eight-month sit-down protest. The workers also demanded that the company reinstate two union leaders who were sacked during the long-running protest.

The formerly state-owned No.2 Textile Factory was privatised in 2012 under an agreement that required Panda Textile management to retain its 600 strong workforce on the same conditions and wages. Workers complained that the new management has cut their pay and forces them to work Saturdays and Sundays, their normal days off, in breach of their

employment contract.

## **New South Wales coal terminal workers impose bans**

Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at the Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT), south of Sydney, applied limited industrial bans from midnight Wednesday in a dispute over a proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The union plans full strike action on December 25.

The strike was triggered after PKCT applied to the Fair Work Commission to terminate the existing agreement. The CFMEU told the media that the company did this after workers rejected management's enterprise "offer." Negotiations for a replacement EA have been ongoing for three years.

A CFMEU spokesman has alleged that the company was stalling negotiations by attacking the current conditions and remuneration in the current enterprise agreement. He said that at least 20 percent of the terminal workforce were not included the company's proposed enterprise offer.

## **Canberra hospital cleaners vote for industrial action**

Specialist cleaners at the Canberra Hospital in the Australian Capital Territory have voted in a secret ballot to take industrial action in their year-long fight for a pay increase. United Voice (UV) members have said that since 2012 they have received only a single pay increase—\$0.64 an hour—which raised their wage to \$21.83 an hour.

The 100 cleaners are employed by ISS under contract with ACT Health and said that they have not had a real pay increase for six years. They want also pay parity with state public service cleaners.

## **Fiji airport catering and baggage-handling workers locked out**

About 200 employees of Air Terminal Services (ATS) at Fiji's main international airport in Nadi have been locked out since December 16. ATS provides catering, baggage-handling and engineering services at the airport. ATS has a workforce of 640.

The dispute was triggered when 70 ATS workers walked out to attend an Air Terminal Services Employees Trust (ATSET) beneficiaries meeting. They were not allowed to return to work until they agreed to sign a declaration saying that their walkout was wrong, apologise and accept disciplinary action. They refused and at least 130 other ATS workers refused to commence duties in sympathy with their colleagues.

ATS workers hold a 49 percent stake in the government-owned company but have no input into its operations. They oppose the way the company is run and its treatment of staff. The government claims the workers' action is a strike and illegal.

## **New Zealand municipal workers threatened with lockout**

Five water utility workers from the Hurunui District Council, in New Zealand's South Island have been threatened with a lockout if they fail to sign the council's proposed new collective agreement by January 2. The council's threat was in response to a Public Service Association (PSA) announcement that the workers would begin industrial action on December 28, only working their usual hours and refusing to be on-call.

The PSA members and the council had been negotiating over a new collective agreement since May. The sticking point has been the current on-call allowance rate. Utilities officers are expected to be on-call one week in five.

The rate for being on-call from Monday to Friday is currently \$20 a day, and \$50 for weekend days and public holidays. Workers want an extra \$20 added to the allowance.

### **Solomon Island doctors strike**

Doctors from the Solomon Islands Medical Association (SIMA) announced on Tuesday that they rejected the government's latest work agreement offer and would begin a national strike on December 22. SIMA claimed that the offer did not reflect any significant change or revision in the current scheme of service.

SIMA withdrew a 28-day strike notice in July, after signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government. However, the MOU did not resolve the doctors' grievances. The document gave the government four months to revise the doctors' service scheme—in effect stalling industrial action until 2018.

A SIMA representative said that the doctors are working under an agreement that has not changed since 2005. Negotiations for a replacement agreement began in December last year.

### **Papua New Guinea national weather staff give notice of strike**

Papua New Guinea's National Weather Service workers have given notice of their intention to strike. Members of the National Weather Service Working Committee, the workers said that their grievances relate to salary discrepancies which have been unresolved by government for nine years.

Weather service workers warned that they will withdraw meteorological, climatological and all other services around Papua New Guinea as part of their industrial action.



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