Striking cleaners occupy Korean university; Australian Paper plant workers strike indefinitely

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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South Korea: Yonsai University cleaning staff launch occupation

Cleaning staff are occupying Seoul's private Yonsei University, one of the oldest and most prestigious academic institutions in South Korea, as part of an indefinite strike launched earlier this month against job cuts and pro-business restructuring. One hundred workers took over the first floor lobby of the university's main building, carrying signs declaring, "Who did the work to give you a clean and safe Yonsei University?"

The workers have demanded that 31 full-time positions, which were lost late last year as a result of retirements, be filled by permanent employees. Instead of hiring new full-time staff, the response of the employment agency which contracts cleaning staff was to hire students on casual, rotating three-hour shifts.

The Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union claims that the employment agencies' cutback was a response to funding reductions from Yonsei University authorities.

Pakistan: Peshawar welfare workers demand outstanding wage payments

Workers Welfare Board (WWB) employees in Peshawar demonstrated in Jinnah Park on Monday to demand the government pay outstanding wages and dues. They have not been paid for the last six months because the federal government has frozen funds to the agency. The rally was called by the Workers Welfare Board Employees Union.

According to the union, a scheduled January 16 sit-down protest outside the Islamabad parliament was postponed after finance division officials promised to make the payments by January 21. WWB workers have threatened to march on the parliament if the government fails to keep its promise.

Pakistan telecommunication pensioners rally for pay rise

Former Pakistan Telecommunication Company employees protested in Peshawar on January 10 to demand the government implement pension pay increases due since 2010. The retirees have threatened to stage a sit-in demonstration outside the parliament if the payments are not made.

In June 2015, the Supreme Court endorsed a 41.5 percent rise in the pension, 50 percent increase in medical allowances and a 50–75 percent rise in the portion of the pension paid to family members. The Pakistan government is yet to make these payments.

Social austerity and other cost-cutting measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund mean that delays or non-payment of wages and salary increases are commonplace for federal, regional and local government employees in Pakistan.

Pakistan education workers demand promotions

Elementary and secondary education department employees from Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa held a sit-down demonstration on January 11 outside the Balambat district education headquarters over promotions and the lack of a service structure.

Those affected are in management positions within the department and have not had an upgrade for the last seven years. The All Pakistan Clerks Association supported the protest.

Bangladesh: Teachers of MPO-enlisted schools demand nationalisation

Several hundred teachers from Monthly Pay Order (MPO)-enlisted education institutions began an indefinite hunger strike on Tuesday to demand that the government nationalise the education system. They have threatened to continue their protest until Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina implements a previous promise to carry out this measure.

The Monthly Pay Order teachers, who have held numerous protests over this issue, are organised by the Besarkari Shikhkha Jatiyakaran Liaison Forum, a six-member alliance of teachers and employees. The joint convener of the forum said that discussions with education department officials had been fruitless.

Running parallel with this campaign, teachers from religious schools for primary aged children (sebtedai madrasas) are continuing a hunger strike outside the Jatiya Press Club. It is the eighth day of the protest. The hunger strikers also want their institutions nationalised but government ministers have previously said this cannot be implemented until Bangladesh's finance ministry provided the necessary funds. There are

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around 48,000 teachers in about 10,000 madrasas who have not received any government pay since these institutions were registered with the Madrasa Education Board in 1984.

India: Volkswagen workers union representatives on hunger strike in Pune

Eleven Volkswagen Employees' Union representatives had been on a hunger strike since January 12 in protest against demands by the global auto corporation for a performance-related wage scheme.

Volkswagen wants salaries to be 80 percent fixed and 20 percent based on performance, which will significantly decrease workers' pay. Bargaining over a new wage agreement began 14 months ago in 2016.

Last year workers at the plant produced over a 150,000 vehicles—about 500 cars per day—a 20 percent increase on the previous year. Workers have told the media that management want daily production increased to 550 cars.

The union officials, who have bombastically declared that they will "fast until death," are determined to prevent any industrial action by the 3,200-strong workforce at the plant. VW Employees' Union general secretary Mashe Tushar told the media "We have resorted to hunger strike, but we don't intend to stop production."

Sri Lankan nurses end strike over finger-print surveillance machines

One hundred and fifty Sri Jayawardenepura Hospital nurses returned to work on January 12, after management temporarily suspended use of its fingerprint attendance system. The nurses defied a court "return to work order" and struck for a week to demand the surveillance machinery be removed.

On January 11 nurses at the Colombo eye hospital walked out for 24 hours in support of the Sri Jayawardenepura Hospital nurses. Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health has appointed a committee to investigate use of the fingerprint machine and other issues.

Sri Lankan police attack CEB workers

Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) employees struck on Thursday in protest against attacks by police special task force officers on power workers demonstrating the previous day at the company's head office in Colombo. The CEB chairman was detained in the office for nine hours during an occupation of the building. Several employees, including female workers, were hospitalised as a result of the police attack.

The workers, who have been demanding a longstanding salary increase, which was denied by the government treasury, were also protesting against what they claim was an "illegal" pay rise for CEB administrative officials in November 2014.

Ceylon Electricity Board Joint Trade Union Alliance convener Ranjan Jayalal told the media that workers would not work on national emergency repairs and breakdowns until their demands were met.

Thursday's strike ended after the Alliance presented a letter to the prime minister's secretary Saman Ekanayeke. The unions have threatened to hold a protest march in Colombo on February 7 and take indefinite strike action if the government fails to respond positively to its demand.

Australian Paper plant workers strike indefinitely in Melbourne

Almost 90 manufacturing staff at an Australian Paper (AP) factory in the Melbourne suburb of Preston stopped work indefinitely on Tuesday, establishing a continuous protest outside the plant as part of a dispute over a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA).

The company is owned by Japanese conglomerate Nippon Paper Group and is one of the country's largest manufacturers of envelopes. Negotiations for a new EBA have been underway since March last year.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), which covers the workers, wants a three-year agreement with 2.5 percent annual pay increases. Currently the workers receive an average of just $21.50 an hour. The company is insisting on a four-year agreement with no pay increase in the first year, two percent in the second and third years and 2.5 percent in the fourth. The offer equates to a 6.5 percent pay rise over the life of the agreement.

AP also wants cuts in working conditions, including reducing rostered days off (RDOs) from 16 to 14 annually, and changes to the existing classification structures that will leave numbers of workers worse off.

The company employs more than 1,300 staff nationally, mostly in regional areas. The AMWU has made no attempt to organise broader support from other AP workers for the Preston strikers.

In February last year, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, with the support of the AMWU, pushed through a regressive EBA at AP's Maryvale paper mill in Victoria's Latrobe Valley. The deal, enforced by the union in the face of substantial opposition, included a 5 percent pay cut and a two-tier wage system with an effective 11.5 percent pay reduction for all new-starts.

Western Australian teachers and support staff threaten strike action

Western Australian (WA) public school teachers, along with education support and service staff, have threatened to begin the year with industrial action in protest against cuts to public education by the WA Labor government, and the increasingly dire working conditions.

The State School Teachers Union of WA (SSTUWA) announced at the beginning of the month that its members were considering strikes as part of an ongoing dispute over a new enterprise agreement covering WA staff.

The union has pointed to the growing number of physical assaults on teachers, with 595 violent incidents last year, triple the figure in 2014. The union is demanding a formal policy relating to assaults on staff members, and a register of incidents. Teachers will rally on January 30 and consider further action.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has threatened separate action by support staff over proposed government cuts. These include reduced funding to Aboriginal education staff and other school support workers. The union has warned that as many as 3,000 jobs will be eliminated across the sector. The government is also moving to close Moora Residential College, which provides boarding services and classes for students from regional areas.

Labor backtracked this month on plans to close the Schools of the Air, which provides education for children in the most remote rural areas, and to end accommodation services at Northan Residential College. The announcement, which only reversed a fraction of the $64 million

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education cuts announced last December, followed a widespread public outcry.

The SSTU and CPSU both supported the election of a Labor government last year, promoting the fraud that it would end public sector cuts. SSTUWA President Pat Byrne signalled the union's support for Labor's austerity agenda, declaring that she recognised "there is a need for budget repair."

Locked-out Port Kembla workers return to work

Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT) employees on the New South Wales south coast returned to work last week after being locked out for four days. PKCT is owned by mining conglomerates, Peabody and South32, along with Tahmoor Coal, Wollongong Coal and Centennial Coal.

The company locked out the 58 permanent workers to prevent a limited work stoppage called by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) in a long-running dispute over a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA).

Negotiations have dragged on for three years. The CFMEU has limited all opposition by workers to spasmodic strikes and stoppages. The union's major concern is that the company's demand for the removal of consultation clauses in the agreement would undermine its privileged position as a labour bargaining agency

PKCT applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to terminate the current EBA and force workers onto the National Employment Standard with inferior pay and conditions, including the removal of existing sick leave provisions and cuts to superannuation payments. The FWC will bring down its ruling next month.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "7.30" program this week claimed to have seen documents which revealed that PKCT planned to sack a third of its permanent workers and replace them with casuals.

Fiji: Thousands protest in support of locked-out airport workers

At least 3,000 people marched in Nadi on January 13 in support of around 200 Air Terminal Services (ATS) workers, almost a third of the workforce, who have been locked out since mid-December. One union leader told Australian media that local reporters estimated 8,400 people were involved in the protest in a city that has less than 45,000. Almost 100 police officers were deployed.

ATS imposed the lockout after workers attended a shareholders meeting during their work hours and raised numerous issues, including an 11-year pay freeze and allegations of sexual harassment. ATS workers, including baggage handlers, check-in staff, engineers and caterers, own 49 percent of the company through an Employees' Trust, but have no say in its operations.

The Fiji government, which owns 51 percent of ATS, has declared that the workers are illegally striking and urged a return to work on the company's terms. Some 32 workers who have returned to work have been made to sign a letter declaring their strike was unlawful. The ATS has hired scabs to replace the locked-out workers.

The Fiji Trades Union Congress has called for another protest march in the capital, Suva, on February 24. Meanwhile, the Federated Airlines Staff Association is continuing negotiations with ATS management and the government's Employment Relations Tribunal. Magistrate Andrew See told the media on Wednesday that he wanted to "get workers back at work as soon as possible."

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