

Workers strike in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 February 2018

Indian labor commissioner orders union to end port agents' workers strike

Over 1,000 port agents' workers at the New Mangalore Port Trust have been on strike since January 29. The strikers are demanding that contractors from over 20 stevedores and commission and forwarding agents at the port facility be made permanent and provided the same pay and conditions—such as health care, minimum wages, bonuses and pensions—as permanent employees.

The strike is being led by the All-India Central Council of Trade Unions, which is affiliated to the Maoist Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). Talks were held with some of the employers and the Labor commissioner on February 6. The commissioner ordered the union to shut down the strike.

Mid-day meal workers protest in India

Hundreds of mid-day meal scheme workers staged a sit-in protest in Hyderabad, the state Telengana capital, on February 1 to demand that the government terminate its agreement with a non-governmental organisation and stop the privatisation of 2,000 mid-day meal workers.

On Monday mid-day meal workers from across Karnataka staged a protest outside Freedom Park in Bengaluru to demand better wages and government recognition of their work. They later demonstrated outside the residence of Minister for Primary and Secondary Education Tanveer Sait. It was the second time in the past 12 months that the midday meal workers have protested at the park. They staged a similar protest from September 12 to 14 last year and refused to leave unless their demands were met.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers demand allowance in Pakistan

Hundreds of health department workers from the Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa struck on Tuesday and protested outside the Saidu Teaching Hospital, Mingora to demand a health professional allowance.

The workers, which include midwives, sweepers, security, technical and clerical employees, accused the government of renegeing on previous promises. According to the Malakand Division Paramedical Association, the government has falsely promised three times to grant the allowance.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health sector employees have repeatedly fought

for the professional allowance, which is paid to doctors and nurses and other health workers.

Lady Health Workers demand permanency in Pakistan

Large numbers of Lady Health Workers program employees demonstrated on Tuesday at Ghalanai in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The workers have not been paid for eight months and, although employed continuously in 2004, remain temporary employees. The protest, which was held outside Mohmand Press Club, blocked the Peshawar-Bajaur Road.

The Lady Health Workers program provides essential health services, including vaccinations, in the poverty-stricken and remote regions of Pakistan. The workers are often paid sub-minimum wages. Despite protracted struggles only a small portion of the large workforce, which is spread across the country, have been given permanent jobs. The protest in Ghalanai was called off after government authorities promised to address the workers' demands.

Pakistan: Punjab brick kiln workers demand minimum wages

Workers from 72 brick kilns in Chiniot in Punjab demonstrated on Tuesday to demand payment of the government regulated minimum wage of 1,110 rupees (\$US10.01) per 1,000 bricks. They are currently paid only 850 rupees.

The kiln workers are among the most exploited in the Pakistan working class and are often forced to seek support of family members to meet daily production targets.

The protest was called off after government authorities claimed they would resolve the issue. While kiln workers in Punjab are rarely paid the mandated minimum wage, the government has refused to take any measures against the kiln owners. Kiln owners, with the tacit support of the police, frequently deploy thugs against workers.

Sri Lankan non-academic university employees stop work

Non-academic workers from Sri Lankan public universities held a two-

day strike starting Tuesday to demand a monthly compensatory allowance from January as previously promised by the university grant commission. Some 15,000 employees from 16 universities participated in the walkout, paralysing services at the facilities.

The strike was called by the Inter University Trade Union Committee (IUTUC), a coalition of several unions. The IUTUC has threatened an indefinite strike from February 15 if university authorities fail to address the issue.

Sri Lankan water employees strike for pay rise

Government Water Board workers in Sri Lanka launched an indefinite strike on Monday to demand a 25 percent salary increase.

While strikers threatened to maintain the walkout until they won their demands, the strike was called off on Tuesday by a water board employees' union alliance, which claimed to have made a deal with management. Authorities have promised to increase salaries by 15 percent and award a 10 percent allowance.

Thailand: Burmese workers who complained of abuse face criminal charges

On Wednesday, 13 Burmese (Myanmar) migrant workers were hauled before a Bangkok court to face charges laid in October in the first-ever criminal defamation case involving employees. One of the 14 workers charged was excused because of pregnancy.

Fourteen workers filed a complaint in 2016 with Thailand's National Human Rights Commission that an employer at Thammakaset farm had made them work forced overtime, paid below the minimum wage, confiscated their passports and restricted their freedom of movement. Foreign workers, particularly those from Burma, are brutally exploited in Thailand. There have been numerous cases of slavery and human trafficking.

The response of the employer was to deny all the allegations of abuse and claimed the workers voluntarily worked at nights and to sleep next to the chicken warehouse. In the landmark case the employer claims damage to reputation. The farm lost a contract with the food conglomerate Betagro as a result of the complaint.

The workers face up to two years' imprisonment. The case was due to end yesterday and a ruling expected next month. Human rights campaigners have said the case reflects the need for protection for migrant workers in Thailand.

Australian Paper workers continue strike

A strike by 90 workers at Australian Paper (AP) in Preston, Victoria is continuing with the company refusing to negotiate unless there is a return to work. The company is the country's largest envelope and school exercise book manufacturer.

The workers, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, have been on strike since January 16 over a new enterprise agreement (EBA). The previous agreement expired in March 2017. The workers have only received \$300 per week strike pay over the past three weeks to sustain themselves and their families.

The company wants the number of annual rostered days off to be cut from 16 to 12 and a wage freeze imposed on the more highly paid workers at the plant. Hourly rates for female workers are only \$21 or around \$43,000 per annum before tax. Male workers received a slightly higher rate based on job allocation. A majority of full time workers have been at the plant for more than 20 years but receive no recognition for service, skill or experience.

Australian Paper is a subsidiary of Japanese based Nippon Paper Group, one of the 10 largest companies in the world in the forest, paper and packaging industry.

Construction workers demonstrate in Queensland

Dozens of construction workers rallied outside Queensland Alumina Limited—one of the largest alumina refineries in the world—to protest the casualisation of Monadelphous Engineering workers in Gladstone, 400 kilometres north of Brisbane.

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) spokesperson Phil Golby says the maintenance contracting company has been replacing permanent employees with casuals and is seeking to remove weekend and public holiday penalty rates, casual loading and overtime. He said that Monadelphous Engineering workers have had their pay frozen since 2015 and a variation in a previous agreement has been used to cut wages by 17 percent.

The AMWU has been negotiating an enterprise bargaining agreement with Monadelphous Engineering since mid-2016. It took no action against the wage cut in 2016

Early childhood workers to strike

Early Childhood Education workers are set to walk off the job on March 27 as a pay dispute between the United Voice union and the federal government drags on.

The action is part of a campaign to bring childcare wages up to those paid in comparable industries where men are paid more. A childcare worker with 18 months training earns just \$3 an hour above the minimum wage. The union is asking for a 35 percent wage increase.

In May last year a ballot of early childhood education workers, who are predominantly female, voted 95 percent in favour of a campaign of nationwide walk offs. There have already been two national strikes last year—in March and September—involving several thousand workers.

On Tuesday, a union application lodged back in 2013 for a 35 percent pay increase for childhood workers was thrown out by the Fair Work Commission (FWC). The FWC ruled that the union did not present any "contemporary" evidence to justify the increase. The FWC is Australia's pro-business industrial tribunal that was introduced in 2009 by the federal Labor government of Kevin Rudd, with the full support of the unions.



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