

Nurses threaten strike action in Solomon Islands

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 March 2018

## **Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa revenue department workers strike**

Revenue department workers for the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government struck this week over a series of long-outstanding demands. Locally known as “patwaris,” the workers want a service structure, time-scale promotions and recruitment into higher pay-grades.

The strikers, who have accused the provincial government of making false promises over the last three years, warned that they would launch an indefinite strike if their demands are not met.

As part of the industrial action workers locked down the revenue department offices, preventing any work being carried out. Despite years of service, no revenue department workers have been given pay increments or promotions. They are responsible for processing approximately half of the government revenue.

## **Islamabad teachers continue class boycott**

Over 2,000 teachers employed on a daily-wage basis in Pakistan government-run educational institutes in Islamabad are continuing their boycott of classes. The industrial action began more than 55 days ago. The striking teachers have been camped outside the National Press Club. On Tuesday several dozen teachers blocked the main road outside the capital’s Federal Directorate of Education for two hours.

The teachers want immediate payment of nine months’ outstanding wages, job permanency and their monthly pay increased from 12,500 rupees (\$US113) to 25,000 rupees. The teachers have been campaigning over these issues for eight months. Despite repeated promises, the government has failed to address any of these issues.

## **Bangladesh sugar mill workers to demonstrate**

On Sunday Mobarakganj Sugar Mill workers will begin a month-long series of protests outside the plant over 19 demands. These include payment of the 8,750-taka (\$107) minimum wage. While their current wage is only 4,200 taka, they have not been paid for the last three months. The protests will involve picket lines, stop-work meetings, as well as partial and full-time work suspensions.

The sugar workers are members of the Sector Corporation Sramik Kormochari Federation Samonnay Parishad, a coalition of about 80

unions which represents hundreds of thousands of workers in Bangladesh’s state-owned corporations.

The media reported last September that the deputy labour minister would announce the government’s decision on the minimum wage for workers in nationalised sectors by December.

## **Bangladesh community healthcare providers resume demonstrations**

Community healthcare providers resumed their sit-down protest outside the National Press Club in Dhaka on February 23. The protests originally began on January 22 and continued until February 1 when they were shut down by police authorities.

The workers are demanding nationalisation of community healthcare providers and opposing the health ministry’s moves to form a “community clinic trust.”

The “trust” is an attempt by the government to dissipate the ongoing struggle and is in response to a series of protests by community health care providers in recent weeks.

Condemning the ministry’s suggestion, the Bangladesh Community Health Care Providers Association convener Shahidul Islam told the media, “The trust might be run by donation, but that does not ensure our future.”

## **Private hospital nurses in Kerala continue indefinite strike**

About 100 nurses from the K. Velayudhan Memorial (KVM) hospital in the Indian state of Kerala remain on strike, after walking out on August 21. They want better working conditions at the private health facility and reinstatement of 112 unfairly dismissed nurses.

Other demands include implementation of a three-shift system, the statutory 190 to 208 hours of work per month, payment of wages in line with 2013 and 2018 wage deals and health insurance.

Instead of a system based on 3 shifts of 8 hours, the hospital currently has a 10-hour day and 14-hour night shift. Nurses are often asked to work 20 hour shifts because of staff shortages.

While the nurses have maintained their action for more than six months, the United Nurses Association has systematically isolated their struggle and refused to call for joint action by other nurses in the state or anywhere else in India.

## **Andhra Pradesh power workers protest against contract system**

Thousands of contract, outsourcing and piecemeal workers employed at the south eastern Indian state's electricity department walked out on strike on February 22 to demand an end to the contract system, third party contractors and equal pay for equal work.

The contract workers, who are members of Stalinist-affiliated Centre for Indian Trade Unions, protested in Andhra Pradesh's industrial city of Vishakhapatnam. Police arrested several union officials and an unknown number of rank-and-file workers. According to union officials, an estimated 30,000 contract employees were involved in a hunger strike protest prior to the demonstration.

## **Hong Kong bus drivers strike**

Hong Kong bus drivers staged an unscheduled strike last Saturday evening near Tsim Sha Tsui station, briefly blocking traffic. The stoppage only lasted ten minutes, before it was broken up by the police.

The walkout was called by the newly formed Full-time KMB Driver Alliance, a union which claims to represent a number of drivers in the privately owned Kowloon Motor Bus Corporation.

Drivers were protesting changes to conditions, including a reduction of working hours and an increase in the number of part-time employees. Workers are reported to have held a short sit-in protest on Monday, in opposition to attempts by the company to victimise leaders of the new union.

## **Textile company sacks 2,000 workers in Vietnam**

Nearly 2,000 workers at the South Korean owned KL Texwell Vina textile factory in Dong Nai province's Bau Xeo Industrial Zone were told on February 28 that the company would not be resuming production. The workers have been protesting outside the company since early February after the factory director and 11 managers fled to South Korea on February 8 owing the workers 13.7 billion Vietnamese dong (about \$US600,000).

Provincial government authorities sought to dissipate workers' anger by paying VND7 billion (\$308,000) to cover half of the overdue wages and claiming that ten other enterprises would hire them. The company also owes VND17.5 billion in social insurance contributions and many workers need to get their Texwell social insurance books before they can start new jobs.

Vietnam's minimum monthly wage is just VND3.75 million (\$US166), a 7.3 percent increase on 2016 rates, but, the lowest rise on record. Workers say they cannot not afford to live. In January, 600 workers at the Nam Phuong garment factory in Ho Chi Minh City struck for a week when the South Korean employer disappeared owing the workers \$1.3 million in wages.

## **Indonesian bank workers demand pay rise**

Indonesian bank workers demonstrated outside the Jakarta's Manpower

Agency on March 1 to demand 30 percent increase in salaries for their sector. The current sectorial pay in the bank services industry is 3.69 million rupiah (\$US276) per month, less than retail supermarket workers receive.

Bank Danamon Indonesia workers union chairman Abdoel Mujib said the rally was a warning to the wages council to increase bank employees wages. "Don't make us strike like the factory workers have done," he said.

## **Paper workers' strike enters sixth week**

Over 90 workers from Australian Paper's Preston envelope factory in Melbourne remain on strike after six weeks. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members walked out on January 16 after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement broke down. The strikers want a 2.5 percent pay increase per annum and a three-year agreement with no changes to working conditions.

The company is attempting to impose cuts to wages and working conditions including reducing the rostered days off (RDOs) from 16 to 14 annually and changes to classification structures that will leave workers worse off financially. Management is also insisting on a four-year agreement with an overall pay increase of just 6.5 percent. This would consist of a wage freeze in the first year, followed by increases of 2, 2.5 and 2 percent in the remaining years.

The AMWU has isolated the dispute, refusing to organise any industrial action by its hundreds of members across Victoria or calling on any other section of the working class.

## **Queensland brewery workers considering industrial action**

Around one hundred workers at the Castlemaine Perkins brewery in Milton, Queensland will vote on taking industrial action in a dispute over terms in a new enterprise work agreement. Management is demanding they accept cuts to fulltime jobs and a greater casualisation of the workforce

United Voice, the union covering the workers, has not yet indicated when the vote on industrial action will occur. It claims that management has threatened to close the plant if its demands are not met. While the company has denied any plans for closure a management spokesman confirmed that it wants changes to the present agreement which he deemed "confusing and prohibitive."

Castlemaine Perkins is owned by Japanese-based brewing giant Lion that has other breweries around Australia around including Tooheys in Western Sydney, West End in South Australia and Boags in Tasmania.

## **Lock-out at Oaky North coal mine suspended**

A lockout of about 190 workers by mining conglomerate Glencore at its Oaky Creek underground mine in the Queensland town of Tieri has been suspended following an order this week by the Fair Work Commission (FWC).

The company imposed the lockout last June after the workers took limited industrial action in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement

(EA). The FWC intervention was triggered by an application by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) calling for the suspension of all “protected” industrial action.

The FWC is currently considering an application by Glencore that it be allowed to cancel the current EA and place workers onto the basic industry award and inferior pay and conditions.

The FWC has ordered workers to vote again on a previously rejected “in principle agreement” worked out between the CFMEU and the company in January. The latest ballot is scheduled for March 27.

system. The 2007 agreement between the government and the union mandated a three-month freeze on recruitment of nurses and stated that the union would accept a three-year wage freeze.



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### **New Zealand: Auckland rail workers take industrial action**

Auckland rail workers began industrial action on February 26, scheduled to last three weeks. Rail and Maritime Transport Union members are refusing to work overtime in protest against plans by the Labour Party-controlled Auckland Council and its contractor, multinational corporation Transdev, to sack up to 200 onboard staff and introduce driver-only operated (DOO) trains on the commuter network. The action means peak hour train services are running only every 20 minutes, rather than every 10 minutes.

Auckland rail workers held a 24-hour strike last December. Wellington rail workers have also taken industrial action over efforts by Transdev, Hyundai Rotem and the Greater Wellington Regional Council to drive down their wages.

While workers are determined to fight, the RMTU is seeking to limit and isolate their action and reach a sellout agreement with management.

Union officials entered negotiations on February 28 with Transdev and Auckland Transport and RMTU spokesman John Kerr told the media the union was happy to lift the overtime ban if “progress” was made.

The RMTU is not calling for the DOO plan to be scrapped, but for a “moratorium” until mid-2019. In the interim, the union would work with the council and Transdev to discuss its “safety concerns” over the plan.

### **French Polynesia newspaper workers strike**

Print workers at *La Dépêche de Tahiti* have been on strike since February 22 in protest against late payment of wages and poor working conditions. The workers went on strike last November over a plan to outsource printing to another company, Pacific Press, which workers feared would lead to job cuts. The latest action follows a general strike on February 15 against the French Polynesian government’s plan to raise the age of pension entitlement.

### **Solomon Islands nurses issue strike notice**

The Solomon Islands Nurses Association (SINA) issued a four-week strike notice on February 25. The union states that the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Public Service have failed to comply with a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2007 on conditions for nurses.

SINA claims that the government breached its obligations by reducing salaries for nurses during annual leave, and by not paying additional allowances for public transport, housing and postings in remote areas.

The union is complicit in the running down of the country’s health