

Bangladesh jute mill workers demonstrate; Paradip port workers strike in Orissa

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 August 2018

Asia

Pakistan: Hyderabad water and sanitary workers demand back pay

Hundreds of Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) employees demonstrated on August 17 to demand immediate payment of three months' outstanding wages and pensions. The protest was organised by the Mehran Workers Union and held outside the Hyderabad Press Club.

The Hyderabad Development Authority, the parent government body of WASA, claimed that it would pay one month's outstanding wages due to the 2,600 workers if the planned protest was called off. This was rejected by the low-paid workers, who have threatened to shut down water supply and drainage system services if authorities do not pay the full amounts before the upcoming Eid religious holidays.

Bangladesh: Jute mill workers call for arrears and festival bonus

About 1,200 Alhaj Jute Mills workers in Jamalpur district demonstrated on August 15 to demand outstanding payments and the Eid bonus. The protesting workers barricaded the road with burning tyres for nearly two-and-a-half hours.

Bangladesh police brutally attacked the protesters with truncheons, hospitalising 10 workers. The jute mill workers have threatened to block the rail line if the authorities do not pay the arrears.

India: West Bengal television actors end strike

Television actors returned to work in West Bengal, after walking out on August 18 to demand on-time wage payments, higher rates, overtime after 10 hours and other claims they have been attempting to win from the Welfare Association of Television Producers. The strikers told the media that, apart from the major stars, no other actors were paid on time.

The strike ended on Thursday after the state's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee established a special consultative committee, headed by veteran actor Soumitra Chatterjee and previously associated with the Stalinist CPI (M). Chatterjee hailed the chief minister for bringing about "a peaceful resolution" but no details were provided about when the actors' demands would be settled.

India: Outsourced Paradip port workers strike in Orissa

Outsourced workers at Paradip port, the second largest in India, walked out on strike on August 22 over a 13-point log of claims. Mechanised and manual cargo handling was immediately affected at the port.

The workers' demands include job security, provision of proper facilities, safety and emergency equipment, holiday leave and other basic working conditions. Forty stevedore agencies employ 2,500 skilled workers to handle cargo at the port. The workers said they would remain on strike until their demands were met.

Australia and the Pacific

Striking Alcoa workers protest outside state parliament

Around 1,000 striking workers from Alcoa's operations in Western Australia (WA) rallied outside state parliament in Perth on Wednesday. Over 1,500 workers at the company's WA refineries and bauxite mines have been on indefinite strike since August 8 after long-running negotiations for new enterprise work agreements (EBAs) stalled.

Wednesday's rally was to highlight workers' concerns over job security and demands for the retention of permanent jobs. It was also to protest the company's application to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for termination of current EBAs.

If Alcoa's application is granted, the workers could be forced back onto the base industrial award, leading to large pay reductions and cuts to working conditions. The company is demanding that the workers endorse its EBA proposal before the end of this month.

Companies can apply for the termination of agreements under Fair Work industrial laws introduced by the former Labor government, with the support of the unions. The legislation also contains draconian anti-strike provisions, which have been used to suppress workers' opposition in dispute after dispute. Employers have forced workers back on to base awards at Glencore's Oaky North mine in Queensland, Griffin Coal in WA and other companies.

New Zealand mental health workers strike

Around 40 mental health workers at Gateway Housing Trust struck for an hour on Tuesday in the first of two planned strikes over a new work agreement. The workers' collective agreement expired two years ago.

The Gateway Housing Trust health workers want a new collective agreement to contain a redundancy clause. Their demand follows a planned restructure and possible cuts to jobs and working hours.

The E t? union, which covers the mental health workers, however, kept the Gateway workers' dispute separate from the recent strike by 30,000 nurses and health workers for a pay rise, jobs and improved conditions.

Learning support specialists strike in New Zealand

Around 850 specialist school workers, including psychologists and speech therapists, struck on Tuesday. The workers are employed by the Ministry of Education to aid pre-school, primary and secondary school children with learning difficulties.

New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) members voted for the walk out after rejecting a pay offer by the government of a 2 percent increase now and a further 2 percent in March. The NZEI leadership has isolated the support specialists' pay dispute from 24-hour strike action taken by 29,000 teachers, who are also NZEI members and walked out on August 15.

Sacked Freeport mine workers protest in Papua

Dozens of workers rallied outside the parliament of Indonesia's Papuan province in Jayapura on Tuesday in protest against their sacking by Freeport Gold and Copper mine, a lucrative operation of the US-based McRoran company.

Over 8,000 were fired 14 months ago and not given any severance pay, following a strike. Many are still unemployed or have been forced into low paid jobs as labourers or motorcycle taxi drivers.

The workers demanded that provincial legislators take up their case. The Jayapura rally followed one in Jakarta early this month. One hundred former employees undertook a 10-day ferry trip to the capital paid for by donations from workers. The company claims it has offered work to sacked employees through contractors.

The mass sackings occurred amid a dispute between the company and the Indonesian government. The company resisted efforts by the Widodo administration to cap copper concentrate exports in order to increase domestic smelting and force the company to divest its shares. During the dispute, production in the huge mine was cut 60 percent. Since July, the Indonesian government has held a 51 percent share of Freeport.



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