

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 April 2019

## India: Chennai workers support victimised Royal Enfield employees

Thousands of workers across Chennai in Tamil Nadu demonstrated in solidarity with victimised Royal Enfield employees on April 2.

Over 300 workers from Royal Enfield, which manufactures motorcycles and related vehicles and parts, have been terminated, transferred or suspended for participating in union activities, including strikes, in February.

The Royal Enfield workers were demanding an end to the company's exploitative employment conditions and called for all eligible trainees, who have completed legal requirements, to be given permanent work.

The April 2 protests were organised by the Working People Trade Union Council (WPTUC) which has called on the company to end its vindictive attacks on the Royal Enfield workers and revoke all transfer orders.

## Indian auto parts workers' strike continues

About 200 permanent Asahi Glass workers have been on strike since March 25 at the company's plant in Ernakulam, Kerala to protest the unlawful dismissal and suspension of employees. They are also demanding fair wages. The walkout was called by the Center of Indian Trade Unions.

The Japanese multinational company makes windshields and other window glass products for Ford, Volkswagen, Daimler, Hyundai, Nissan and Ashok Leyland. It also has other plants in Chennai, Uttarkand, Haryana and Maharashtra.

Asahi Glass sacked workers after they took industrial action in 2015 demanding the company recognise employees who had 10 years' service and pay them accordingly. When workers struck again last October the company terminated 28 workers and issued warnings to several others. Since then the company has arbitrarily denied workers' their leave and change shifts so that they often have to work seven days a week.

Recently, after some joined the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and attended a gate meeting by the CITU leaders, management suspended five employees, including an office-bearer of the union. The striking workers are now demanding the labour department intervene.

## Rail workers rally in Mumbai over salary issues

Around 1,000 rail workers demonstrated in Mumbai on March 25 in protest against a new pension scheme and to demand finalisation of a

delayed review of central government salaries. The protest was organised by All India Railwaymen's Federation affiliate, the National Railway Mazdoor Union.

## Pakistan unions end Karachi port workers protest

The Port Qasim Workers Union ended protest action at Port Qasim in Karachi on March 28 following negotiations with government authorities. The waterfront workers were protesting against port authorities and Huaneng Fuyun Port & Shipping (HFPS), which operates two berths at the busy port. The dispute, which involved 1,750 workers, has been ongoing since September and included a 185-day protest camp outside the Karachi Press Club.

Authorities agreed to a 10 percent wage rise, establish a recruitment quota system for workers' children and continue recognising their status as port workers even when outsourced to a third-party operator such as HFPS.

Even if HFPS pays the 10 percent pay rise, workers' salaries will remain low because they were not even receiving the minimum 8,000 rupees (\$56.48) per month paid to Port of Karachi workers. The HFPS regularly withholds monthly wages and employs its workforce on a temporary basis. They are also not paid safety allowances or provided basic safety equipment needed for the dangerous job.

## Bangladesh jute mill workers protest over wages

Strike action and protests by jute mill workers were called off on Wednesday, after two days of action, when authorities claimed that they would grant workers' nine demands. These included payment of outstanding salaries, gratuities and the provident fund for retired workers.

The protest involved workers from several state-owned mills in Dhaka, Khulna, Jessore and Chittagong. Some jute mill workers protested on Monday, blocking roads and rail routes.

Fearful that the industrial action would spread, the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), a public corporation that owns and manages all government jute mills, agreed to implement various wage commission recommendations. The Bangladesh ministry of finance, however, has not agreed to this.

More than 35,000 workers from nine state-owned jute mills in Khulna and Jessore protested on March 12 over the same demands.

## **West Bengal teachers demand higher pay**

Over 350 contract computer teachers employed by the privately owned IL & FS Education & Technology Services protested outside the company on April 3 to demand higher pay. The company has the contract to supply teachers to all government schools in West Bengal. Several teachers were injured when their protest was violently suppressed by police.

While the teachers are only paid 4,500-rupees (\$62) per month, the company receives about 350,000 rupees per school annually from government. The computer teachers have been demanding a 15,000-rupee monthly salary for the past four years.

## **Construction workers protest over wages in central China**

Around 20 workers employed on a solar power station construction project in Weinan, in China's Shaanxi province, protested on March 28 over unpaid wages dating back to last October. Tianzuo, the energy company responsible, reportedly owed the workers almost 100,000 yuan.

Workers said they had been abandoned by the local labour inspectorate, which refused to assist them on the grounds that they could not produce payroll documents. Most of the workers had been hired on a casual basis.

## **Australian union covering Telstra technicians drags out pay dispute**

Following a national 24-hour stoppage and limited work bans initiated on March 12, the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU) covering over 3,000 technicians at Telstra has called for further strikes.

The union has stated that any industrial action, in the long-running dispute over a pay and conditions, would have "minimal impact on customers." Limited action for field staff would involve stoppages between 7.30 a.m., and 8 a.m., on April 5 and 8.

The union claimed that this action was designed to "send a clear message to Telstra" in support of their wage claim. Rather, it is designed to drag out the dispute and wear members' resolve down to force through a sell-out enterprise agreement.

After one year of negotiations, CEPU members rejected Telstra's proposed pay rise of 4.5 percent over the next three years, which amounts to an increase of just 1.5 percent per year, well below the official rate of inflation. The union has called for a meagre 12 percent wage increase over three years.

## **Sydney ferry skippers hold second strike**

Sydney harbour ferry skippers employed by the NRMA on its My Fast Ferry and Manly Fast Ferry services continued industrial action this month with a two-hour stoppage on Wednesday. The action, in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement, followed a two-hour stoppage on March 6.

Ferry skippers are paid below the industry award and are casually employed. Workers are demanding more permanent full-time positions, regular shifts and higher wages. Last December, the Fair Work Commission found that the skippers could be collectively owed as much

as \$1 million due to underpayment.

The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), complained that after six meetings with the NRMA and industrial action, no meaningful concessions have been offered. The union is isolating the skippers and making impotent appeals to members of the NRMA to call on the company's directors and CEO to "get involved." The NRMA has been harassing, intimidating and dismissing staff and using scab labour.

## **New Zealand doctors ballot for new strike after cancellation**

The Resident Doctors Association (RDA) withdrew notice on Thursday of a forthcoming strike by junior doctors, blaming a "technical" problem. It followed the cancellation of a nationwide teachers' strike on April 3, with the unions citing the Christchurch terror attack as a pretext.

The RDA had earlier given notice of a four-day strike by its 3,000 members from 15-19 April, with the exception of Christchurch. The doctors had voted overwhelmingly to strike for a fifth time in a long-running employment contract dispute. The notice was withdrawn because the union said it had omitted to properly notify the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

The RDA has now opened a ballot for another strike later in April. However, the employing District Health Boards (DHBs) have confirmed that the parties will meet again next week for talks, and that there's been no notice of further strike action. They were pleased the "possibility of disruption to services" had been avoided.

The current employment agreement lapsed at the end of last month. Doctors could now be offered new contracts on different terms when they change hospitals as part of their training, or earlier. The 20 DHBs want to extend the number of consecutive days that doctors can be rostered to work from 10 to 12. They also want the power to force doctors to work shifts longer than 16 hours and to relocate them anywhere in the country.

Junior hospital doctors have voted to strike for a fifth time this year, now that bargaining with the district health boards has stalled this month.



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