

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the South Pacific

23 November 2019

India: Punjab workers protest death of child labourer

Workers in Ludhiana, Punjab demonstrated on the Hambran Road on Monday over the death of a 15-year-old worker at the hands of his employer. Witnesses said the boy was mercilessly beaten by the labour contractor at a plywood factory.

A group of trade union activists, along with the father and relatives of the deceased, rallied and sought to block traffic by keeping the body on the road. Protesters refused to budge and locked the entry gate of the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited on Hambran Road.

Police intervened and used force to disperse the protest. Workers alleged that the administration was working hand in glove with the employers who illegally engage child labourers on low wages to cut the cost of production.

Tamil Nadu transport workers demonstrate over road conditions

Lorry drivers and porters who transport goods in and out of the market at Shevapat, Salem stopped work on Tuesday and demonstrated on the busy road leading to the market. They demanded that local authorities do urgent repairs to the district's roads. Entry into the market was affected for over one hour.

Protesters said the roads were full of potholes and were unsafe, resulting in many accidents. They have been complaining about the poor conditions for five years and demanded the completion of a flyover to ease traffic movement.

Tamil Nadu garment workers protest over unpaid severance pay

Former workers from the closed Unitex International garment factory in Thiruvallur demonstrated in front of the District Collector's office on Monday. They demanded implementation of the Joint Labour Commissioner's order awarding compensation for 91 garment workers (most of them women) who worked at the factory till 2016.

Workers alleged that the factory closed down without paying minimum wages, gratuity and PF. They said that they had battled against management, banks and other obstacles to get this order, and complained that the authorities were refusing to implement it.

Tamil Nadu retired bank employees protest

Retired bank employees in Madurai demonstrated at the Anna Nagar bus terminal on November 15 with several demands. These included the introduction of a 30 percent uniform family pension, 100 percent neutralization of a dearness allowance and the scrapping of the new pension scheme.

Other demands advanced by the Coordination of Bank Pensioners and Retirees Organizations and SBI Pensioners Association (Chennai Circle) included the withdrawal of plans for a merger of state banks, the recruitment of more staff and the removal of anomalies in superannuation.

Karnataka childcare workers protest against election duty

Anganwadi (childcare) workers demonstrated in Belagavi, Karnataka on Tuesday to oppose compulsory election duty and a delay in resolving other longstanding demands. The protest was organised by the Karnataka State Anganwadi Workers and Assistants Association.

Demonstrators marched to the deputy commissioner's office shouting slogans against the government. They handed a memorandum with a list of demands to the office.

Workers said that they have been asked to conduct a survey of tuberculosis-affected persons in rural areas, without any Government Order or circular and complained that several Anganwadi staff had not been paid for three months. They threatened to hold a district-wide protest if their demands were not met.

Karnataka food packaging workers on indefinite strike

Nearly 130 permanent workers from the food packaging company LTC at Malur, Karnataka struck on November 14 to demand a new three-year wage agreement that has been pending since February 2018. Workers said they have not had a pay increase for four years. They receive a meagre monthly wage of 12,000 rupees (\$US169).

Management has maintained production using contract workers and casual staff. Strikers allege that they have been harassed by police wielding cane batons.

Karnataka school teachers protest

Teachers at government schools, aided and unaided, and private institutions demonstrated in Dharwad, Karnataka on November 16 to

demand implementation of the Horatti Commission Report which recommended improvements in education, salary and conditions. Protesters marched to the deputy commissioner's office in Dharward.

Indian government power workers protest against privatisation

More than 13,000 executives with 6,000 others workers from the government owned National Thermal Power Company (NTPC) held a candle march in New Delhi on November 15 to oppose the proposed disinvestment of the company. The NTPC Executives' Federation of India led the protest along with several other unions.

Workers allege that the government is planning to reduce its 54.5 percent stake in the company. They complained that the government had refused to discuss the issue.

Uttar Pradesh power employees strike over provident fund scam

Employees of the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL), struck for two days beginning on November 18 to protest against the provident fund scam in which their money was invested in the tainted Dewan Housing and Finance Corporation Limited (DHFL). Workers demanded that the state government guarantee the safe return of their provident fund money. A joint forum of power employees and engineers called the stoppage.

Bangladesh public transport strike closed down without resolution

A strike by transport workers from 20 districts, including Dhaka, was called off after two days when the government pledged to "look into" union demands.

Transport workers in Sunamganj struck on Tuesday to demand the repeal of the Road Transport Act, 2018, which was gazetted on October 22. The law imposes harsh punishments and long imprisonments over driving offences, including the death penalty for anyone found guilty of causing a bus accident that results in a fatality.

The strike had quickly spread from Sunamganj into other districts, out of the control of the Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation (BRTWF), which did not oppose the new Act, but simply demanded amendments.

Despite workers protests, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has already filed 79 cases and issued fines of thousands taka under the new act in Dhaka alone. A spokesman for workers and bus owners said a driver usually earns around \$US235-295 (20,000-25,000 taka) per month and that the new law imposes fines for unlicensed drivers that are higher than their monthly income.

Cambodia: Handbag factory workers on strike

Around 800 workers from the Monopai Cambodia handbag factory in Kampong Speu are striking after walking out on November 14 over the

sacking of two union delegates. The company fired another seven workers in retaliation after the workforce refused to obey a Provincial Court order to return to work on November 16.

Workers rejected the claim by factory management that the two delegates were sacked because of their work. The labour department alleged that the two delegates "incited" the strike and refused to obey company orders. Oeun Chanthly, one of the two sacked, said they were targeted as delegates and that no one incited the workers who responded to the attack on their rights.

Strike in French Polynesia over sacked hotel workers

A fresh strike was launched in French Polynesia on Thursday over the sacking of four employees of the luxury Intercontinental Hotel Moorea. The O Oe To Oe Rima union called on its members to stop work unless the Intercontinental Hotel Moorea reinstates the men. The four were dismissed after a female employee reported they had raped her months earlier.

A police investigation has since failed to establish any wrongdoing and the case has been closed. From late August the union took 45 days of strike action in an unsuccessful attempt to force the re-instatement of the workers.

In October it was reported that union and management had reached an agreement and the dispute had gone to Employment Court. However, the hotel is still refusing to reinstate the workers, saying they were sacked because of sexual harassment.

The strikes, involving 80 percent of the hotel's employees, have reportedly caused losses of about \$US2 million. The current strike coincides with the hotel due to host the contestants of the next Miss France competition.

Australia: Council workers in Melbourne impose work bans

Over 100 workers from the Warrnambool City Council (WCC), south of Melbourne, have stepped up work bans initiated on October 28 in their dispute over the council's proposed enterprise agreement. Bans are in place on collecting litter, mowing some parts of the city and sporting fields, responding to emails after 4 p.m. and refuelling vehicles.

The Australian Services Union has limited its demand to a 2 percent annual increase or \$30 per week, whichever is greater. This would increase low paid workers' wages by just \$6 per day. Low paid workers include in-house aged care staff, lifeguards and other employees. According to a union spokesman many are paid only \$50 a week above the official poverty wage.

WCC management has refused to meet with union representatives since October 10 when workers overwhelmingly approved industrial action that included 43 work bans and a 24-hour strike.

Jetstar pilots and ground crew vote on industrial action

The Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP), representing around 800 pilots from Qantas Airways budget subsidiary Jetstar, and the Transport Workers Union (TWU), representing airport ground crew at

Jetstar terminals, were granted permission this week by the Fair Work Commission to hold industrial action ballots for a new enterprise agreement. Action being voted on ranges from work bands to 24-hour stoppages.

Issues in dispute include demands for salary increases and changes in fatigue management through improved rostering. Jetstar claimed that the salary increase demanded by AFAP would increase labour costs by 15 percent. Pilots rejected the company's offer of 3 percent annual increases, saying they are the lowest paid in Australia. Baggage handlers are also demanding a wage increase and equal pay for equal work.

The TWU and AFAP ballots close on December 6. Approved industrial action can commence three days after the ballots close.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact