

Indian auto parts workers demand union rights; Bangladesh cargo workers on indefinite strike; French Polynesia hotel workers expand walkout

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

30 November 2019

### Asia

#### Karnataka auto-parts workers demand union rights

Assembly-line workers at Exedy Clutch India in the Narasapura Industrial Area, Kolar marched on November 25 to demand proper recognition of their union and collective bargaining rights. Workers accused management of repeatedly victimising young workers for demanding their legitimate rights. More than 50 percent of the company's employees are contract workers.

Apart from the union president, all other office bearers had been suspended. Management is refusing to negotiate on the union's Charter of Demands. Workers allege that wage increases due on April 1 have not been paid and that management has illegally reduced workers' wages.

#### India: Uttarkhand bus drivers protest unpaid salaries

A group of Uttarkhand Transport Corporation workers demonstrated at 20 bus stops across the state for an hour at 12 noon on November 23. They were demanding the corporation follow a court order directing it to pay workers' October salaries. These should have been paid before the Diwali religious festival on November 14. The workers, who are members of the Uttaranchal Roadway Workers Union, wore black armbands and held empty plates.

#### Assam workers hold anti-privatisation protest

Members of the Save Industry Save Workers Joint Struggle Committee (which covers many different unions) demonstrated in Guwahati, Assam on November 25 to oppose the Indian government's disinvestment policy. The union alliance has submitted a memorandum to Assam's chief minister and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Workers oppose privatisation and are demanding the government modernise and revive the rundown state-owned industries. The

memorandum calls on the government to retain its shares in BPCL, an oil and gas-company, revive the Nagaon and Cachar paper mills, pay overdue wages, keep the Assam Power Distribution Company, and revive the Assam Co-operative Jute Mills and other government owned plants.

#### Puducherry public works contract employees demand permanency

A group of Public Works Department (PWD) daily paid contract workers in India's southern union territory of Puducherry demonstrated outside the Swadeshi cotton mills on November 25. They were demanding an increase in the number of days to 30 a month that they work, a 648-rupee (\$US9) minimum daily wage, payment of all outstanding salaries and permanent jobs from December.

#### Disabled job seekers demonstrate in New Delhi

Around 100 job aspirants with varying disabilities demonstrated on the Bhagwan Das Road in New Delhi on November 25 demanding that the railway minister honour his promise to recruit them into Group D positions in the Indian Railways. Traffic movement was affected during the protest.

Workers said they ended a three-day protest on October 25 after senior railway officers and the Court of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities falsely assured them that a final decision would be made in 14 days. The workers had been issued with worthless letters falsely offering them a job.

#### India: Punjab thermal power plant contract workers demonstrate

Guru Hargobind Thermal Plant (GHTP) contract workers in Punjab demonstrated outside the thermal plant gate at Lehra Mohabbat, Bathinda on November 25. They demanded to be brought under the Contract Welfare Act, 2016 and directly employed by Powercom.

They also called for salary increases in line with inflation, that long-time non-skilled workers be recruited into vacant skilled positions and that vacancies at the Powercom's accommodation facility be filled by those who need it.

Workers allege that the state government is deliberately boosting production at private thermal plants in order to shut down GHTP. They are demanding that the GHTP plant be kept running.

### **Andhra Pradesh brewery workers protest sackings**

United Breweries Company workers demonstrated outside the company's main gate in the Pydibhimavaram industrial estate on November 24 to demand management reverse its retrenchment of a group of workers on November 25. Management claimed the retrenchments were in response to a drop in sales caused by new liquor laws. The union representing 600 workers at the factory is affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

### **Telangana University contract workers demand permanency**

Around 250 non-teaching contract workers from the Telangana University demonstrated on the university's main campus in Nizamabad on November 25. They were demanding implementation of Government Order No.14, equal pay for equal work and permanency for non-teaching posts.

Hostel workers and employees, including at the South Campus, Biknoor, and B.Ed College at Sarangapur, boycotted regular duties.

### **Tamil Nadu council workers protest unpaid wages**

Panchayat (village council) workers, including garbage truck drivers and conservation staff, demonstrated in Madurai on November 25, over unpaid salaries.

The council workers said they had not received their salaries on time for several months and that administration has systematically ignored their concerns.

Workers also said that contract employers were paying lower wages than that stipulated by the district administration and some workers were not provided with basic equipment, such as bins, brooms, dustpans and gloves. Some retired workers have not received their benefits.

### **Pakistan: Punjab government land authority workers end strike**

Field staff from the Punjab Land Record Authority (PLRA) in Lahore ended a 12-day strike on November 22 after the government agreed to an immediate salary increase and promised to resolve two key demands within two months. The workers also want permanent jobs and a service structure.

On the same day, the Lahore High Court ordered the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority to censor any reportage on demonstrations at

The Mall, in central Lahore, which is near provincial assembly and other key government installations.

### **Bangladesh smaller cargo vessel workers on indefinite strike**

Lighterage (small) vessels workers in the Outer Anchorage of Chittagong Port and at 16 jetties on the Karnaphuli River began an indefinite strike on Wednesday for higher pay and other demands. Around 1,500 lighterage vessels and several oil tankers are idle in the river. Unloading of large freighters has also ground to a halt. The strike was called by the Bangladesh Maritime Workers Sangram Parishad (action committee).

Workers want higher pay because they are not being paid government-mandated rates, increased compensation for death and injuries caused while at work and government measures to stop piracy and extortion at sea and in rivers.

### **Bangladeshi jute mill workers strike in Khulna**

Jute mill workers from state-owned mills in the Khulna-Jashore industrial belt and the state-owned Amin Jute Mills in Chattogram (Chittagong) held a nine-hour hunger strike on Wednesday over 11 demands, including payment of unpaid wages and the implementation of wage commission recommendations. The nine state-owned jute mills employ over 31,000 workers.

The workers also want regular weekly wages, cancellation of public-private ownerships and payment of a provident fund gratuity for retired workers.

The hunger strike was part of a seven-day program of escalating protests starting on December 2, organised by the State-owned Jute Mills Collective Bargaining Association and Non-CBA Sangram Parishad. Future action will include marches, rallies and strike action.

### **Thousands of South Korean train workers strike**

South Korean railway workers concluded a five-day strike on Sunday, to demand improved wages and conditions. The stoppage, which involved 11,500 members of the Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union, halved the number of train services across the board.

Cargo services were running at about 31 percent of the typical level, and many other passenger lines were reduced to roughly 60 percent of capacity.

### **Australia and the Pacific**

#### **Australia: Lactalis cheese factory workers strike**

Sixteen women workers at the Lactalis cheese processing factory in Jindivick, east of Melbourne, have been on strike and established a picket

outside the plant since November 13 in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

Management called in the police on the second day of the stoppage, after truck drivers refused to cross the picket line. Public order response officers in riot gear confronted the strikers. The strikers eventually moved their picket away from the factory's main gate following an order from the Fair Work Commission.

The workers, who want pay parity with employees at other nearby Lactalis factories, said previous EAs negotiated by the union have kept their wages at poverty levels. One worker said that her hourly wage had only risen by \$1.13 over ten years to \$20.68, just \$1.19 above the minimum wage.

The United Workers Union has called for a 10 percent per annum pay increase over the four-year agreement, which it claims would eventually bring wages in line with other Lactalis workers who are paid between \$27 and \$32 an hour.

Although the company has agreed to some demands, such as site rates for casuals, it has not improved its pay offer of just 6.5 percent for the first year followed by 3 percent for each of the next three years.

Lactalis is a French transnational with a turnover of \$21 billion a year. It has maintained production at the Jindivick plant by hiring casuals.

### **Dairy food quality assurance workers in Melbourne locked out**

Several workers at the Dairy Technical Services (DTS) laboratory in North Melbourne have been locked out for a week after holding a four-hour strike on November 20 in a dispute for better pay and conditions. The anti-democratic attack was management's response to industrial action which began in early October. Management has called the police on several occasions.

According to the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), DTS is refusing to hold any more negotiations on its proposed enterprise agreement, which has been voted down three times by workers. The EA covers around 30 tertiary qualified employees at the site who are only paid slightly above the minimum award wage.

### **Packaging production workers in Melbourne on indefinite strike**

Over 35 AMWU members at VIP Packaging in the Melbourne suburb of Truganina began an indefinite strike on November 22 in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Their demands include a better work/life balance, paid union meetings, classification structures, a delegate training clause, shift loading, income protection and an end to casualisation.

Workers established a picket outside the Truganina site and vowed to stay out for 24/7 until the dispute is resolved.

### **Queensland hospital workers continue state-wide industrial action**

Queensland Health hospital support workers across Queensland have imposed work bans as part of industrial action for an improved work agreement.

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members began action at the Robina Hospital on the Gold Coast on October 28 and progressively extended the

bans throughout the state. Nurses, doctors and volunteers have been called upon to do kitchen duty, move patients in beds and clean toilets and floors.

The AWU has been in negotiations with the government since January. Members want a pay rise, improved classification levels, reduced workload, genuine action on backfilling, closing of a casual conversion loophole and secure permanent jobs.

They also want an independent review into safety, bullying and harassment, and an end to unfair position downgrades. Workers rejected Queensland Health's government's 2.5 percent pay increase offer.

### **Pipe manufacturing workers in New South Wales strike**

Around 50 workers at a concrete pipe manufacturing plant at Emu Plains, west of Sydney, walked off the job twice on November 20 as part of ongoing industrial action for a new EA.

The AWU has been negotiating a pay rise with Rocla since May. The union has called for 3 percent. Rocla's latest offer was just 2 percent, up from its original offer of 1.5 percent.

Meanwhile, AWU members at Rocla's Campbellfield plant in Victoria are taking industrial action over their new enterprise agreement. The company's offer has pegged its annual increase at 2 percent at plants in both states.

### **Coal mining union suspends strike**

The union representing over 300 striking workers at the Idemitsu-owned Boggabri Coal open-cut mine in north-west New South Wales struck a deal with the employer and agreed to end strike action for three weeks if management ends its lockout of workers.

The company imposed a nine-day lockout on November 22 after 88 percent of members of the Construction Forestry Maritime and Mining Union (CFMMEU) rejected a proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers began rolling industrial action with strikes on September 22 and 25. They are attempting to win back conditions that were lost when their employment moved from contractor Downer to Idemitsu two years ago.

The workers are reportedly paid \$40,000 a year less than Idemitsu's coal miners in Muswellbrook in the Hunter Valley and Ensham in Queensland. Other issues of concern are redundancy entitlements worth half of those at other Idemitsu mines, lack of arbitration to resolve issues and no commitment to training and skills development.

### **Queensland Catholic school teachers' union suspends industrial action**

The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA), covering over 7,000 teachers and support staff from 195 Catholic schools across Queensland, suspended all industrial action in a dispute for a new work agreement last Wednesday.

The shutdown followed a threat by the Catholic school employers that they would withhold back pay and lock out anyone imposing work bans. The union justified its capitulation to members claiming it expected to re-

enter negotiations on December 4.

Teachers imposed limited work bans on November 7. These included bans on meeting attendance, duties during scheduled meal breaks, supervision lessons or cover periods, playground and transport supervision and employer requests for data collection or analysis.

The union has called for a \$1,250 one-off payment to all staff to maintain the 30-year wage parity with the state sector and said concerns over excessive workloads remain unresolved.

### **New Zealand aged-care workers vote to strike**

Workers at the Woburn Masonic Village aged-care facility in Lower Hutt have voted to strike for four-and-a-half hours on December 3, 6 and 11 over an unresolved collective employment agreement.

Management is refusing to offer set shifts or hours. It claims that it will guarantee a certain number of hours a fortnight but has refused to tell caregivers what these hours will be. Workers also want more sick leave, weekend pay rates and recognition of long service.

The E t? union said talks had dragged on for almost a year and, despite several sessions with the mediator, are “nowhere near agreement.” A meeting with the mediator had been scheduled for this week with a union spokesman calling for “an offer we can work with.”

### **Hotel strikes in French Polynesia set to spread**

Six unions in French Polynesia have issued a joint strike notice for this week targeting the territory's four InterContinental hotels in what they have described as a general strike. The notice is for an indefinite period of time and concerns employment conditions at the hotels on Bora Bora and Tahiti, as well as the top resort on Tetiaroa, The Brando. The extended stoppage will impact a broad range of businesses.

One of the unions, O Oe To Oe Rima, separately launched a strike at the Intercontinental Hotel Moorea last week in a bid to reinstate four sacked workers who were involved in a 45-day strike begun in August.

The men were dismissed after a female employee alleged that they had raped her months earlier. A police investigation has since failed to establish any wrongdoing and the case has been closed. The hotel, however, is refusing to re-employ them, saying they were sacked because of sexual harassment.



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