Andhra Pradesh textile workers strike; 400,000 Assam tea plantation workers walk out; Western Australia: Offshore LNG platform employees in Western Australia take action

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 October 2020

Asia

India: Andhra Pradesh textile workers walk out

Nearly 4,000 textile workers, 90 percent of whom are women, from three Texport Industries plants in the Andhra Pradesh city of Hindupur, have been on strike since October 5 demanding a wage increase. They said the company is only paying 6,000 rupees ($82) per month to workers in Hindupur, lower than the company's other units.

Around 500 workers demonstrated outside the company's office on October 9 after police arrested 25 trade union members who were supporting the strike on October 7. Workers complained that besides being paid below the official minimum wage there are no basic facilities in the factories.

Texport Industries has an annual revenue of $80 billion and 19 directly-owned factories with over 15,000 employees.

Thousands of Assam tea plantation workers strike over poverty wages

Around 400,000 workers from 250 tea estates in India's north-eastern state of Assam ended a week-long strike on Tuesday. They were protesting against the failure of the state government to increase their wages as promised in a 2018 agreement.

The Assam government had promised to increase tea workers' minimum daily wage to 350 rupees ($US4.7)—about double their salary—and formed a committee to lift workers' compensation and overcome hazardous conditions in the estates. The workers have held several protests over these issues in the past two years. The strikers, the majority of whom are women, declared that they would launch a more aggressive campaign if their demands are not met soon.

Bokaro Steel Plant workers protest in Jharkhand

Thousands of permanent and contract workers from the state-run Bokaro Steel Plant (BSL) marched from the plant to the Steel Authority of India (SAIL) administration building on Monday in Bokaro over a series of outstanding demands. BSL is a unit of SAIL running under the union steel ministry.

Management has been accused of ignoring a 13-point log of demands made by the company's 9,335 permanent workers and 15,000 contract employees. The workers allege that BSL made a considerable profit in the last financial year and maintained production during the COVID-19 lockdown.

BSL steel workers want a wage rise and a minimum 30,000-rupee ($US410) bonus prior to the Durga Puja (religious celebration), leave payments and other allowances.

Punjab state university workers protest

Academic staff and other workers from the Punjab Agriculture University in Ludhiana, the largest agricultural university in Asia, marched and held sit-down demonstration at the university on Wednesday. They were protesting over promotions. Workers said they are not being promoted, despite completion of the required number of years of service.

The workers claimed that clerks with ten years' service had not been promoted, even though the regulations state that clerks should be promoted to the next grade in five years.

They demanded the experience period for promotions be reduced and that workers be given pay increases and implementation of the old pension scheme with improved benefits.

This week a group of workers from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University in Punjab protested at the university gate against the non-payment of their salaries for the past seven months. The protesters said they were on the verge of starvation and most of them had taken loans from banks but were unable to pay the instalments.

Karnataka higher education workers demonstrate over unpaid wages

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Karnataka State Higher Education Colleges Employees Union members demonstrated opposite the Joint Director of Higher Education office in Mysusu on October 9 to demand payment of outstanding wages to all college employees in the district.

The workers alleged that college principals were falsely claiming that they were providing minimum wages for employees during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Telangana state forest nursery workers strike

About 100 workers from the Tellapur Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) nursery went on strike in Hyderabad on October 12 to demand payment of three months' outstanding wages.

The workers, who are only paid 9,000 rupees ($123) per month, alleged that the authorities don't pay salaries on time, skip payment every few months and then pay for a month to compensate. They also said officials withheld salaries claiming poor performance. They complained that the number of workers at the nursery has been reduced to 50 percent adding to their workload.

Cochin Port workers protest against privatisation

The Cochin Port Joint Trade Union Forum began an indefinite hunger protest outside the Cochin Port head office in Kochi on October 4 over the Indian government's move to privatise the port under its proposed Major Port Trust Authority Act, 2020.

The union umbrella group proposed that port operations be streamlined and all vacant positions filled. They also demanded that expenses for dredging the shipping channel for the Kochi port should be shared by the Cochin Shipyard and the Indian Navy.

Pakistani government sector workers protest over wages and pensions

Thousands of government sector workers demonstrated in Islamabad on Wednesday to demand pay increases, ending of attacks on pensions and retirement benefit, and for a 100 percent rise in the medical allowance. A similar demonstration was held on October 6 in Islamabad by over 10,000 government sector workers from several provinces. That protest was called off by the All Pakistan Clerks Association after accepting a vague government promise to establish a committee to investigate workers' demands.

Participants in Wednesday's protest included clerks, Lady Health Workers, teachers, pensioners, workers of Pakistan Railways and Pakistan International Airlines and others. The government deployed a 1,300-strong security force with armed vehicles and water cannons to stop the protesters marching to the National Assembly.

The government, in line with International Monetary Fund dictates, has imposed a freeze on all government employees' wages for the 2020–21 financial year. Workers accuse the government of planning to completely eliminate their retirement benefits.

The latest protest was called by the All Pakistan Employees, Pensioners & Labour Tehreek, an umbrella organisation that included All Pakistan Clerks Association and other unions.

Cambodian garbage collectors end strike

Around 2,500 garbage truck crews employed by the contractor CINTRI ended a 13-day strike on Wednesday in the capital Phnom Penh. The strike began after CINTRI workers discovered that City Hall was planning to award the garbage collection contract to another contractor.

The return to work followed an agreement between the Phnom Penh municipal authorities, union representatives, and the contractor on terms of termination of employment at the end of CINTRI's contract.

The current contract with the municipality will be terminated on January 31 when the workers will cease to be employees of CINTRI. All workers will be awarded all payments and benefits, including seniority payments by the second week of February. These payments will be guaranteed by municipal authorities.

Australia

South Australian health workers demand better conditions

As part of an ongoing campaign for a new enterprise agreement, a group of public sector health, aged care and disability support workers demonstrated at the Lyell McEwin Hospital, in South Australia's capital Adelaide, on Wednesday. The United Workers Union (UWU) members have launched a petition outlining their demands from the Liberal state government.

An UWU newsletter said public sector workers opposed any further outsourcing, privatisation or staff cuts. They also want a wage increase and special COVID-19 provisions, including paid pandemic leave and measures to ensure adequate staffing levels.

Workers have faced increased workloads due to COVID-19 safety requirements, serious understaffing issues and cutbacks to aged care hours during the pandemic.

In May, the government rejected a proposal from the UWU that the current enterprise agreement be rolled over for 12 months with a 2 percent pay increase. The government responded by declaring that a "reasonable" wage increase would need to be offset by "significant" changes in the agreement.

Offshore LNG platform workers in Western Australia still on strike

Construction and maintenance workers at Shell Australia's Prelude floating LNG platform off the coast of north-west Australia are maintaining rolling stoppages and work bans begun on October 9 in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement (EA).

The dispute is between the Offshore Alliance (a combination of the Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia) and the Electrical Trades Union and employer Monadelphous (Monos), contracted by Shell to maintain the infrastructure. The contract workforce is 100 percent casual and not covered by a negotiated agreement. The Offshore Alliance (OA) claims that Monos wants to impose a four-year enterprise agreement that will put workers on wages 30 percent below the industry

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standard.

Workers are demanding permanent jobs, job security, regular rosters, industry standard pay, shift allowance, superannuation, income cover, training and travel pay.

Monos is currently undertaking engineering and construction work on the Prelude platform, which came online last year and has been plagued by technical problems. Shell does not directly employ workers on the platform but demands labour contractors keep labour costs at a minimum.

Caterers and cleaners on the Prelude employed by Sodexo, a food services and facility company, struck for 24 hours in September in their long-running dispute with Sodexo for an improved enterprise agreement. The strike followed three-hour stoppages in the morning and afternoon in July and August, plus bans on baking and laundry services.

OA claimed that it had earlier reached an agreement with Sodexo that gave a pay increase and was accepted by the workers, but alleged Sodexo pulled out under pressure from Shell.

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