

Bangladeshi union shuts down port workers national strike; Assam rail workers demand festival allowance; Western Australian workers protest after worksite death

## Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

23 October 2020

### Asia

#### India: Punjab public school teachers demand regular employment

Hundreds of contract teachers and non-teaching workers from Punjab state schools demonstrated in Sangrur on October 16 to demand the state government fulfil their long outstanding demand for permanent jobs.

The protest was called by the Democratic Teachers' Front which had sent memoranda of demands to the government in May and June but received no response. The demonstrators also called for promotions and the special transfer of teachers who had to travel long distance from home to work.

#### Assam state railway workers demand festival allowance

Several hundred workers organised by the Northeast Frontier Railway Workers Union demonstrated at 52 work sites in several cities in Assam state on October 18 to demand the Durga Puja (religious festival) bonus. They threatened to stop the entire railway network if the government ignored their demand.

The following day workers organised by the Dakshin Railway Employees Union demonstrated to demand the same bonus.

#### Haryana auto plant workers protest against labour laws

Workers from the Bellsonica Auto Component India (BACI) plant held a hunger protest outside the mini Secretariat at Gurugram, Haryana state, on October 15. Eight office bearers of the BACI employees' union held an eight-hour hunger strike and were joined by other workers as they ended their shifts.

The demonstration was to protest the Indian government's latest labour laws. The union claimed that the new legislation undermines workers' rights, gives employers a free hand to exploit workers and

would lead to an increase in contract labour.

Workers also opposed the company's refusal to negotiate with the union for a three-year contract covering its 1,200 workers. There have been no negotiations for 20 months.

#### Andhra Pradesh municipal workers demand overdue wages

Municipal workers in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district have been protesting for the last two weeks to demand the immediate payment of three months' salaries. A state-wide protest is planned for November 2.

Workers also alleged that municipal officials were harassing them via the Real Time Monitoring System (RTMS) which tracks waste collection. They have also called for an increase in the minimum wage to 24,000 rupees (\$US326) per month, abolition of the RTMS system and transfer of contract workers to fulltime jobs.

#### Bangladesh: Port workers unions call off national strike without resolution

The Bangladesh Water Transport Workers' Federation (BWTWF) and the Bangladesh Lighterage Workers Union shut down the national strike of 200,000 water transport workers after three days without resolution to their charter of 11 demands.

The workers began an indefinite strike on Tuesday at ports across the country, including major ports such as Chattogram and Mongla. Millions of tonnes of cargo were affected.

The strikers were demanding payment of salaries in line with the government gazette announced in 2016, the issuing of landing passes, appointment letters and identity cards, the provision of food allowances for India-bound vessel workers and compensation of one million taka (\$US11,798) for workers killed in workplace accidents.

The unions quickly closed down the strike after employers agreed to just one of the demands: the provision of food allowances.

Workers on passenger transport vessels did not join the strike due to the Durga Puja festival.

## **Bangladeshi unemployed assistant school teachers hold hunger protest**

Hundreds of unemployed primary school assistant teachers have been on a hunger strike since October 13 outside the National Press Club in Dhaka to demand jobs. The assistant teachers, who said they had passed the required recruitment examination, have vowed to continue the protest until their demand is met.

## **Bangladeshi police assault protesting jute mill workers**

Hundreds of demonstrating jute mill workers and family members were seriously injured when police used batons and fired tear gas shells to break up their protest on the Khulna-Jashore highway on Monday. At least 22 workers were injured and 14 arrested. Protesters were demanding the reopening of closed government-owned jute mills.

Hundreds of jute workers and jute farmers demonstrated in Khulna and Tangail in August to demand reopening of the mills.

In July, the government closed down 25 state-owned jute mills, claiming that they were running at a loss. About 50,000 workers lost their jobs overnight while thousands of jute farmers were left with no income. The government claims that the mills will be reopened under public/private ownership or leased.

## **Pakistan: Lady Health Workers end seven-day strike**

Over 500 National Programme Health Employees Federation members ended a seven-day strike and sit-down protest outside the National Assembly in Islamabad on Tuesday. The workers, who are employed by the Lady Health Workers (LHW) programme, ended their industrial action after negotiations with the government. They were demanding a pay rise, an improved service structure and gratuities, and protection while on duty.

More than 100,000 workers are employed in the LHW program across Pakistan. In most rural areas where no permanent health facilities exist, LHW provides vaccinations and other essential services as a mobile unit. The workers, who are only paid about 20,000 rupees a month (\$US123.27), are amongst the most exploited sections of the Pakistani working class. After years of struggle for permanent positions, some still remain on contract.

## **Sri Lankan tea plantation workers protest over factory closure**

Around 30 tea plantation workers who lost their jobs due to a sudden factory closure in the north division of Helboda estate in

Kotmale, a key tea plantation area in Nuwara-eliya district, held a sit-down protest outside the factory on October 16. They demanded reemployment in some other division of the estate. They were supported by workers from other divisions who took strike action for two days.

## **Australia**

### **Western Australian workers protest after worksite death**

At least 2,000 construction workers and family members marched to the Western Australian parliament building in Perth on Tuesday to demand industrial manslaughter legislation promised by the state's McGowan Labor government in 2017, and held up in the Upper House committee on technicalities, be passed urgently. The legislation increases financial and criminal penalties for those convicted of industrial manslaughter.

The protest came just one week after a 20-metre high glass and steel awning at Perth's Curtin University collapsed killing 23-year-old glaziers apprentice Johnnie Hartshorn and leaving two more workers injured, one critically. The disastrous collapse could have killed and injured another two dozen building workers if they had not left for lunch off-site five minutes earlier.

The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), and other unions at the site were aware one week earlier of the dangers of a serious accident but allowed work to continue after the chief building contractor insisted that construction should go ahead.

### **Tasmanian aged care workers protest over short staffing**

Over 20 workers from Tasmania's largest aged care facility demonstrated outside the facility in Burnie, north-west Tasmania, on Tuesday. The Health and Community Services Union (HASCU) members at OneCare Umina Park said they were concerned the facility is seriously understaffed and are doubtful that it will be able to fill shifts in the event of another coronavirus outbreak in the region.

The workers were supported by the local people who held placards saying "Faceless but not voiceless" and "OneCare has many problems." In the absence of a campaign by the union to unite all members across Tasmania over the chronic state-wide staff shortage in aged care, protesters have resorted to putting leaflets into local letterboxes in an attempt to get community support.



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