

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 November 2016

## **India: Haryana health workers' strike in second week**

Close to 12,000 contract workers, including several hundred doctors, employed under the National Health Mission (NHM) have been on strike across Haryana state since October 25 to demand permanency and equal wages with state health department employees. At least 150 have been sacked and face police charges over their involvement in the strike.

NHM workers are employed in a range of departments, including ambulance, maternal health, vaccinations, adolescent health, birth and death records, child immunisations, nursing and data entry. Some NHM employees said they have been on contract wages for 18 years, even after passing interviews and holding qualifications accepted for permanent workers. An NHM Employees' Association spokesman told media that NHM employees get almost one fourth of the salary or allowances being drawn by regular health department employees.

## **Jalandhar municipal sanitation workers strike**

Around 300 contract sanitation workers from the Municipal Corporation of Jalandhar (MCJ) walked off the job indefinitely on Tuesday to demand permanency and an end to the contract system. The Punjab Sanitation Workers Union has accused the state government of falsely promising that it would make 27,000 contract workers across the state permanent. Union leaders called off an eight-day strike by MCJ sanitation workers in April following vague commitments from authorities that demands for permanency and better wages would be "considered."

Workers have threatened to extend the strike state-wide if their demands, which also include the immediate permanency of 145 workers and recruitment of another 2,500 sanitation and sewer-men, are not met soon.

## **Nagaland school teachers strike in third week**

The Nagaland Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Teachers Association announced on Tuesday that a classroom boycott by 2,600 teachers in Nagaland, which began on October 17, would be extended indefinitely. The teachers want the payment of six months' unpaid wages.

A large number of teachers are demonstrating outside the Directorate of Education in Kohima, restricting access to the building.

## **Punjab power workers demonstrate**

Hundreds of contract workers and their families protested

outside the state-run Guru Nanak Dev Thermal Plant (GNDTP) in Bathinda on Tuesday over the temporary closure of the generator. The government is closing three plants in the state for six months, affecting 750 jobs at GNDTP and 2,750 at the Rupnagar and Lehra Mohabbat generators. Workers fear that the government is preparing to privatise the generators. The workers are members of the Guru Nanak Dev Thermal Plant Contract Workers' Union.

## **Andhra Pradesh village revenue assistants protest**

Hundreds of members of the Village Revenue Assistants Association demonstrated in Kurnool and Nellore on Monday to demand an 18,000-rupee (\$US270) minimum monthly wage, promotions into the fourth-class category and the same retirement benefits as government employees.

The workers include village revenue officers, attenders, watchmen and computer operators in the government revenue department but are not given the same recognition as permanent government employees.

## **Uttarakhand unemployed yoga teachers demonstrate**

The Yoga Qualified Unemployed Federation (YQUF), representing around 20,000 unemployed yoga teachers in Uttarakhand state, said this week that its members would resume protests and rallies begun in 2006 to force the government to provide jobs in public schools and hospitals.

The YQUF ended previous demonstrations after the state government promised to create jobs for the teachers. The union federation says it will intensify action from November 5.

## **Pakistan: Shipbreaking workers in Gadani protest**

Gadani shipbreaking yard workers rallied at the Karachi Press Club On October 30 to demand that employees be legally recognised as workers and allowed to form unions. At least 20,000 people are employed at the Gadani yard, working in extremely unsafe conditions with no basic facilities. A National Trade Union Federation spokesman said workers were not provided medical facilities, education for their children and civic amenities like clean water, gas and electricity.

On Tuesday, two days after the protest, an old oil tank exploded and caught fire while workers were dismantling the ship at the Gadani site. Eighteen workers were killed and over 50 injured, some of them losing limbs. The death toll is expected to rise as there were an unknown number of workers trapped inside the vessel.

Established in the 1970s, Gadani is one of the world's largest ship-breaking yards. Laborers are often injured or killed on job, mainly due to the lack of any safety standards.

### **Punjab government school teachers oppose privatisation**

Over 100 school teachers demonstrated outside the Lahore Press Club on Monday to oppose further privatisation of the public school system. They are also demanding a pay increase and an immediate end to reprisals by the School Education Department which has been transferring militant teachers to rural areas as a punishment. The Grand Teachers Alliance, representing seven teachers' organisations, threatened to launch a province-wide protest on November 10 and a sit-down protest outside the Punjab Assembly in December if its demands are not met.

The privatisation of public schools is being carried out through the Punjab Education Foundation, a non-government organisation, and is targeting some 5,000 schools. Some other public schools have been handed over to the Daanish School System, a similar entity.

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers strike**

Class-IV workers from Lower Dir district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa began boycotting duties at government health facilities on October 26 to demand a health professional allowance. Their action followed strikes and demonstrations in August by government doctors, nurses and paramedics demanding the same allowance. While the government has promised on numerous occasions to grant the allowance, it remains unpaid to most workers.

### **Burmese garment workers' strike enters sixth month**

Over 600 workers from the Panda Textile Factory in Singaing township, Mandalay have been on strike for over five months to demand payments they claim they are entitled to under their employment contracts. The textile workers have been demonstrating outside the factory and planned to begin a protest march to Nay Pyi Taw, the nation's capital, on Thursday.

The formerly state-owned No.2 Textile Factory was privatised in 2012 under an agreement that required Panda Textile management to retain its workforce on the same working conditions and wages. Workers complained that the new management has cut their pay and forces them to work Saturdays and Sundays, their normal days off, in breach of their employment contract.

### **Cambodian garment workers protest for wages**

More than 50 workers from Phnom Penh's Co-Seek garment factory protested outside the municipal court on Monday to demand overdue back wages after the factory owner disappeared. Protesters said about half of the 200 workers had been paid a portion of their wages by the factory's landlord about 95 employees have received nothing. A representative from the Cambodian Youth Power Union League said workers want the municipal court, which has frozen the factory's assets, to issue another order to auction off its machinery to pay wages.

### **Indonesian bank employees strike**

Hundreds of employees of Bank Danamon, one of Indonesia's largest financial institutions, marched from Tugu Tani to the company's headquarters in Kuningan, South Jakarta on October 28 to protest the bank's labour policies and to demand their rights. Bank Danamon Workers Union (SP) members want an end to mass layoffs and pension fund cuts.

According to the union, the cutbacks began after the firm conducted a "business transformation" to maintain profits. Workers at Bank Danamon's 1,900 branches have been retrenched, offered relocation or early retirement.

### **Queensland: Caltex oil processing workers end strike**

Workers at Caltex's lubrication manufacturing plant and distribution centre in Brisbane ended a 10-day strike on Wednesday after the National Union of Workers (NUW) made a deal with management for a new work agreement. NUW members walked off the job after rejecting management's proposed enterprise agreement, which they claimed would reduce the working week from 42 to 38 hours and axe two hours of overtime work currently paid at 160 percent of the standard rate.

The union said that wages would be cut by between 15 to 20 percent and that the company wanted to cap redundancy payouts at 55 weeks, down from 63, and cut superannuation contributions.

While the NUW claims that its new deal with company represented a win saying, "Wages paid for each hour worked are largely maintained", details on the revised proposal are scant. The agreement is reported to contain annual wage increases, increased penalty rates and a reduction in hours worked.

### **New Zealand: St John ambulance paramedics impose work bans**

Paramedics employed at St John New Zealand, a government-subsidised ambulance service, began low-level industrial action on Thursday after talks with management for a new work agreement failed on Tuesday. Work bans include not wearing uniforms, completing paperwork or covering extra shifts.

The Ambulance Professionals First union, which cover over 1,000 ambulance workers, announced several weeks ago that its members would begin industrial action on November 4 after workers rejected management's pay offer. St John offered a one percent pay rise in return for the elimination of time-and-a-half for extra work, which is used to cover under-staffing. Workers want the extended working hours cut, complaining that it is unsafe because they are near breaking point from exhaustion.

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