

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 February 2018

Child-care workers strike in India

About 500 anganwadi (childcare) workers from Gurgaon, in the central Indian state of Haryana, walked out on strike on February 19 to demand their monthly salaries be increased to 18,000 rupees (\$US278), better working conditions and the same conditions and benefits as other government workers.

The workers held a meeting at Kamala Nehru Park and resolved to remain on strike until February 26. They have threatened a state-wide indefinite walkout in the future if their demands are not met. "We work around the year every day without any leave and we don't have access to basic benefits given to other government employees such as pension and health benefits. And the government has not acted on our repeated demands," one demonstrating anganwadi worker told the media.

The next day the childcare workers demonstrated outside Haryana Public Works Department Minister Rao Narbir Singh's residence and burnt an effigy of Kavita Jain, minister of urban local bodies.

Bathinda sanitation workers threaten strike over jobs

Sanitation workers in Bathinda in India's Punjab province met on February 21 and presented a memorandum of claims to the city's municipal council. The workers have been long demanding the council increase wages in line the Seventh Pay Commission. They also want 1,500 sanitation workers hired, and current contract workers and fully trained employees given permanent jobs. The meeting gave the council 72-hours to grant these claims or face immediate strike action.

Striking bus workers in Nagpur, India defy state government

Over two thousand transport workers in Nagpur, the third-largest city in the Indian state of Maharashtra, walked out on strike February 20 to demand the minimum wage and permanent jobs for workers hired from a former city bus operator. The strike grounded all 375 buses and 123 routes in the city with workers stopping management attempts to use strike-breakers.

The Bharatiya Kamgar Sena Nagpur Union called off all industrial action soon after the state government invoked the repressive Essential Services and Maintenance Act and the industrial court declared the strike illegal.

Pakistan: Visually impaired government workers protest

Visually impaired workers from Pakistan government departments in Lahore, Punjab demonstrated in The Mall, the

city's main thoroughfare, on Monday.

The protest, which involved about 50 people, was the latest in the workers' long-running struggle for implementation of a three percent job quota within the government service, permanent jobs for all visually impaired workers and other demands. An estimated one in ten people are visually impaired in Pakistan with more than two million people blind in both eyes.

The protest continued the following day, blocking city traffic and the road leading to the office of the chief minister of the provincial government. Many workers refused to negotiate with the police and other government officials who attempted to disperse the protest with a series of empty promises. Demonstrators accused the government of offering the same false promises it had made over the last several years.

Bangladesh power workers demand union rights

Hundreds of Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited (DESCO) workers demonstrated outside the company's head office at Nikunja in Dhaka on Sunday to demand trade union rights and promotions.

DESCO, which was established in 1996, distributes electricity to the northern parts of Dhaka City and Tongi Town in Gazipur District. It was created in 1996 under the Companies Act 1994 as a Public Limited Company.

South Korean university cleaners continue strike action

Dongguk University cleaners from the facilities management division remain on strike over the university's refusal to employ regular workers to fill positions left by eight retiring workers.

Dongguk and other universities are attempting to slash operating costs by hiring students on a casual basis and on two-hour shifts each morning. Yonsaid University eliminated 31 full-time cleaning jobs early this year.

Industrial action by the Dongguk university cleaners began in the second week of January with protests on an almost daily basis. Students have also joined the protests. Several demonstrators were injured by security guards when they attempted to enter the university president's office in late January.

Philippines Coca-Cola workers protest job cuts

Coca-Cola workers demonstrated in the Philippines on Tuesday after the multi-national corporation announced that it was restructuring its operations and would sack over 600 workers on March 2.

The company claimed the cuts were partly in response to the government's tax reform law, which has increased the tax on sugar-sweetened drinks. Coca-Cola FEMSA Philippines is the company's largest bottling operation in the world. It has over 15,300 employees, 19 plants and 52 distribution centres.

IBM-KMU union leaders rejected the claim that the new tax was the basis for the sackings and said there would be more protests involving Coca-Cola and other workers. The union says that 23 of those being fired were union officials, including four union presidents.

According to the Philippines Labor and Employment Department, a total of 6,644 jobs were axed from 424 companies in the Metro Manila area in January this year.

Philippines teachers and government workers demand higher wages

Teachers and government workers marched to Mendiola area in Metro Manila on February 21 to demand a minimum monthly wage of 16,000 pesos (\$US308) for government workers and a 10,000-peso increase for teachers and nurses.

The marchers also demanded an end to "contractualisation"—the practice of laying off workers after five months, one month before the requirement of "regularising" them. This means making them eligible for permanent jobs and additional payments or benefits. Nurses have been among the victims of this scam.

During his election campaign President Rodrigo Duterte promised to eliminate the practice but the Labor Department says it does not have the number of inspectors to stop it.

Coal terminal workers locked out again

Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT) in the Illawarra region in New South Wales locked out around 60 workers last week in an ongoing dispute over a new enterprise work agreement. The company is trying to push through major cuts to wages and conditions. Management previously locked out the workers for four days last month.

PKCT is refusing to negotiate with the Construction Forestry and Mining Union (CFMEU), which covers the terminal workers, and has applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to have the current enterprise agreement terminated. If successful, the workers would be pushed back onto the basic award with inferior pay and conditions.

The previous agreement expired in 2015. Over the past 12 months the union has confined opposition to the company's demands to sporadic and isolated strike action. It has also offered to provide PKCT with a number of concessions while making pleas to the company to negotiate.

The CFMEU organised a protest outside the terminal in response to the latest lockout and plans a demonstration outside the FWC offices in Sydney next Wednesday.

Aged care workers accept new enterprise agreement

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) this week struck a new enterprise agreement (EA) covering more than 1,000 aged care nurses and carers employed at 26 nursing homes in Victoria operated by the Bupa international healthcare group.

Last year, the workers took unprecedented industrial action over 37 days after earlier rejecting a company offer containing annual pay increases of just 2.1 percent. Negotiations for a new agreement have dragged on for more than 14 months.

ANMF acting secretary Paul Gilbert hailed the new deal as a "victory." However, it provides for a pay increase of just 11.25 percent over three years, or 3.75 annually, barely meeting parity with other workers in the sector.

The new agreement does not address the concerns of workers over chronic understaffing across the company's aged care facilities. There is no mandatory minimum staff-to-patient ratio. Federal legislation states only that aged care facilities must have an "appropriate level" of staff and care.

New Zealand: Strike announced for Lyttleton Port workers

The Rail and Maritime Union (RMTU) have announced a 24-hour strike scheduled for March 8. On February 15, 200 waterfront workers voted unanimously in favour of a complete withdrawal of labour for up to three weeks. Workers also endorsed over-time bans which would begin on March 5.

The dispute is over plans to run the port on a 24/7 basis. The union has not posed any fundamental opposition to this plan. In fact, RMTU South Island organiser John Kerr told media, "We have no problem with that."

The strike was confirmed after the RMTU's 22nd meeting with the company.

The lengthy negotiations and the limited 24-hour strike are indicators of the RMTU's determination to accommodate to management's demands.

The RMTU restricted strike action last year by rail workers fighting for wages, jobs and conditions in Wellington and Auckland to 24-hours. The union has still not released the results of a ballot to strike by Auckland rail workers. The vote concluded on February 9.

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