

Land record officers strike in Indian state of Punjab; Bangladesh garment workers strike continues; Australian ferry drivers walkout again in Brisbane.

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 December 2018

### **Muster roll workers in North India protest against low wages**

Jaintia Hills Public Work Department (PWD) muster roll workers from the North Indian city of Shillong staged a protest hunger strike on December 17 to demand a pay rise and other basic benefits.

Around 300 members of the Jaintia Hills PWD Muster Roll Workers' and Labour Union, chanted slogans and held placards demanding 300-rupee (\$US4.2) daily wage for untrained casual workers. Muster roll workers maintained labour attendance records at work sites.

The workers also called for establishment of a workers welfare board, retirement at 60 years, a family pension and the introduction of proper casual and maternity leave schemes. The protest ended later that evening after discussions with the union, which decided to suspend the strike after speaking with the Meghalaya state deputy chief minister. No details have been about the outcome of the meeting.

### **India Western Railway Mazdoor Sangh members in Ahmedabad hold sit-down protest**

Members of the Western Railway Mazdoor Sangh (WRMS) union held a sit-down protest at a railway divisional office on December 14 over various outstanding demands, including a higher minimum wage—from 18,000 rupees (\$254) to 21,000 rupees—and 100-kilometre payment allowance to be increased. It is currently 648 rupees per 100 kilometres and has not been raised since January 1, 2017.

The WRMS want the 130,000 vacancies in the safety category filled as soon as possible, running staff to be paid a 10,000-rupee dress allowance in line with other job categories, and guards to be re-designated as train managers. Other demands include pay rises for loco inspectors, as well as mail and express guards and loco pilots.

### **Land record officers walkout in the Indian state of Punjab**

A two-day strike by land record officers or “patwaries” stopped revenue work at local government officers in Jalandhar, Bathinda and other cities in Punjab on December 13 and 14.

Local president of the Punjab Patwar Union told the media that the government had been ignoring workers' calls for improved promotions and other demands. The workers said they need basic amenities in local work places and for government authorities to stop harassing and victimising employees.

### **Bangladesh garment workers protests continue**

Hundreds of garment workers from factories in Savar, Ashulia and Gazipur are continuing industrial action and protests against a discriminatory new wage structure. The strike began on December 9 and also includes workers from Narayanganj.

Fearing that the industrial action would spread, employers have stopped production at about 50 factories. Police have also brutally attacked demonstrating workers, leaving at least 25 people

injured.

The garment workers claim that basic wages have been reduced in some grades under a new wage revision approved on September and introduced this month. They had previously called for the basic monthly wage to be increased to 16,000 taka. Under the new pay deal is just 8,000 taka (\$96).

The Bangladesh minister for labour claims has cynically declared that any “contradictions” in the pay agreement would be removed after the national elections on December 30. The media is reporting that the country’s so-called Crisis Management Core Committee, a tri-partite body consisting of government, factory owners and union officials, is discussing workers’ demands.

### **Pakistan: Lahore engineers demand allowances and better salaries**

Large number of engineers working for government departments across Punjab province demonstrated in Lahore on Wednesday to demand a technical allowance and a pay grade upgrade. The day-long protest blocked The Mall, Lahore’s main thoroughfare. Organised by the Pakistan Association of Government Engineers, the protest included workers from the Water and Sanitation Agency, Water and Power Development Authority, the Irrigation, Public Health and other key departments.

Demonstrating engineers denounced the government for “negligence” and the told the media that the government had ignored their demands. The association warned that the protests will continue until engineers’ demands are granted.

### **Australia: Brisbane ferry drivers strike again**

Around 130 workers who operate ferry services in Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, walked off the job for 12 hours on Thursday morning. The action followed a 48-hour strike earlier this month demanding higher pay and greater job security in a proposed enterprise agreement.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has been in negotiations for nearly a year with Transdev, a private transport company contracted by the city council to operate commuter ferry services on the Brisbane River.

Many workers are reportedly paid below the award rate and have no job security because they are employed on casual contracts. Transdev made a pay

offer but demanded workers accept a change in start times from 6.30am to 6.31am so they didn’t receive the early morning allowance. The union has not indicated what its demands are. The dispute was scheduled to be mediated in the Fair Work Commission on Thursday, December 20.

### **New Zealand: Pay deal ends Ministry of Justice strikes**

The Public Service Association (PSA) reported on Thursday that around 2,000 Ministry of Justice workers had ratified a new collective agreement, bringing an end to three months of sporadic partial strikes and work-to-rule actions at court houses across New Zealand.

During negotiations, the PSA had initially demanded a 13 percent pay rise across two years. It then revised this down to 11 percent in November. The final agreement offers workers only 4 percent in the first year and six percent over the following years. This is little more than the offer of 5 percent across two years that workers had already rejected.

The union promoted a limited and drawn-out campaign of short, low impact strikes before pushing through the sell-out. A union representative stated that they “only took actions that disrupted the courts as a last resort.”

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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