

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 April 2015

India: Bosch ends Rajasthan lockout

Auto-parts manufacturer Bosch ended a seven-day lockout at its Jaipur plant in Rajasthan on April 15 following an agreement by management and the union to enter talks. Workers agreed to cease all industrial action, which included an assembly “go-slow.” Forty-five contract workers have been terminated since industrial action began in February and seven workers, who were on a hunger strike, were arrested by police.

Wage negotiations for the period June 2013 to May 2017 have been ongoing for more than 20 months. The workers want monthly wages increased by 9,000 rupees (\$US144) and the workload cut by 30 percent. Bosch has offered just 7,000 rupees.

Goa ferry workers delay strike

Ferry workers in India’s west coast state of Goa have postponed a planned strike on April 13 until April 23, following an assurance from the river navigation department that the workers’ demands would be resolved within the next 10 days. The ferry workers want payment of 15 months’ outstanding overtime, a wage rise as per the sixth pay commission, adequate employment of sailors, reimbursement of uniform-stitching charges and removal of pay scale anomalies.

The government has enacted its draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act, which makes it illegal for India Navigation Employees Union members to take further strike action.

Tamil Nadu noon-meal workers on strike

Sixty thousand Nutritional Noon Meal Workers Association members walked off the job for an indefinite period on April 14 over a raft of demands. The noon-meal workers said they would not return until all their claims, which include a minimum 3,000-rupee pension, minimum gratuity and wage increases, were met. Over 128,000 people are employed in the nutritional meal scheme which provides for 5.4 million students.

Falcon Tyres workers remain locked out

Almost 2,500 Rui Group-Falcon Tyres plant employees in Mysore, Tamil Nadu have been locked out since January after the company ceased production in December. The tyre workers have not been paid since the closure.

Union representatives at negotiations mediated by the state government rejected a company offer to reopen the plant in one month’s time. Workers want immediate payment of outstanding wages since January and the plant immediately reopened.

Dunlop Polymers, which is owned by the same Rui Group of companies in Mysore, stopped production for over a month and half, yet its 250 workers are still receiving their monthly salaries.

Kerala LPG truck drivers end strike

Truck drivers at the state-owned Bharat Petroleum’s LPG bottling plant in Ambalamugal on the outskirts of Kochi in Kerala ended a five-day strike on Monday after management agreed to appoint a cleaner for every truck by April 23. Drivers have been told that they could hire anyone as cleaners in the interim and the company will pay them a 375-rupee daily wage. The trucks deliver LPG cylinders to nine districts in the state.

Pakistan: Punjab government doctors continue struggle for service-structure

Government hospital doctors in several major Punjab provincial cities held demonstrations on April 9 as part of a long-running campaign for service structure changes. The government has delayed implementation of an agreed service structure since 2012, forcing doctors to remain on lower pay-scales.

The action by Young Doctors Association (YDA) members follows a strike in March over the issue, which forced the closure of several government hospital departments, including out-patients. YDA members are also concerned that the lack of sufficient medical staff will mean they will be forced to perform duties on extended hours.

Punjab paramedics protest

Paramedics and other health workers at Punjab government hospitals demonstrated in Lahore and Faisalabad on April 13 demanding the government implement its agreed service structure changes and permanency for contract workers. Salary increments and promotions are being delayed for BPS 1 to 17 scale employees.

The Punjab Paramedics Alliance and the Health Support Staff Association have threatened to call wider industrial action for April 20 if the government fails to address their issues.

Paramedics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas also warned that they will protest if the government fails to implement service structure changes in their respective provinces before April 15.

Peshawar utility workers continue anti-privatisation campaign

Peshawar Electric Supply Company (Pesco) employees struck on April 13 and held demonstrations across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa against government plans to privatise the utility company. Pesco workers have also demanded timely promotions and payment of delayed bonuses.

The ineffective and long-running protests are controlled by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union. The Pakistan government, in line with International Monetary Fund and World Bank demands, says that it will continue to privatise state-run utilities.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government employees protest

Class-IV government employees of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province demonstrated in Peshawar on April 6 demanding an immediate wage rise. Class-IV Employees Association members have warned that if the government does not meet its demands there would be strike action. The workers also want a pay-scale upgrade and allowances.

There are about 93,000 Class-IV government employees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The protest was joined by workers from the Civil Secretariat, museums, wildlife and other government departments.

Department of Defence workers vote for industrial action

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members in the Department of Defence voted overwhelmingly this week to take protected industrial action in a dispute for a new work agreement. Department of Defence staff will join tens of thousands of Australian public sector workers taking industrial action, including work bans and stoppages, this month. The CPSU has ensured that the action will have the least effect on government operations.

Bargaining for the pay and conditions of around 160,000 public servants in 117 federal agencies has been under way for a year. The government “offered” between zero and 1.05 percent annual wage increases combined with cuts to superannuation protections and other conditions. With inflation running at over 2 percent, the pay offers would amount to a \$2,500–\$3,000 annual pay cut.

CPSU members in the Department of Veteran Affairs have begun holding national stop-work meetings. The action follows two weeks of limited lunchtime action in the Department of Human Services—Centrelink, Medicare and Child Support. CPSU members in Agriculture, Tax, Human Services, Defence, Environment, Employment, Geoscience Australia, CSIRO, the Australian Institute of Criminology and Bureau of Meteorology are taking or planning industrial action this month.

Construction workers in north-west Australia threaten industrial action

Workers employed at Chevron’s Gorgon liquefied natural gas project off Western Australia’s northwest coast have threatened industrial action over a proposed new work agreement by CB&I, the largest contractor on the \$US54 billion project. CB&I wants to change the current roster of 26 days on and 9 days off to 25 days on and 10 days off.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union want a 30-day roster consisting of 20 days on and 10 days off. Workers have twice rejected the employer’s roster changes in the past five months.

Meanwhile, iron ore miner Fortescue Metals Group (FMG), in a move to cut costs amidst a deepening slump in the mining industry, wants to change rosters from the current 8 days on and 6 days off to 14 days on and 7 days off. The CFMEU claimed the change would destroy over 750 jobs from the 4,000-strong workforce at FMG’s Pilbara iron ore operations.

New Zealand fast food workers protest

Hundreds of fast food workers and supporters across New Zealand held protest pickets outside fast food restaurants in Auckland, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin on Wednesday calling for an end to the use of “zero-hours” contracts. The protests were part of an international day of action to end “super exploitation” in the fast food industry.

The Unite union says it has reached agreement with Restaurant Brands, which owns KFC, Pizza Hut, Carl’s Jnr and Starbucks brands, to end zero-hours contracts by July. No agreement has been reached with McDonalds and Wendy’s Hamburgers.

Under zero-hour contracts workers are not guaranteed set hours and can be rostered anywhere between 3 and 40 hours a week. Contract employees do not receive the same entitlements as other workers, such as a day off in lieu for any public holidays worked.



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