

Health workers strike in India, Cambodian garment workers walkout over wages

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 December 2017

## India: Bihar provincial government orders sacking of 80,000 health workers

The Bihar state government on Wednesday ordered the termination of 80,000 striking workers hired under contract at the National Health Mission (NHM). The workers, including district programme managers, monitoring and evaluation officers, data entry officers, accountants and paramedical staff walked out on Tuesday to demand job permanency and a salary increase.

A Contractual Health Workers Association spokesman said the terminations were draconian and threatened to intensify the protests to include a hunger strike.

The strike follows a decision last month by the Patna High Court ruling that 40,000 public school contract teachers across Bihar were eligible for pay and other benefits on a par with their regular state counterparts. The state government has appealed the decision.

## Haryana NHM contract workers strike

Thousands of National Health Mission (NHM) workers in India's northern state of Haryana struck work for 48 hours on Tuesday to demand a pay increase and job permanency. There are 12,500 NHM workers in the state employed on contract. They include medical officers, pharmacists, lab technicians, clerks, data entry operators, and auxiliary nurse midwives.

The strikers' main demand is for job permanency and, until they become permanent, a salary increase to match regular health workers, under the slogan of "equal work, equal pay." Haryana's NHM workers have been holding demonstrations over their demands since 2015. They ended a 13-day strike in September last year after the government falsely promised to immediately begin the process of permanency.

## Punjab midday meal workers demonstrate

Mid-day Meal Workers Union members who work on contract to provide meals for children at Punjab state public schools met in Bathinda on Sunday and plan to protest today. They have been demanding an increase in salary and job permanency for several years.

Punjab midday meal workers want equal pay with fellow workers in other states. They are paid a meagre 1,700 rupees (\$US26.35) a month while workers in Kerala receive 6,000 rupees and in Pondicherry 9,000 a month.

Workers are demanding that monthly salaries be set at 8,403 rupees, insurance cover extended, job permanency, salaries for 12 months in the year instead of 10 months, dearness and uniform allowances and leave at par with what is given to the permanent employees of the state education department.

They announced that if the government continued to ignore them, they would strike and hold sit-in protests at schools until demands were met.

## Punjab industrial estate workers protest following deaths

Workers and union representatives from various factories in the Ludhiana industrial estate demonstrated outside the Ludhiana mini-secretariat on Tuesday to demand stringent labour laws and registration of factories under the Factories Act.

The protest followed a recent fire at a plastic factory where 16 people lost their lives. The five-storey factory employed 100 people mostly on daily contracts. Protesting workers said they feared more workers could be buried in the rubble.

## Bathinda public transport workers protest

Punjab Road Transport Corporation workers in Bathinda rallied at the Bathinda bus stand on Tuesday over changes to the bus time table which they claimed favoured the private bus operator Jhunir Bus Service. The PRTC Workers' Union handed a memorandum to the depot manager.

Government public transport workers in all states across India are constantly fighting against attempts by transport authorities to handover work to private bus operators in preparation for full privatisation.

## Pakistan: Police baton charge protesting Sindh teachers again

Sindh government school teachers involved in a long-running campaign for unpaid wages were attacked by police as they marched from the Karachi Press Club to the Sindh assembly on November 23. The baton-charge left at least 10 injured while 25 were arrested.

Karachi police used water cannon and batons against these same workers when they demonstrated in September over the issue. Two protesters were injured and three arrested.

The Sindh government, following protests in March and July, promised to pay overdue wages before the September Eid holidays. Around 7,000 teachers appointed in 2012 have been affected. Many teachers said they received their appointments in 2012 but salary payments ceased after 16 months. The teachers, who are still working, alleged that they were told by the treasury department that there were discrepancies in their appointments that had to be resolved before salary payments were resumed.

The teachers are organised by the New Teachers Action Committee.

### **Sindh community health workers strike over unpaid wages**

Lady Health Workers (LHW), who provide health services for women in communities and rural areas, boycotted duties in Badin and Jacobabad on November 22 to demand six months of unpaid wages. Their strike followed a protest in Karachi on November 16, which they ended after a false assurance was given by the district health officer that wages would be paid within two days.

### **Punjab government clerks strike again**

Tens of thousands of All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA)-Punjab members stopped work across the province on November 29 over several outstanding demands. Their action followed a province-wide strike and demonstrations on November 15 over the same issues.

Government clerks are demanding a salary increase and payment of a utility allowance, increase in housing and marriage allowances and job permanency for contract workers among other demands. Other demands were restoration of abolished posts in the departments of health, education and local government

### **Punjab visually impaired workers protest**

Visually impaired workers from government departments in Lahore demonstrated outside the Lahore Press Club on Monday demanding their jobs be made permanent. The government has continued to keep these workers on daily wage basis despite continued demands over three years for permanent jobs. Protesters were joined by unemployed visually impaired workers demanding that the government implement its quota system that 5 percent of government jobs be allocated to handicapped people.

A large number of visually impaired workers from across the province demonstrated in Lahore on October 15 over the same issues.

### **Sindh primary schoolteachers oppose re-testing for job confirmation**

Teachers of government-run primary schools in Sindh province protested against the imposition of another round of tests before their jobs are confirmed by the government. Teachers held sit-in demonstrations and a hunger strike on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Teachers accused the government of using ad-hoc testing for delaying tactics over their appointment. They pointed out that all of them were eligible for appointment after passing tests conducted by University of Sindh and National Testing Service.

### **Sri Lankan train drivers on strike**

Sri Lanka Railways train drivers walked off the job Wednesday midnight protesting that management had disregarded recruitment policies and procedures when recruiting trainees. All rail services have come to a standstill. Workers said they would continue the strike until the issue was resolved.

Rail workers went on strike in October over the same issue. The railway unions called off a planned 48-hour strike in early November after the government falsely said it would meet with them and resolve the recruitment issue and pay anomalies.

### **South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers strike for wage increase**

Unionised workers at Hyundai Motor's five plants in Ulsan, 400km south of Seoul, struck for up to six hours each day Tuesday through to Friday in their dispute for a new wage deal following 36 rounds of negotiations without reaching agreement.

Members of the 51,000-strong union want the basic monthly wage to be increased by 154,883 won (\$US142.50) and a bonus of 30 percent. The company's 2016 full-year net profit for 2016 was 5.72 trillion won.

Workers rejected Hyundai's offer to raise basic salaries by 42,879 won per month and bonuses worth 200 percent of basic pay plus 1 million won. After workers rejected this offer, the company suggested bonuses of 250 percent of basic pay plus 1.5 million won in a revised offer.

### **Seoul subway workers strike**

Union members at the privately operated Seoul Subway Line No. 9 walked off the job on November 30 and demonstrated near Seoul City Hall to protest against long work hours and short staffing. Union leaders announced at the demonstration that the walkout was the beginning of a six-day strike.

The union alleges that management of Seoul Line 9 Operation Company was stalling on reaching an agreement after 12 months of negotiations using the excuse that they were waiting for a decision from the parent companies Transdev and RATP.

### **Taiwan workers and students oppose new industrial laws**

Over 100 workers and students rallied outside the Executive Yuan in Taipei on Sunday protesting against the government's latest amendment to the Labor Standards Act. Protesters condemned the draft amendment for relaxing overtime rules which would allow some industries to raise the maximum number of consecutive working days from six to 12 and lower rest time between shifts from 11 hours to eight hours.

The proposed changes would increase the maximum number of overtime hours from 46 to 54 per month, but cap it at 138 hours over three months. While the draft amendment requires businesses to obtain the consent of unions or employees when asking employees to work overtime, only 7 percent of the nation's workers are represented by a union.

A survey conducted by the 1111 Online Job Bank, released in November, found that 75 percent of workers were against the labour amendments, with many fearing they would become physically and mentally exhausted if employers were allowed to set longer overtime hours.

### **Burmese factory workers demand minimum wage rise**

About 1,000 workers from factories in the Mandalay Industrial Zone demonstrated in Mandalay on Sunday demanding that the new minimum daily wage to be set at 5,600 kyat (\$US4.1). The current daily wage is 3,600 kyat for an eight-hour day. Workers are concerned that the National Committee for the Minimum Wage is discussing lifting the minimum wage to only 4,000 or 4,800 kyat.

### **Cambodian garment workers strike**

More than 200 workers from the Nantai garment factory in Phnom Penh walked off the job on Wednesday to demand legal rights such as advance notice when their contracts are to be terminated, termination compensation, deductible annual leave and other demands.

Workers agreed to end their protest outside the factory and return to work the following day after representatives from the labour ministry and local authorities said they would meet with the factory owner and resolve their grievances.

### **Catholic school teachers walk out**

Thousands of teachers and support staff from 350 Catholic schools throughout New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) walked out for four hours on Monday and Tuesday, protesting the attempts by the Catholic schools to impose an enterprise agreement without the union's endorsement. Independent Education Union (IEU) members walked off the job in October after the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ruled that the wording in the proposed enterprise agreement would restrict the union's ability to refer a dispute to the commission.

The IEU said the dispute was not about pay. A 2.5 percent pay rise was settled nearly a year ago, but has yet to be paid. Teachers and support staff want their conditions protected by their enterprise agreement and by the FWC. The Catholic Commission for Employment Relations (CCER) has refused to negotiate on the clause in the proposed agreement that allows it to veto the union's access to the FWC.

The CCER told teachers that if they vote yes for the agreement they would receive their 2.5 percent pay increase, back dated to January 1 by Christmas.

### **Tip Top owner-drivers protest against pay and conditions**

Truck owner-drivers for bread manufacturer Tip Top travelled to Australia's capital Canberra on Wednesday to demand that the Turnbull federal government reinstate the independent road safety tribunal which drivers claim monitored excessive exploitation and safety risks in transport supply chains. The Transport Workers Union wants federally-binding rules that would ensure standards across the industry.

Drivers claimed that Tip Top, which operates in the Aldi supply chain, pays low contract rates, which were compromising safety as drivers were being pushed to work fatigued and with trucks not being maintained.

Fatal crashes involving articulated trucks have increased by 9.4 percent this year, according to the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics. Safe Work Australia data shows that almost 40 percent of all workplace deaths involved transport workers this year. This is up from one in four in 2015.

### **New Zealand: Auckland commuter rail workers strike**

Rail and Maritime Union (RMU) members at Transdev, which operates commuter train services on contract for Auckland Transport, planned to stop work for 24 hours from 2 a.m. Friday. Some 84 percent of workers voted for strike action to protest against Transdev's cost cutting proposal to introduce driver only services.

Workers fear that passengers and drivers would be at risk by dividing drivers' attention and increasing the chances of an accident. The RMU estimated that more than 200 jobs will be lost when Auckland Transport and Transdev push ahead with plans to remove train managers and rely on ad-hoc use of transport officers to supervise passengers and monitor safety.

### **Tahiti: Air France flight attendants end strike**

Air France flight attendants stationed at Tahiti in French Polynesia ended their three-week strike on Sunday after reaching an agreement with the airline. Flight attendants walked out on November 11 after the breakdown of talks between the carrier and the UFSA-UNSA, the flight attendants union, on a collective agreement and changes to the distribution of wages, and other issues.

Media reported that 90 percent of union members ratified the agreement, however details of the agreement were not made public. A media report on Wednesday said the flight attendants were considering resuming industrial action after hearing that local management was considering renegeing on the agreement.

### **Tahiti newspaper strike ends**

Workers at French Polynesia's *La Depeche de Tahiti* newspaper ended a week-long strike on December 2 after management agreed to abandon plans to move the printing of the paper to another company, Pacific Press. Workers feared they would lose their jobs after hearing that Pacific Press said it had no intention of hiring displaced staff from *La Depeche*.

### **New Caledonia music teachers strike**

Music teachers in the South Pacific French territory of New Caledonia began unlimited strike action on Monday to oppose a \$US1.5 million budget cut to culture and arts education. Workers said at least 12 teachers would have to be dismissed and dozens more jobs in the culture sector will have to go.

Teachers demonstrated in front of Congress in Noumea on Tuesday. The School of Music has cancelled exams while the heads of various culture institutions have written to the French president who is currently visiting New Caledonia.



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