Thousands of oil tanker drivers in Odisha, India to strike next week for higher pay

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

14 April 2018

India: Oil tanker drivers in Odisha plan statewide strike

Up to 3,000 contract oil tanker drivers and their helpers will hold a statewide strike for higher pay in Odisha on April 16. There are about 2,500 to 3,000 oil tankers and five major oil depots in Odisha.

The oil transport workers are members of the All Odisha Transport Workers' Federation, which is affiliated to the All India Road Transport Workers' Federation. They are demanding 18,000 rupees ($US275) minimum monthly pay for helpers and 30,000 rupees ($US460) for drivers. Helpers currently receive between 2,000 and 3,000 per month, while drivers get 7,000 to 8,000 rupees.

While the drivers and helpers work for public-sector companies—the Indian Oil Corporation Limited, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited—they are employed through transport contractors.

India: New Delhi sanitation workers end strike

About 5,000 New Delhi sanitation employees returned to work this week, after walking out on strike on March 24. The workers were demanding a wage rise and payment of outstanding salaries. They also called for medical cards for all sanitation workers and an end to contract employment.

The workers are members of the Delhi Pradesh Safai Majdoor Union, which ended the industrial action after a meeting with Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari and North Delhi corporation mayor Preety Agarwal. Tiwari claimed that council authorities would provide medical cards and payment of outstanding wages. Similar promises have been made and not fulfilled in the past.

Indian road tunnel workers end strike

Five hundred striking contract workers on the Rohtang Tunnel in the eastern Pir Panjal range of the Himalayas on the Leh-Manali Highway returned to work on April 6.

The workers walked out March 27 to demand the company adhere to national labor laws and for an improvement in working conditions and facilities. The 8.8-kilometre project, the longest tunnel in India, is running three years behind schedule.

Mandi constituency MP Ram Swaroop Sharma met with the workers and "assured" them that their demands would be granted by the contracting companies. The parliamentarian, however, gave no details.

Pakistan: Sindh prosecution department workers protests

Sindh province prosecution department employees demonstrated outside the Sindh High Court in Karachi on Monday to demand promotions, pay increases, medical facilities and other benefits. A similar campaign last year was called off after the government falsely agreed to workers' demands and said it would resolve all outstanding issues within two months. A year later none of the workers' claims have been granted.

The Sindh Prosecution Welfare Association, which called the protests, warned authorities that employees would begin an indefinite sit-in protest until all demands were met.

Hundreds of Pakistan journalists rally in Islamabad

Hundreds of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) members protested outside the parliament in Islamabad on Monday to demand establishment of a wages board, introduction of a salary structure for electronic media journalists, an end to the contract system, and permanent jobs for all journalists.

Demonstrators denounced government authorities for ignoring their demands. Journalists have not had a pay rise since 2000. The PFUJ said there would be demonstrations outside the national parliament for five days.

Striking Sri Lankan university non-academic staff given ultimatum

The University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Higher Education has threatened to sack striking non-academic staff of state universities if they do not return to work on or before April 17.

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The notice declared that all probation, contract, training and temporary workers will be considered as having vacated their posts if they fail to report for duties on that day. Striking permanent employees will not be paid during the ongoing strike if they fail to return to work on April 17.

About 15,000 non-academic workers have been on strike for six weeks for a 20 percent wage rise, a language-proficiency allowance, increased concessionary loans and the introduction of medical insurance and a pension scheme. The University Trade Union Joint Committee (UTUJC), which called the strike, has been attempting to call off the strike without winning members' claims.

About 1,500 workers marched in Colombo on Tuesday over their demands while university students have protested in major cities supporting the non-academic workers.

Bangladesh tea estate workers strike for higher wages

Thousands of tea estate workers in the Sylhet Valley struck for two hours and marched on Thursday to call for a pay rise and the appointment of a qualified physician and an ambulance at every tea plantation.

The strikers also want their daily wage increased from 85 taka ($US1) to 250 taka ($US3), better sanitation and housing facilities, and recognition of their ownership of land where they had lived for generations. The walkout and demonstration was organised by the Sylhet Vallir Cha-Shramikbrinda (Tea Garden Workers of Sylhet Valley). Speakers told the demonstrators there would be stronger industrial action if workers' demands were not granted by Saturday.

South Korean musical instrument workers protest

Former employees of Cort Guitars and Basses, a guitar manufacturer, staged a sit-down protest Gwanghwamun Plaza on Monday.

Cort guitars, which is based in South Korea and was founded in 1973, sacked over 200 workers in 2007 after they formed a union and demanded the minimum wage. The company immediately locked its factories, forced workers to sign resignation papers and then moved production to cheaper labour platforms in China and Indonesia.

The sacked Korean guitar workers have continued to protest their dismissal since then. The dispute is still being contested in the Supreme Court of Korea.

Australian brewery workers strike again

Around 70 workers at Castlemaine Perkins Brewery in Brisbane Queensland walked off the job for a second time on Wednesday in an enterprise bargaining dispute. The company wants to reduce working conditions and increase its use of casual labour on inferior pay. The workers held a one-hour stoppage last month.

Castlemaine Perkins, which produces XXXX beer, is owned by the Japanese-based brewer Lion. It has threatened to shut its Brisbane facility if workers do not accept its demands. The brewery's workforce has already been slashed by about one third or around 40 jobs in recent years.

An intimidating company email declared: "The long term viability of our brewery at XXXX is dependent on our ability to be flexible and responsive to changes at a level that we have not seen in the past."

While the XXXX workers had previously voted for industrial action, the United Voice union is isolating the dispute and limiting action to a series of short rolling stoppages. Lion owns and operates several other breweries across the country.

New Zealand: Lyttleton Port workers extend strike

A strike by port workers has been extended from five days to nine, following another fruitless negotiation meeting between the Lyttleton Port Company (LPC) and the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU). Workers will strike from April 20–24, and again from April 26–29. Ships will not be able to leave or enter the port during the walkout.

Around 200 RMTU members want the same pay increase as fellow workers represented by the Maritime Union NZ (MUNZ). LPC refuses to offer the same pay rate unless the RMTU workers accept the same flexible hours accepted by members of the MUNZ.

The RMTU has isolated the LPC workers and is prolonging negotiations in order to wear down workers and create the conditions to impose a sellout agreement which fulfills management's productivity demands.

New Zealand nurses protest low wages

Nurses throughout New Zealand demonstrated this week following a rejected pay offer from the District Health Boards (DHBs). The DHBs are critically underfunded after decades of cost-cutting measures by successive Labour and National governments. The collective agreement offer, which included a 2 percent increase, was rejected by nurses last December. A slightly modified agreement but with the same wage rates was voted down again in March.

Protests were organised by the New Zealand Nurses Organisation in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Over a hundred people demonstrated outside Auckland's Middlemore hospital on Tuesday.

Numerous media reports have indicated that nurses are ready to strike. Nurses have established their own Facebook group, with over 40,000 members, and organised a petition, which has gathered over 26,000 signatures. The group plans more protests in May.

L'Oreal workers in New Zealand win meagre pay rise

L'Oreal has increased the pay of its distribution centre workers to a supposed "living wage" of $20.55 per hour after they threatened to strike. Some workers were previously receiving only $15.75 per hour, a "starting-out" wage mostly for workers under 19, and below New Zealand's minimum wage of $16.50.

Workers decided to organise industrial action after discovering that one of their colleagues could not afford rental accommodation and was sleeping in his car. The distribution centre is located in the impoverished South Auckland suburb of Mangere. Auckland has some of the most expensive housing in the world.

The First Union has heaped praise on the cosmetics giant claiming it has responded to workers in a "humane" way. The slavish response is a clear indication that the union will do nothing to lift workers meagre hourly

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rates above $20.55.

New Zealand: Nelson City Council maintenance workers hold three-hour strike

Over 50 Nelmac workers struck for three hours and formed picket lines in Tahunanui, Richmond and Motueka on Tuesday in protest over low pay and long hours. The Reunited Employees Association and Nelmac, which does maintenance work for the Nelson City Council, have been in negotiations over a collective agreement since July last year.

Nelmac announced in December that they would not meet with the union unless a mediator was present. Negotiations are set to continue on April 19, but the workers have threatened to strike again next Tuesday if the meeting date is not brought forward.

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