Indian bank workers threaten national strike, Auckland University students and staff protest in New Zealand

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Indian bank unions threaten two-day strike

Indian bank unions have threatened a two-day national strike, starting on May 30, if the Indian Bank Association does not increase its current 2 percent annual wage rise offer.

The planned strike, which would involve tens of thousands of bank workers, has been called by the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), an umbrella body of nine unions. The forum includes the All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) and National Organisation of Bank Workers (NOBW).

The UFBU wants higher salaries, improvements in other service conditions and a speedy settlement of its wage claims. The previous agreement ended in November 2017. All India Bank Officers' Confederation secretary D.T.Franco told the media that bank employees receive lower pay than government workers and private sector employees.

The UFBU has also demanded that any wage increase include all bank employees up to scale VII. Some banks, however, have said that they will only hold wage negotiations for up to Scale III officers.

India: Chandigarh municipal workers strike

Municipal workers had been on strike in Chandigarh, the capital of the northern Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, since May 9. The 30,000 workers, which include Municipal Corporation Workers Union members and fire department employees, decided late last week to continue their industrial action until May 17.

The strikers want permanent jobs for contractual employees, a minimum monthly salary of 15,000 rupees for sanitation workers, cashless medical facilities for contract employees, higher allowances for permanent and contract workers and better safety equipment for those involved in cleaning sewers.

Bangladesh power workers take indefinite strike action

Over a thousand power workers and staff from the Barapukuria Coal Mine Company struck last Saturday over 13 demands, including payment of nine months outstanding wages. On Sunday morning workers demonstrated outside the company's main entrance which is located in Dinajpur.

Workers want permanent employment for outsourced workers, introduction of profit and gratuity bonuses, a reduced six-hour working shift for underground workers, rehabilitation of families whose homes were damaged by mine operations and employment of family members.

Union officials told the media that the employees would strike if the company did not settle workers' demands by April 26. Barapukuria Coal Mine management claimed that the coal mine was operating as usual and the strike would not impact on the power plant.

Pakistan: Visually impaired workers demonstrate in Lahore

About 30 visually impaired workers blocked a key metro track in protest against the government for refusing to make their jobs permanent and delaying a promised job quota. The workers also complained that their wages were not paid on time.

The protest, which began on Sunday, disrupted the metro bus service for at least 24 hours. The workers ignored police demands that they call off the demonstration. While the Pakistan government has promised to increase the job quota from 2 to 3 percent for visually impaired workers, it has failed to honour this pledge.

Philippines food equipment workers strike against casual employment

One hundred workers at the Middleby fast food equipment factory in Binan City began indefinite strike action on May 10 for permanent jobs. Some workers are manning a picket outside the plant while others are staging a sit-down strike inside.

The factory makes oven conveyors, fryers and tanks for major fast food companies. Of more than 300 workers at the plant, 191 are contract employees and only 82 have regular work. The plant operates 12-hour shifts with workers regularly forced to do an additional four hours of overtime.

On May 13, authorities threatened to break up the picket if it was not withdrawn. The government is fearful that the dispute will become the focal point of a broader movement throughout the Laguna economic zone.

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Brisbane brewery workers strike for seventh time

About 100 workers at the XXXX brewery in Milton, an inner-city suburb of Brisbane, struck for several hours on Wednesday afternoon as part of an ongoing dispute over a new workplace agreement. It was the seventh strike at the plant in as many weeks.

Workers are opposing attempts by Lion, which owns the plant, to cover the leave of permanent employees with casual and contract labour. Workers are fearful that the move is the first step in plans for a broader casualisation of the workforce. There are also concerns that Lion may shut the plant altogether and move production elsewhere.

The United Voice union, which covers the workers, has sought to limit the struggle to sporadic stoppages, lasting only several hours. They are calling for a meagre pay rise of just three percent per year, well below the rapidly rising cost of living. The union is also issuing impotent appeals for rugby league officials and clubs, which have business arrangements with Lion, to intervene.

Australian Capital Territory public servants threaten to strike

Public servants employed by the government in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), which includes Canberra, the national capital, have threatened strike action in an 18-month conflict over new workplace agreements.

The Health Services Union (HSU) last week applied to the Fair Work Commission to begin industrial action, potentially including stoppages. According to the HSU and other unions involved in the dispute, the ACT Labor government is only offering 2 percent annual pay rises across the sector.

The unions have held 16 discussions with the ACT government since November 2016. All of the unions involved have previously backed Labor in ACT elections.

Tasmanian casino staff vote for industrial action

Workers at Tasmania’s largest casinos, the Launceston Country Club and Wrest Point Casino in Hobart, voted overwhelmingly to take further industrial action, the United Voice union reported on May 10. The ballot is the latest development in a protracted dispute over a new workplace enterprise agreement.

Federal Group, which owns both casinos, is seeking to impose a deal that includes a pay rise of just 1.8 percent per annum, barely in line with the official rate of inflation. It is also seeking to expand casualisation, remove some redundancy provisions and institute a new roster that will result in more onerous work conditions.

Federal Group has reportedly held an exclusive license to operate all of the 8,500 poker machines in the state since 1997. The Farrell family, which controls Federal Group, has an estimated collective wealth of $463 million.

Sydney food delivery riders protest poor wages and conditions

Dozens of food delivery riders protested in Sydney last Wednesday against poverty-level pay and poor working conditions. Online food delivery services such as UberEats, Deliveroo and Foodora pay drivers as little as $7 per delivery. In most cases, they do not receive an hourly wage, meaning that they can go substantial parts of a day without making any money.

Deliveroo, Foodora and UberEats all claim the working conditions for the drivers, who are employed as independent contractors, are designed to provide “flexibility.” Drivers are not entitled to sick pay or other benefits that full-time employees receive. Nor are they compensated for the inherent risks associated with driving a bicycle in a busy city at night, and in inclement weather.

Unions NSW and the Transport Workers Union, which organised the limited protest, have not announced any further action. They are instead issuing impotent appeals for the federal Liberal-National government to impose harsher regulations on food delivery companies.

New Zealand: Auckland University students and staff protest

Students and staff at the University of Auckland protested on May 17 against the underfunding of tertiary education by the government and cuts at the university. About 1,000 people took part, blockading nearby streets. A petition signed by 4,000 was delivered to Vice-Chancellor Stuart McCutcheon, opposing a proposed restructure of library services that would result in 40 positions cut over the next year, including specialist subject librarians.

Students also protested in April by occupying the Fine Arts Library, which is being considered for closure. The latest rally coincided with the Labour Party government's announcement of its budget, which continues the underfunding of universities.

New Zealand bus drivers’ strike expands

Bus drivers in the city of Hamilton struck for two hours from 7:30 a.m. on Monday to demand better pay. This follows 16 school bus drivers striking against a pay increase just a few cents above the minimum wage, in Te Awamutu, a rural town south of Hamilton. Both Hamilton and Te Awamutu bus drivers are employed by Go Bus.

On Thursday, the strike expanded further north to Auckland, with around 70 drivers from Ritchies Murphy Transport.

First Union have reported complaints from drivers including pressure to work longer than the 5 ½ hour driving limit, a clampdown on pay rates, overtime and redundancy. Workers are also opposed to not being paid for extended periods spent at the depot between split shifts, which in effect means they are paid for only 8 of the 14 hours they work.

Industrial action by New Zealand printers

Workers at four print shops owned by the Blue Star Group have banned overtime from May 16. The ban is in response to demands from Blue Star Group made during negotiations with the E Tu union over a collective agreement which expired last year.

The company wants workers to accept shift changes without negotiation

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or face redundancy and are demanding that they reveal whether they are working a second job. Blue Star also refuses to back date any pay rises to the expiry date of the agreement. The E Tu has not put a figure on the pay increase they are negotiating.

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