

Indian port workers to walk out, 30,000 municipal workers remain on strike in Haryana state

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 May 2018

### Indian port workers to strike for higher wages

Dock workers at 12 major Indian ports, including Kandla, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, will hold a one-day strike on May 28 to demand higher wages and improved services conditions, including better pensions, back-dated to January 2017. The 12 ports handle approximately 61 percent of the country's cargo traffic.

The strike, which is being organised by the National Coordination Committee (NCC), an alliance of the major port workers' federations, is also in protest against the central government's Major Port Authorities Bill. Introduced in 2016, the cost-cutting bill will privatise existing port hospitals, and eliminated a percentage of port revenues that are used to pay allowances, provident funds, gratuity and other hard won benefits.

NCC officials have threatened indefinite strike action if the Ministry of Shipping and Indian Ports Association authorities refuse to address workers' demands.

### Tamil Nadu: Trichy rural postal workers still out

Thousands of Tamil Nadu rural postal workers in the Trichy postal region began indefinite strike action on Tuesday for a pay increase. The walkout was called by the National Federation of Postal Employees (NFPE), who told the media that 90 percent of the region's 5,000-strong postal work force were involved in the industrial action. The strike has severely impacted on postal and money order deliveries.

The postal workers want a pay increase in line with the rises recommended by the Kamalesh Chandra committee for rural postal workers. The committee has proposed a 2.5 percent increase in the monthly minimum wage to 10,000 rupees (\$US147.87) for Scale 1 workers, 12,000 rupees for Scale 2 and 14,000 for Scale 3.

The NFPE has threatened nationwide indefinite strike action from August 23 if the authorities continue to delay the outstanding increases.

### Indian sanitation workers in Haryana continue strike

More than 30,000 sanitary municipal workers in Haryana state in India remain on strike after walking out on May 9 for a pay rise and improved

working conditions. Garbage continues to pile up all over the state.

The strikers want permanency for contract workers, a 15,000-rupee minimum monthly wage for sewerage workers, implementation of free medical facilities for all contract workers, higher allowances for permanent and contract employees, and better safety equipment for sewer cleaners.

Discussions between the sanitation workers' union (Nagar Palika Karmachari Sang) in Haryana and municipal authorities remain deadlocked. The state government is using essential service regulations and recruiting strike-breakers to try and break the ongoing industrial action. Strikers have vowed to continue their action until their demands are met.

### Indian food corporation workers protest in Punjab

Food corporation workers and staff members in Jalandhar, Punjab state, held a one-day protest in the state last week over Food Corporation of India (FCI) management's refusal to pay outstanding wage increases. Food Corporation of India Employees Association (FCIEA) members wore black badges during the protest and have imposed bans on overtime.

FCIEA district chairman Gurinder Singh told the media that if management did not grant workers' demands there would be strike action from June 15 to 22. Wage increases for category III and IV employees have been outstanding since January 1, 2017.

### Pakistan: Punjab university workers demand permanent employment

Contract workers at the government-funded Punjab University demonstrated on May 18 for job permanency and in protest against a Punjab Higher Education department directive not to renew work contracts.

The measure threatens jobs of about 600 current employees at Punjab University whose contracts end in June or earlier. This is despite promises from authorities that the contract workers would be given permanent jobs. University administration has already sacked 75 contract workers.

The department alleges that the university is not complying with the official recruitment process and using this to cut jobs and slash education expenditure.

### **Tribal area health workers in Pakistan demand outstanding dues**

Workers from the state-funded Lady Health Workers (LHW) program in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) blocked the Peshawar-Torkham Highway on Monday in protest against the non-payment of dues for the past 11 months. The demonstration was called off after the authorities promised to resolve the issue before the Eidul Fitr religious holidays.

Pakistan's LHW program is mainly available to those in FATA and other rural regions where other health services are miniscule. Employees of the program, who provide vital health services to poverty-stricken regions, are among the most exploited in Pakistan. Non-payment of wages is commonplace with most of the workforce on daily wage contracts.

### **Bangladesh garment workers demand higher minimum wage**

Hundreds of Bangladesh garment workers demonstrated last Friday for immediate implementation of a 16,000 taka (\$190) minimum monthly wage, a festival allowance equal to basic salary and all wage arrears paid by next month. The protest was organised by the Garments Workers Trade Union Centre.

On January 14, the Bangladesh government established a minimum wages board to review the salaries of readymade garment workers. The current minimum wage is about 5,300 taka (\$60). Union leaders told the media there has only been one meeting since the wage board was formed and four months of deliberate delays.

### **Sri Lanka immigration officers end protests**

Sri Lanka Immigration & Emigration Officers' Association members at Bandaranayake International Airport and Colombo Sea Port held a one-day work-to-rule campaign on May 17.

Union members held a silent demonstration outside the Bandaranayake International Airport at Katunayake prior to launching the industrial action. The work bans were lifted by midnight that day after the union received a written assurance by Domestic Affairs Minister S.B. Navinna that the workers' claims will be resolved.

The workers want reestablishment of jobs cut from the service and better working conditions. Domestic Affairs Minister S.B. Navinna promised to submit workers' demands to the Sri Lankan cabinet on May 23.

### **South Korean doctors protest**

Around 7,000 doctors rallied in Seoul on May 25 against the government's "unilateral" medical care policy. The protest was called by the Korean Medical Association.

Referencing the Moon-led government, the doctors shouted slogans including: "Let's banish Moon Jai-in Care" and "The government has

come up with a delusional policy."

Doctors denounced the lack of negotiations prior to the establishment of the government's new policy and warned that it could result in real funding cuts and the deterioration of services.

### **Cambodian workers strike after union organiser fired**

About 1,000 Cambodian workers struck at the Cheng Xin Manufacturing plant in the Bati district of Takeo province on May 17. They staged a protest outside with a banner demanding that a sacked union representative be reinstated.

Som Sopheap was reportedly fired for seeking to organise a union at the factory. He had played a leading role in a campaign for improved working conditions, including for the establishment of an infirmary and lunch room, and the payment of monthly bonuses on time. The company has refused to rehire Sopheap and failed to meet any of the workers' claims.

### **Indonesia: Coca-Cola employees reject national agreement**

Workers at Coca-Cola factories in Indonesia have rejected a national collective agreement and formed a new union alliance. The new body, which is called the Coca-Cola Indonesian Workers Council and unites four unions, opposed a work agreement organised between the company and the Confederation of All Indonesian Workers' Unions (KSPSI).

Coca-Cola is reportedly refusing to recognise the new union council or reinstate two dismissed union leaders involved in its formation. The company operates 10 bottling plants and has an Indonesian workforce of around 12,000.

Company management is continuing to collaborate with the KSPSI, which was established under the Suharto military dictatorship. The national agreement is to facilitate a major restructuring operation by the giant transnational corporation, which involves layoffs and attacks on works rights and benefits.

The new alliance was established after a series of mass protests. When employers at the Semarang bottling plant struck on May Day to protest the national agreement, management operatives went to their homes and demanded that they go to the factory and work.

### **Australian bank note printers strike for pay increase**

Workers at Note Printing's Melbourne plant in Victoria struck for 24 hours on May 18, as part of a dispute over a new enterprise work agreement. Friday's action is the first time in 150 years that workers at the company have gone on strike.

The company, a wholly owned facility of the Reserve Bank of Australia, prints banknotes for 18 countries, as well as Australian passports.

The workers are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU). The union is asking for a 4 percent pay increase per annum over the three-year life of the agreement, but the company is offering only 2 percent.

The AMWU is also seeking permanency for casuals, many of whom have been employed at the company for years, a resolution of classification issues and domestic violence leave. The union is attempting

to divert widespread anger among workers into impotent appeals to management, calling for backroom negotiations with higher level Note Printing representatives.

### **New Zealand cinema workers strike**

Workers at Event, New Zealand's largest cinema chain, walked off the job at 10 p.m. on Wednesday for higher wages. The industrial action was timed to coincide with a premiere midnight screening of *Solo*, the latest instalment in the multi-billion dollar *Star Wars* film franchise.

Event operates across the country, employing around 200 staff, 50 of whom rallied outside the chain's Queen Street cinema in Auckland. The strike was organised after months of pay negotiations with the Unite Union broke down. Entry-level workers at Event earn the minimum wage whilst managing staff earn \$NZ20–\$NZ22 per hour.

The company claims the strike was unlawful and say they offered a 4 percent pay increase. The union has limited their pay demand to \$23 for managers, only a few cents higher than what Event were offering.

### **New Zealand fast food workers vote to strike**

Wendy's fast food chain workers are voting to strike after the company imposed cuts of up to 20 percent on rostered work hours.

According to Unite Union leader Mike Treen, Wendy's management are removing automatic pay rises for workers after six months' employment and refuse to give workers a 15-minute break during the first three hours of the work day.

Wendy's employees fought a three-year battle to regain days-in-lieu entitlements for working on public holidays. While the company last year was ordered by the Employment Relations Authority to repay workers for lost days-in-lieu, it has yet to do so.



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