

Uttar Pradesh childcare workers demand teachers' pay rates, Sri Lankan water supply workers strike for pay increase

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 June 2018

India: Rural childcare workers in Mohali to demand teachers' salaries

Hundreds of rural childcare (anganwadi) workers protested from May 28 until May 31 in Mohali to demand the same pay rates as teachers. The demonstration was in response to a state government directive that children above three years of age be enrolled in pre-primary classes in government schools. Anganwadi workers already act as de facto teachers for the children in the three- to six-year age group.

The protesters said the state and central Indian governments had failed to provide adequate equipment to the facilities and that the decision to merge these centres with primary schools was worsening the situation. There are 64,000 anganwadi workers in almost 27,000 centres in Punjab state. They are not paid a proper wage but just receive an honorarium payment.

Around 35 protesters, all of whom were women, fainted due to heat and fatigue during the protest.

Hundreds of striking nurses arrested in India's Chhattisgarh state

Six hundred protesting government nurses were arrested by police in Rajpur, the capital of Chhattisgarh state, on June 2. The nurses had been taking industrial action over the previous two weeks to demand a salary increase.

Two days before the arrests, Chhattisgarh's Bharatiya Janata Party state government imposed its draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) and outlawed the strike.

The government nurses, who only receive 3,500 rupees (\$US52) per month, want their wages increased to 4,600 rupees. While other government employees are paid according to 7th pay commission recommendations, the state government nurses receive less than the 6th pay commission.

Nurses called off their strike on June 4, following assurances from the state government that their demands would be met. The Indian media has failed to report what the nurses were charged with or whether they were later released.

Bangladesh coal miners end strike over unpaid wages

Over 1,000 workers and staff from Barapukuria Coal Mine returned to work on June 2 after walking out on May 13 to demand payment of nine months wages and 12 other claims. Picketing workers blocked management from entering the mine office and seven workers were injured in the first week of the strike when police attacked workers.

Workers had given management until April 26 to settle their claims. Residents of 20 nearby villages supported the strikers and also lodged a six-point log of claims.

The claims included permanent employment of outsourced workers, introduction of profit and gratuity bonuses, six-hour shifts for underground workers, rehabilitation of families whose homes were damaged due to mine operations and compensation for injured members in the form of jobs with the company.

While no precise details on the return to work are available, the strike ended after negotiations between the company, the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, mine workers and local villagers.

Bangladesh garment workers demand wages

Up to 250 protesting Ashiana Garments workers in Dhaka blocked the main road between Malibagh and North Badda on May 31 to demand unpaid wages and the Ramadan religious festival allowance. Workers said the company had not paid wages for the past three months or given any indication that they would receive the annual Ramadan allowance.

The company, which was hit by a major fire in April this year, had promised to pay outstanding wages by May 31 but when workers arrived at the plant, the doors were sealed shut.

Workers ended their protest after assurances from Bangladesh's department of labour and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association that the factory owners would pay the wages by June 2. According to its website, Ashiana Garments has an annual turnover of \$US9 million.

Sri Lankan water supply workers strike for outstanding pay rise

More than 12,000 National Water Supply and Drainage Board workers in Sri Lanka have been on strike since June 4 to demand payment of their outstanding triennial salary increments. It followed a half-day walkout late

last month.

Apart from water purification, all breakdown repairs, new water supply installations, meter readings and office work have come to a standstill. Water purification and pumping workers will join the industrial action if strikers' demands are not met.

The Water Supply Joint Trade Union Alliance, which called the strike, said that national strike action and protests have been organized for next week. On June 5, about 2000 workers demonstrated outside the Ministry of National Water Supply and Drainage in Colombo.

The workers have not received a wage increase due to be paid for January 2018. Although the water authority management agreed to a 25 percent pay increase following industrial action in January and February, the promised payments have not been received.

Two-day strike paralyses Sri Lankan postal service

Two-day strike action by 4,000 postal workers beginning on midnight June 4 paralysed national postal services this week. The workers want proper recruitment procedures and several other demands.

While workers are determined to fight, the two main unions—the Sri Lanka Postal and Telecommunication Services Union and the Joint Alliance of Postal Unions—are attempting to keep the workers divided while appealing to management for negotiations.

The walkout, which seriously impacted on Sri Lanka's main post offices, including the Colombo central postal exchange, defied the postmaster general's threats to cancel strikers' leave and impose punitive measures.

Migrant workers protest in Taiwan

About 60 migrant workers protested outside Google's Taipei 101 office in Taiwan last Sunday. The Filipino workers have accused HTC Corp, a consumer electronics company, of illegally docking their pay, including by forging agreements. They are demanding an end to the practice and an improvement of their working conditions.

The workers demonstrated outside Google's premises because in 2017, the tech monopoly bought a large stake in HTC's operations and smartphone intellectual property.

Early this year, HTC's migrant employees were pressured to sign an agreement terminating their existing contracts. Many signed under the impression that they had no choice. Others have claimed that management forged their signature on the deal.

The move has been used to reduce workers' pay to cover \$NT2,500 in monthly expenses per employee, including for food, accommodation and plane tickets. Under the previous contract, these expenses were reportedly covered by the company, without any pay decrease.

Downer Group workers strike for pay increase

Workers at Downer Group's construction and maintenance division in New South Wales (NSW) Hunter Valley and Illawarra began a three-day strike on Wednesday and have also imposed a month-long ban on overtime for a 3 percent wage rise.

Downer designs, builds and sustains assets and infrastructure facilities. Around 430 workers, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), walked off Downer projects on a number of industrial sites including coal mines, steel works, power stations and light rail construction.

Around 200 of the workers marched in Newcastle on Wednesday and others demonstrated outside BlueScope Steel in Port Kembla on NSW's South Coast.

Negotiations between the unions and Downer for a new workplace agreement have been stalled since January. The company is offering a 2.25 percent pay increase and no improvement on current conditions.

The last union agreement with Downer imposed a two-year wage freeze and cuts to site allowances and redundancy benefits.

Downer's profits are surging on the back of large infrastructure projects with the company paying some of its executives \$500,000 in bonuses.

Bureau of Meteorology workers take action over wages

A protracted campaign of limited industrial action, including rolling stoppages and bans by workers at the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) for a new enterprise work agreement and pay increase, is continuing. The previous agreement expired four years ago.

BOM management has rejected any pay increase above a government mandated 2 percent pay ceiling and wants to cut allowances for staff working in remote locations and other work conditions. It has also ruled out back-dating any wage rise effectively imposing a four-year pay freeze.

This week workers inserted messages in weather forecasts and social media posts on the Bureau's official weather channels to highlight the dispute. The messages included “#BOMonSTRIKE” and “#5yearpayfreeze” and links to a union petition.

Management responded by imposing “additional quality control,” requiring administrative checks on all social media posts before forecasts are transmitted.

Last year the Community and Public Sector Union agreed to low pay increases in retrograde work agreements across most of federal government departments.

Hunter Valley mine workers strike over safety

About 250 workers at Mach Energy's Mount Pleasant coal mine near Muswellbrook in NSW's Hunter Valley went on strike for three days on Monday after a man was injured in a rigging accident.

According to an Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) spokesman, the worker's upper-arm muscle was “torn from the bone” and he had to be taken to hospital for surgery.

The strikers were members of the AMWU, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union and the Electrical Trades Union and are employed by G&S Engineering, a contracting company.

On Wednesday G&S Engineering made an application to the Fair Work Commission, the federal industrial tribunal, seeking to have the strike declared illegal but then dropped the action.

The strike has ended but workers will not participate in any “high risk duties” until G&S establishes basic safety systems, including a first-aid office and an emergency response team.

New Zealand: Fast food workers continue Wendy's strike

Workers at the Dunedin branch of fast food restaurant chain Wendy's took strike action last weekend. It was a continuation of a strike in Wendy's stores throughout the country the previous weekend.

The strike was called after months of negotiations between Unite Union and Wendco broke down over pay and break times. Wendy's has also failed to compensate workers for days-in-lieu owed to staff for working on public holidays. Last November, Wendy's staff took the issue to the Employment Relations Authority, which ruled in favour of the workers.

Unite have limited all strike action. Unite Union organiser Sonja Mitchell told the *Otago Times*, "Ideally, we would like a living wage for all workers but we think at least the people who are responsible for opening the store and closing the store."

This would leave a majority of staff on or just above the minimum wage. The supposed "living wage" of \$20.55 is only a few dollars above the minimum wage and based on the bare necessities to survive.

New Zealand tug boat operators threaten strike

Tug masters and engineers at Port Nelson threatened to strike from yesterday 6 p.m. until 6 a.m. Monday. The notice was issued after negotiations around a collective agreement broke down.

According to the Merchant Service Guild, Port Nelson workers are on call 24 hours for 14 continuous days. The union continued negotiations with the Port Nelson company on Wednesday in an attempt to prevent the walkout.

New Zealand primary school teachers to discuss pay offer

Around 50,000 primary school teachers will begin meetings to discuss the latest government pay offer. The ministry of education has offered a pay rise of 2.2 to 2.6 percent for teachers with more than three years' experience, which is about 86 percent of the workforce, and 4.3 to 4.7 percent for newer teachers. The increases would occur every year for the next three years.

New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) members have demanded a minimum 16 percent increase. If teachers reject the government pay offer they are likely to vote in favour of strike action.

The first teachers' meeting will be on June 18 in Manukau. While the union is calling for teachers to reject the offer, it heavily promoted Labour during the 2017 election and after it formed government, claiming teachers would get better pay.



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