

Delhi Metro rail threatened with India's essential services laws;  
New Zealand teachers vote in favour of strike

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 July 2018

### India: Delhi railway workers' strike deferred

Planned strike action on July 2 by thousands of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) staff for better pay and improved working conditions was deferred late last week after they were threatened with the Essential Services Maintenance Act.

The workers had been holding protests at various DMRC depots and control rooms since June 19. They are demanding higher wages, payment of arrears, fixed guidelines if management wants to sack any employee and the right to form a union.

The 9,000 non-executive workers, including train operators, station controllers, technicians, maintenance and operations staff, threatened industrial action last year over the same issues. The workers are currently members of a staff council and want to establish a DMRC employees' union. The high court was due to meet on July 6 over the dispute.

### India: Ambulance workers in Himachal Pradesh end strike

The "108" ambulance workers' union called off state-wide strike action on July 4, after walking out on June 28 to demand a 20,000-rupee (\$US291) monthly salary and a fixed eight-hour working day. The ambulance workers are employed by the privately owned GVK Emergency Management and Research Institute.

The industrial action by about 1,000 drivers and medical technicians was in defiance of the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act, which had been declared in 11 out of 12 districts in the state. Workers said they were not government employees and that the ESMA was not applicable to private workers.

Union officials, however, have been involved in ongoing discussions with GVK Emergency Management and Research Institute management. The media has published no recent details on the outcome of the dispute.

### Indian Metal and Ferro Alloy workers end industrial action in Orissa

Indian Metal and Ferro Alloys (IMFA) workers in Orissa state ended an indefinite strike on June 29 after a tripartite meeting involving the District Collector, IMFA management and workers' representatives. IMFA is one

of India's leading ferro-alloy companies. There is no union at the Orissa facility.

Workers walked out on June 27, locked the front gates and maintained a sit-down protest outside the plant during the dispute. Their long-outstanding demands included the provision of a minimum wage, bonuses and other dues, drinking water facilities, rest rooms for women workers and other improvements in conditions.

Workers were told that the company had provided a written assurance that most of their demands would be granted within three months.

### Pakistan: Forest and wildlife workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demand outstanding pay

Forest and Wildlife Department workers in the Chitral district are holding a hunger protest to demand nine months' outstanding wages and payment for seed collection. The hunger strike entered its seventh day on Tuesday. Four workers were hospitalised on June 30 after fainting at the protest camp.

Forestry and Wildlife Department management have refused to hold any negotiations with the protestors and falsely accused the workers of being unproductive. Pakistan governments constantly delay the payments of wages and dues to workers at state-funded entities.

### Cambodian construction workers strike over unpaid wages

Construction workers stopped work and staged a protest on Tuesday on a building site in Bavet in Cambodia's Svay Rieng province last Tuesday.

The 70 workers said they had been brought to the site by a labour-hire agency in March and had not received any pay in the four months since. The agency allegedly owes them almost \$A32,000. Workers said the owner of the construction site had paid the agency but that they have not passed on the wages and may have since fled the country.

Similar incidents have reportedly taken place at other construction sites. Workers in the industry have no legally-mandated minimum wage, limited safety protection and are unable to access benefits from the National Social Security Fund.

## **Queensland: Aurizon rail operators begin stoppages as union tries to contain anger over job and wage cuts**

About 60 workers at rail freight company Aurizon's control room in the central Queensland regional city of Rockhampton began stoppages and work bans last Thursday morning, potentially halting coal shipments across the state.

After nine months of negotiation with the management over a new enterprise agreement collapsed, the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) authorised the limited action to try to head off wider anger among Aurizon workers.

With several Aurizon enterprise agreements coming up for renegotiation this year, the company has deepened its six-year offensive against workers. It is demanding further cuts to wages and conditions to "better align to competitors and industry." Management has given the workers until Monday to vote on a package that includes annual pay rises of 2 percent for four years—well below cost of living rises.

The RTBU has enforced cuts in conditions and the destruction of thousands of jobs and conditions since 2010, when the previous state Labor government sold the state-owned freight carrier Queensland Rail to Aurizon. In 2015, the company abruptly terminated a "legacy" agreement for train crew, a precedent that other employers followed.

The RTBU made clear its reluctance to call the current stoppages. RTBU state president Bruce Mackie blamed Aurizon for "walking away from the negotiating table." The first stoppage period coincided with a scheduled maintenance shutdown, reducing the impact on the company. Aurizon said it was ready to use strike-breakers.

Last year, the RTBU and other trade unions suppressed opposition after Aurizon, Australia's largest rail freight operator, announced the closure of its maintenance workshops in Rockhampton, as part of a broader restructure that threatened to eliminate more than 300 jobs.

## **Maintenance workers strike at Tullamarine Airport in Melbourne**

Workers employed by Schneider Electric to carry out maintenance at Melbourne airport struck for eight hours on Monday in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. They returned the next day but are refusing to work overtime. The company is a European multinational employing 130,000 people in over 100 countries.

Schneider Electric wants to introduce a two-tier system with new employees hired at a substantially lower wage rate. The company is also demanding workers accept a 40-hour week compared with the current 38 hours.

According to the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), the workers have not had a pay rise in four years and the company's proposals will see new staff paid 37 percent less than current employees. The workers, who are highly skilled, service and maintain the extensive heating and cooling systems at the largest airport in the country.

## **Australian unions end industrial action at Downer**

A campaign of industrial action by workers at Downer Group's New South Wales (NSW) construction and maintenance division was called off this week after unions struck an in-principle work agreement.

The 400 workers, employed on various projects across the NSW Hunter

Valley and Illawarra regions, are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). They walked out on strike for three days early last month and then began rolling stoppages and an overtime ban after negotiations for a new enterprise work agreement stalled.

The unions were seeking a meagre 3 percent annual pay increase over four years. The company originally offered only 2.25 percent and no improvement in working conditions. The new in-principle agreement delivers a pay rise of just 2.5 percent. This barely keeps pace with inflation and does not make up for the two-year wage freeze and loss of allowances and working conditions agreed to by the unions in the last enterprise deal.

## **New Zealand primary school teachers vote in favour of strike**

The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) confirmed on Tuesday that an "overwhelming majority" of primary school teachers voted in favour of taking strike action on August 15. The union represents around 27,000 primary school teachers. This will be the first primary teachers' strike since 1994.

Teachers have rejected a pay increase from the government, which in most cases would amount to only 2.2 to 2.6 percent a year for three years. NZEI has limited the strike to a half-day from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Teachers called for a full-day strike during union meetings to discuss the strike, arguing that a half-day did not "send a strong enough message." This forced the union to call for an electronic vote to extend the strike at the beginning of the next school term.

## **New Zealand supermarket workers picket in Hastings**

Over 50 workers at the Pak'nSave supermarket in Hastings picketed the outlet last Saturday after negotiations with the store owner broke down. The demonstration followed a strike on June 16. Mike McNab of the First Union said the supermarket was refusing to give the workers a pay rise above the minimum wage.

Pak'nSave is one of the biggest supermarket chains in the country, with 57 stores nationwide. However, McNab said the strike was only targeted at this specific branch.

## **New Zealand: Farmers department store workers strike**

Hundreds of retail workers for the Farmers department store went on strike on Thursday, after 93 percent of the workers rejected a pay offer. Farmers is one of the oldest retail chains in the country and has 59 stores in New Zealand.

Most workers at Farmers are paid between \$16.50, the minimum wage, and \$17.50. Over 600 workers signed a petition demanding they be paid the "living wage" calculated at \$20.55. First Union says 80 percent of Farmers workers are paid less than the living wage.

Workers are also striking over unfair pay reviews. The union says 60 to 70 percent of workers are graded a C or lower in the pay review system so the company does not have to give them a pay rise.

## Accident compensation medical advisors to strike in New Zealand

Medical advisors for New Zealand's state-owned Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) are striking against low pay and poor working conditions. Rolling strikes will commence on July 17 and run for four hours a day, on a different day each week, for five weeks.

The Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) has been in negotiations with the company since November. It says workers are demanding a 1 percent pay rise, a redundancy agreement that matches other ACC staff, and a statement in the collective agreement about staff well-being.



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