

Indian electricity workers on strike in Madhya Pradesh; Indonesian motorcycle taxi drivers threaten mass strike action

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

21 July 2018

India: Sanitation workers strike in Punjab

Sanitation workers in Punjab state walked out on strike for two days on July 17 to demand on time payment of wages and an end to the contract labour system. They also called for a pension scheme, permanent jobs for all temporary workers and a 1,000-rupee (\$14.50) allowance.

The strike was called by Punjab Municipal Workers Committee and involved members of the Sanitation Workers Union. About 800 workers protested outside the Bathinda municipal corporation office in southern Punjab chanting slogans against the state government.

The strike had a major impact across the state with uncollected garbage piling up on roadsides. In Bathinda heavy rain pushed garbage into sewerage pipes, causing blockages in parts of the city.

Sanitation workers in India have been protesting for years for better working conditions and an end to the contract labour system.

demands include permanent jobs for all temporary workers employed for more than three weeks, equal pay rates and benefits to all employees, and implementation of the seventh pay commission ruling.

Strike was called by the Madhya Pradesh Electricity Outsourced Workers Association. The workers are employed by about 30 private contracting companies for six government-owned electricity companies. Strikers have maintained a three-week protest at a site in Tower Chowk.

Manoj Bhargava, state convenor of the union, told the media said that the 45,000 outsourced employees performed dangerous work but were only paid 6,000 and 8,000 rupees per month. Workers with up to 12 years' service were deprived of decent salaries, he said, and pointed out that the Indian government and a few state governments paid 18,000 rupees per month to employees doing in the same work.

In April 2017, more than 20,000 workers from all of Madhya Pradesh state's power distribution companies struck work over the same demands. Workers also held state-wide demonstrations in October against the state government's moves to fully privatise electricity.

Punjab bus drivers demand permanent jobs for contract workers

Drivers for the state-funded bus company in the Indian state of Punjab began a three-day strike on July 16 to demand an end to the existing contracting system and implementation of Supreme Court guidelines for equal wages for equal work.

The walkout was organised by called by the Punjab Roadway Punbus Contractor Workers Union. The strikers also want the driving permits of 12,210 private buses cancelled as ordered by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. While workers have struck six times this year over these demands the state's transport minister has ignored their appeals.

A Punjab Roadway Punbus Contractor Workers Union official told the media that the transport minister claimed that Punjab Roadways' employees were "not registered workers" but labourers. The striking workers demanded that government and bus authorities meet with the union and resolve all outstanding demands.

Hundreds of truck and motorcycle drivers protest in Taiwan

On Sunday, over 500 trucks and motorcycles formed a procession blocking roads and ending at the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) in Taipei. They were protesting laws that tighten emission regulations on vehicles.

New Air Pollution Control Act allows the EPA to introduce more stringent emission standards for cars that are more than 10 years old. This includes barring them from service and forcing workers to replace vehicles, largely out of their own pockets. Those hit hardest are contractors with precarious work arrangements.

Workers pointed to the hypocrisy of the government taking measures against drivers while doing nothing to crack-down on the pollution of the major corporations. They shouted slogans such as "We do not want air pollution, but we want comprehensive measures [to combat it]" and "Stop taking action against small civilians."

India: Madhya Pradesh electricity workers continue indefinite strike

Thousands of Madhya Pradesh outsourced electricity workers remain on strike after walking out on June 25 over a 15-point log of claims. Their

Migrant workers protest in Taiwan

Over 30 members of the Taiwan International Workers' Association

gathered outside the Taipei Railway Station on Sunday to demand equal labor rights for migrant workers. The protesters called on the government to acknowledge a petition which asks for the repeal of amendments passed in the Labor Standards Act, which took effect on March 1. They are hoping that it will take prominent place during the local elections of November.

The new laws allow employers to force migrant employees to work 12 continuous days, with only 8 hours of rest between each two shifts. They also raised the cap on overtime to 54 hours per month from 46.

Millions of Indonesian motorcycle taxi drivers threaten to strike

Up to two million motorcycle taxi drivers in the Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Palembang have threatened to disrupt the Asian Games sporting competition in mid-August with stoppages and protests, if their demands are not met.

The impoverished drivers are employed on a piecework basis by ride-sharing apps Go-Jek and Grab. They are calling for greater minimum fees for drivers, and the introduction of legal protections in the precarious and seasonally-driven industry.

Drivers are currently paid on average as little as 12 US cents per kilometre driven with a passenger in the traffic-jammed streets of Indonesia's major cities.

Cambodian garment workers end strike

Over 1,000 garment workers at You Li International, in Cambodia's Bavet city, ended a week-long strike and rally outside the factory on Thursday.

Workers opposed a company productivity drive which included shorter deadlines and increasingly intolerable working conditions. Management had said that workers who did not meet their monthly targets would be sanctioned. Pregnant women were being made to work the same hours as other employees.

The workers were also demanding a wage increase but the company refused. The provincial labor department, however, claims that workers' demands for an end to the productivity drive were agreed to by the company.

Bus drivers take further industrial action in Victoria

Bus drivers employed by the private transport company CDC Victoria took further industrial action in Melbourne and key regional cities, including Ballarat and Geelong, on Thursday, in opposition to demands for effective wage reductions and further cuts to conditions. The action involved CDC Victoria employees refusing to collect fares for passengers. It followed earlier 24-hour strikes on July 10 and 13.

The global company has offered a paltry wage rise of just 2.5 percent per annum, well below the rapidly rising cost of living.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), which covers the employees, has called for a meagre 4 percent pay increase per year. Neither the union or the company has proposed any remedy to the issues cited by drivers, including long shift times, stressful work situations and health and safety

issues.

The TWU called off a possible 24-hour stoppage yesterday, in a signal that it is prepared to push through yet another sell-out deal.

New South Wales track maintenance workers to strike on Monday

Maintenance workers at the federal government-owned Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) will strike on Monday in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The 24-hour walkout—from 3 a.m. Monday—will involve 180 Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members across New South Wales, and follows a five-hour stoppage last week.

ARTC has only offered an annual 2.65 percent increase but refuses to improve conditions or provide adequate living-away-from-home allowances.

The workers spend long periods away from home maintaining tracks in regional and remote areas but were not being adequately compensated. Negotiations over a new enterprise deal have dragged on for 18 months. Management has also refused to back-date its pay offer.

Australian meatworkers union agrees to compulsory Saturday overtime

The Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU) has brokered an in-principle agreement covering workers at the JBS processing plant in the rural town of Scone in New South Wales. The workers walked off the job for two hours last week and imposed an overtime ban in opposition to the company's demands for a new work roster. The changes would force employees to work overtime on Saturday at least 13 times a year. Currently Saturday overtime is voluntary.

The union claimed that during negotiations after last week's stop work that the company had "substantially moved forward on its initial offer, as well as backing away from their attempt to take control of workers weekends and family time." Under the union-brokered deal, however, employees would be required to work compulsory overtime 10 Saturdays a year.

The agreement also includes a 13.5 percent wage increase over four years and a \$300 one-off bonus. The pay rise will barely keep up with the rapidly rising cost of living. It is a sop to get workers to endorse the agreement, in a ballot to be held over coming weeks.

JBS is a global meat processing company that employs around 260,000 workers in 17 countries. It purchased the Scone processing facility from Primo Smallgoods in 2015.

New Zealand: ACC medical advisers strike

Thirty-nine senior doctors serving as medical advisers at state-owned health insurer Accident and Compensation Corporation (ACC) walked off the job on Tuesday after failed pay negotiations. The industrial action follows last week's 24-hour strike by 30,000 nurses and healthcare workers.

The Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) have been in negotiations for a one percent pay increase, redundancy provisions matching other ACC staff, and a statement in their collective agreement

acknowledging health and safety.

The ASMS have prolonged the negotiations since last November, and limited the strike on Tuesday to four hours, from 8 a.m. to midday.



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