

Three thousand emergency workers strike in India; 29,000 primary school teachers vote on pay offer in New Zealand

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 September 2018

India: Goa miners protests over retrenchments

Around 300 United Mine Workers' Union members demonstrated on September 11 outside the Chowgule Mining Company's offices at Mormugao Harbour over retrenchment of 350 workers. The iron ore miners have warned that there will be an indefinite strike if the company does not withdraw the sackings.

One miner told the media that they were retrenched from the company's Shigao mines on July 24 and face worsening financial difficulties.

Chowgule, which mines about 3.5 million tons of iron ore per year, is one of several private mines in Goa, including Vedanta, Fomento Resources, VM Salgaocar and other companies, that were shut down after an Indian Supreme Court ruling in February. The court ruled that they were operating illegally.

United Mine Workers' Union leaders said that the company could easily pay salaries of their workers from the two or three shipments it had processed after the February court order.

Three thousand emergency workers strike in Assam

GVK (EMRI) emergency and ambulance workers in Assam remain on strike after walking off on September 11 in protest over the company's refusal to comply with labor laws, non-payment of annual pay increments and benefits since 2015–16 and other demands. The strikers have not received any response from the Assam state government or GVK (EMRI) management.

About 3,000 employees who are members of the All Assam 108 Mrityunjoy Employees Association are involved in the strike, which has crippled emergency medical transportation services across the state. The company claims the protest is "illegal" and has started hiring strike breakers for its call centre and field operations.

Hundreds of strikers staged a sit down protest this week carrying placards and shouting slogans denouncing the company. They have pledged not to return to work unless management holds talks with the union and provides a written assurance that it will grant the workers' demands.

India: Two thousand daily wage engineering workers strike in

Kashmir

Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department daily wage workers in Kathua, Kashmir are on strike to demand permanent jobs and payment of 52 months of unpaid wages. The walkout was organised by the All Jammu and Kashmir PHE trained workers association and involves 2,000 workers.

While the PHE department is attempting to run over 250 pumping stations in Kathua district with the temporary workers, the strike has seriously impacted on water supplies.

On September 11 workers held a protest rally at the divisional headquarters in Jammu. One striker told the media that salaries had been withheld for past 18 months. Another daily wage worker said: "We have only one thing to ask for. Fulfil our demands. We can't live like this. We have families to run and are unable to make our ends meet."

India: Hyderabad municipal workers launched a strike

Over 14,000 workers from Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) walked out on September 5 and protested to demand permanency for 27,000 contract worker jobs and for 1,500 temporary employees. They chanted "Equal pay for equal work" in a demonstration outside GHMC offices.

The strikers denounced the local government, claiming it had not delivered on promises. Organised by the Greater Hyderabad Employees Union, the strike crippled municipal services.

Mysore University sanitation workers strike in India

Around 200 Mysore University sanitation workers walked out on September 3 to demand payment of the state's minimum wage and access to the provident fund, which is deducted from their salaries. Some of the workers have been employed at the university for up to twenty years.

While university management threatened to introduce a contract system and sack the protesting employees, the striking workers were supported by a section of students and the academic staff.

Bangladesh tea estate workers demand pay rise

Several thousand temporary workers from 15 tea gardens in Sreemangal Upazila in Sylhet held a one-day strike on September 6 to demand the same pay as permanent employees.

The tea estate owners are supposed to increase wages every year. The last pay rise was three years ago.

While temporary and permanent workers were previously paid 85 taka (\$US1) per day, the estate owners would only agree to increase permanent employees' daily wage to 102 taka. The strike ended after estate management agreed to pay the temporary workers the same daily wage.

Pakistan: Punjab brick-kiln workers protest for minimum wage

Brick-kiln workers in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab province, demonstrated for the fourth consecutive day on Monday as part of their protracted struggle for payment of the mandated minimum wage of 1,100 rupees for 1,000 bricks (\$8.94).

The protestors also demanded the implementation of the Child Labour Act 2016 at the kilns. The Toba Tek Singh kilns are notorious for the use of child and young labour and in extremely dangerous work. The government has also failed to provide the mandated allowance of 4,000 rupees for the education of children. Toba Tek Singh is home to over 130 kilns but proper employee records, including of children, are not maintained.

A demonstration was held outside the Labour Welfare Department and an effigy of the department's assistant director burnt to protest his failure to implement the mandated minimum wage.

The Bhatta Mazdoor Union, which called the demonstration, warned that the protest would continue indefinitely until their demands are met. Kiln owners refuse to provide the minimum wage and continue to pay 700 to 800 rupees per 1,000 bricks.

Pakistan: Sindh coal workers demand unpaid wages

Sindh Energy Department employees on its underground coal gasification project in Mithi demonstrated on Tuesday outside the Thar Press Club to demand payment three months' outstanding wages and benefits to 450 workers.

The workers have been involved in the project for eight years. The Pakistan government, whose economic policies are dictated by the International Monetary Fund, frequently delays payments to direct employees and government contract workers.

First-ever strike in Philippines call centre industry

On Monday, a union covering workers at Alorica company's West Contract Services call centre in Manila announced it had called a strike after registering a dispute with national authorities.

The conflict began over the company's plan to relocate from its Pasay site to Makati in another part of Manila. The company has refused to assist with relocation and transport costs or to recognise the union. The

Unified Employees of Alorica union says 200 workers have been forced to resign.

If the strike goes ahead as scheduled it will be the first strike in the Philippines Business Processing Outsourcing sector, which is often described as the call centre capital of the world. The sector employs 1.2 million people and has annual revenues of \$US22 billion.

Western Australian Alcoa workers remain on strike

Around 1,500 workers at Alcoa's aluminium refineries and bauxite mines in Western Australia (WA) remain on strike in a protracted dispute over a new enterprise work agreement.

Last week, the workers, who have been on strike since August 8, overwhelmingly rejected a company offer because it fails to address concerns over job security.

An application by Alcoa to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to allow the giant corporation to terminate the existing work agreement, is being heard this week. Workers could be forced back onto the base industry award, leading to major reductions in pay and working conditions.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) has sought to isolate the dispute to Alcoa's WA operations. It has not called any industrial action by workers at the company's other facilities and plants nationally. Statements by union officials have made clear they will invoke the threat of the FWC terminating the agreement, to try and end the strike and push through a sell-out deal.

Busways drivers stop work over pay in Sydney

Drivers for private transport operator Busways stopped work at five Sydney depots and attended meetings last week in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement.

The drivers had voted overwhelmingly to support industrial action, including one-hour stoppages, overtime bans, bans on refuelling vehicles and fare-free days on some routes.

The drivers' enterprise agreement expired in 2017 and there has been no pay rise since then. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) has called for a 4 percent increase, but the company has offered only half of that amount.

The TWU has restricted opposition to limited stoppages to minimise disruption and is appealing to the company to return to negotiations and come to a "fair and respectful deal" to prevent further industrial action.

South Australian prison officers oppose privatisation

Prison officers and other corrective services workers from five prisons in South Australia went on strike this week in opposition to the Liberal state government's plan to privatise the Adelaide Remand Centre.

Hundreds of officers and their supporters also demonstrated outside the state parliament and the remand centre. They are concerned that the handing over of the Adelaide Remand Centre to a private operator is a step towards the privatisation of the state's prisons. The previous state Labor government outsourced the management and operation of the Mount Gambier prison to a private company in 2009.

Thousands of New Zealand primary school teachers vote on new pay offer

Primary school teachers across the country will vote online next week on a new pay offer from the ministry of education. A previous offer was rejected, and a 24-hour strike involving around 29,000 teachers was held on August 15.

The new contract is almost identical to the previous offer and does not address the teachers' concerns. The previous pay offer was a 2.2 to 2.6 percent increase for three years for a majority of teachers. The new offer is now a 3 percent increase for three years. There is no extra funding for children with additional learning needs, and no provisions to reduce workloads or class sizes.

Teachers have asked for at least 16 percent over two years and measures to drastically improve working conditions and teaching resources, in order to help fill a massive teacher shortage.

A New Zealand Educators Institute (NZEI) press release on September 11 said it was "not making any recommendation" over how its members should vote. This dispute follows a bitter struggle between health workers and the New Zealand Nurses Organisation, which pressured its members to accept a sell-out deal. There was widespread anger from health workers throughout social media and threats from many to quit the union.

Miners strike in Waihi, New Zealand

Ninety miners at Waihi's OceanaGold held a 48-hour strike starting last Saturday evening. The workers were striking in a bid to improve their wages and conditions.

According to E Tu organiser Myles Leeson, the company is very profitable and recently uncovered nearly seven times more gold than expected in a new field. The company refuses to offer more than a two percent increase.

The union has already sold out its members by pushing through a new roster which curbs excessive hours but at the extraordinary cost of up to a 19 percent reduction in wages. In a September 8 press release announcing the strike, the union claimed its members are "comfortable" accepting the roster.

Third strike by New Zealand pallet workers

Around 50 workers at CHEP's pallet plant in Christchurch are striking for the third week in a row. The strike was announced on Wednesday and will continue through to Sunday.

The workers are striking because of extremely low wages. Most CHEP workers earn between \$17 and \$18 an hour and their starting rate is only 6 cents above the minimum wage of \$16.50. Workers in the Christchurch plant are also paid much less than their counterparts at the company's Auckland plant.

According to First Union, there is public support for the workers, who were sent food parcels and donations. However, the union is only negotiating a \$1.50 wage increase, which they admit would not even match the Auckland plant.

New Zealand supermarket workers strike in Whakatane

Around 30 workers at the Pak'nSave supermarket in Whakatane held a strike on Wednesday and picketed the store for two hours.

Pak'nSave is one of New Zealand's largest supermarket chains with 57 stores nationwide. Most of the staff are paid only minimum wage of \$16.50 an hour. Supervisors are paid only about 50 cents above this.

First Union says the Whakatane branch pays its workers less than most other Pak'nSave branches. However, in July, Pak'nSave workers in Hastings, also members of First Union, held a strike because they also are paid only the minimum wage.

Inland Revenue Department pay dispute ends in New Zealand

Following three, two-hour strikes by thousands of Inland Revenue Department (IRD) workers, the Public Services Association (PSA) have announced that a new pay deal has been ratified by its members.

A press release from the union September 10 is scant on details but confirms that the IRD have not agreed to an "across the board" pay increase. The PSA's national secretary Erin Polaczuk says that one-in-four IRD workers earn less than \$48,000 a year, but has not said how much the new collective agreement improves this situation, if at all.

The PSA statement also notes that the contract only lasts 14 months, and anticipates that workers will make more stringent demands during the next round of negotiations.



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