

Rajasthan bus drivers strike in India; New Zealand Ministry of Justice workers walkout

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 September 2018

India: Rajasthan bus drivers walk out demanding salary regulations

Around 4,500 Rajasthan state buses ground to a halt at midnight September 16 after transport corporation employees began a 24-hour strike for higher pay and other demands. The Rajasthan Roadways Workers' Union called the walkout following fruitless negotiations with the state transport minister.

An estimated one million commuters were impacted by the strike, which also saw drivers protest at various bus stations across the state. One striker told the media that drivers had not received salaries for the past three months and were demanding the government immediately implement the seventh pay panel's pay rise recommendations. The union has threatened future action if the government does not grant workers' demands.

Haryana Roadways unions oppose privatisation

Members of Haryana Roadways employees' unions were due to hold a 24-hour hunger strike and protests on September 20 and 21 in protest against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led state government's decision to allow 700 private buses to operate in the state. The Haryana Transport Department admitted that the strike would impact on 1.25 million workers.

Late last month the state government imposed the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) to stop a planned one-day strike on September 5. Police arrested union officials in pre-dawn raids at several bus depots.

Transport workers have denounced the police attacks, demanded the government lift the ESMA, lift the suspensions of targeted workers and withdraw police charges.

Delhi sanitation workers strike

Hundreds of sanitation workers employed by Delhi city's municipal corporations struck work on September 12 in protest over delayed wages and other outstanding payments, and for job permanency and cashless medical cards. Workers rallied outside the chief minister's residence.

One union official told the media: "Every time we raise our demands,

they pacify us and hand us a lollipop. This time we are not going to budge." The unions have threatened to intensify protests and demonstrations.

Pakistan coal workers continue fight for unpaid wages and permanent jobs

Sindh Energy Department employees at its underground coal gasification project in Mithi are continuing their struggle for unpaid wages and permanent jobs, rejecting excuses of the local government minister for the issues.

Despite continued services for last eight years, 450 workers have not been paid for past three months while they have been kept on a contract basis. Workers rejected a provincial government cabinet minister's attempts to blame the federal government for the non-payment of wages.

Punjab brick-kiln workers end protests in Pakistan

Brick-kiln workers in Toba Tek Singh district, Punjab province, ended an 11-day sit-down demonstration on September 18 to demand payment of the legally mandated minimum wage. The decision to call off the protest was made by the Bhatta Mazdoor Union after negotiations with the Pakistan's Labour Welfare Department.

Owners of about 130 kilns in the district have flatly refused to pay the mandated minimum of 1,100 rupees for 1,000 bricks (\$8.91) in the face of ongoing protests and demonstrations by kiln workers.

Despite repeated promises to act against the kiln bosses, department and other government institutions have done nothing to stop the super-exploitation of workers and child labourers in particular by Toba Tek Singh owners and their counterparts across Punjab.

The department had agreed to assist kiln workers' families to send their children to school but protesting workers said that an agreed 4,000-rupee education allowance has not been paid.

The government is currently considering closing kilns for a two-month period in order to reduce dangerous smog caused by the burning of coal in kilns. The government, however, has made no proposal for compensating the laid off kiln workers or miners, who are equally exploited, during the shutdown.

Bangladesh jute mill workers demand outstanding wages

Hundreds of jute mill workers from nine state-owned jute mills in Khulna and Jessore held a protest march and rally on September 13 to call for the establishment of a wage commission, payment of outstanding wages and six other demands. A worker employed at the Crescent Jute Mills over the last 30 years told the media that he could not remember the last time he received regular payment of his wages.

Last week's protest followed a meeting on August 8 between workers' representatives—the Bangladesh Jute Mill CBA and non-CBA coordination council leadership—and the state jute minister and the mill owners.

Sri Lankan development officers strike for higher pay

More than 100,000 development officers in government institutions held a one-day strike on September 12 to call for higher wages and other demands. Around 3,000 workers staged a protest rally in Colombo.

The industrial action was called by the Development Officers Service Association and the Graduate Employees Association. The unions' main demand was for monthly salaries to be increased from 31,490 rupees to 34,605 rupees (\$US208).

The development officers also called for permanent recruitment and employment of qualified workers, increased travel payments for the field workers and other demands.

Taiwan drivers protest air pollution amendment

Scores of drivers protested in Taipei on Friday against an amendment to the Air Pollution Control Act that gives the Taiwan Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) the right to tighten emission standards for large goods vehicles aged 10 years or more. The amendment places the onus for improving older vehicles on the workers themselves.

Protesters parked about 100 vehicles on the corner of Ketagalan Boulevard and Zhongshan S Road, where they held signs saying that the government was “destroying their livelihoods” and “forcibly scrapping vehicles.”

Australian train manufacturing workers walk out over pay

Around 250 manufacturing workers at Downer EDI's train manufacturing facility in Maryborough, Queensland went on strike last Monday for three days in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The action follows a stop work meeting at the plant last month.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, which covers the workers, wants a marginal pay rise and has called on the company to abandon plans to cut workers' personal leave entitlements.

Downer EDI builds trains in partnership with Canadian transportation manufacturing giant Bombardier. In 2016, the joint venture was awarded \$511 million by the Western Australian government to build and maintain

New Zealand justice workers strike

Courts throughout the country closed for two hours on Wednesday after nearly 2,000 Ministry of Justice workers went on strike. The ministry had offered a 5 percent pay rise over two years but the Public Services Association (PSA) says workers want at least 13 percent. The strikers included court registry officers, court reporters, victim advisors and family court coordinators.

The PSA has focused the campaign on “closing the gender gap,” declaring that the strike was to primarily increase the wages for female staff who earn on average 15 percent less than male staff. Pay negotiations have been dragged out for months.

The union limited this week's strike to just two hours, like the industrial action taken by workers at the Inland Revenue Department and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

While the Inland Revenue workers' pay dispute was settled recently, the PSA has not released full details but admitted that it did not raise wages “across the board.”

New Zealand gold miners hold second strike

Ninety miners at OceanaGold in Waihi unanimously endorsed a second 48-hour walkout and struck from Saturday morning through to Monday morning last weekend. The workers have rejected the company's 2.2 percent pay rise offer and demanded at least 4 percent.

The E t? union will resume negotiations with the mine on September 27. A September 14 press release by organiser Myles Leeson said that the union was hoping to negotiate “a realistic pay rise.” The company made a record \$172 million profit last year.

Almost 900 New Zealand steel workers strike

Around 750 workers at BlueScope's NZ Steel mill at Glenbrook struck for 12 hours on Wednesday. They were joined by 120 workers from Pacific Steel's rolling and wire mills, also owned by BlueScope, who walked out for 24 hours. It was the second 24-hour strike this year by workers at Pacific Steel. BlueScope workers in Australia also began rolling strikes earlier in the month.

The global corporation reported profits of over \$1.7 billion this year, an 80 percent increase. This was achieved partially by freezing wages, which workers accepted after the company threatened to close its Port Kembla plant in Australia in 2015. In the past two years, the steel workers have only had a one percent increase and have given up bonuses.

Tahitian unions strike over government attacks on pensions

Five unions in the French-Polynesian island of Tahiti called a general strike on Wednesday to protest planned pension reforms, including lifting

the retirement age from 60 to 62 by 2023. Workers from both private and public sectors participated in the walkout.

The government amended its planned reforms after a general strike in March which coincided with a rally of around 4,000 on the third day of the strike. Thousands forced their way into the government assembly which quickly decided to delay a vote on the reforms for a month.

The unions limited the latest strike, foregoing marches or demonstrations after President Edouard Fritch said the reforms had to be pushed through in order to avoid a financial collapse.

Public sector workers strike in Wallis and Futuna

A strike began early last week involving top administrators on the French territory islands of Wallis and Futuna. The walkout was joined by firefighters on Tuesday. The small Pacific islands are an extremely remote with a population of less than 12,000. The workers walked out over working conditions and concerns over budget cuts.



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