

Indian police arrest 600 striking Yamaha workers; Pakistan teachers, municipal employees and other workers demonstrate for unpaid wages

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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India: Police arrest 600 protesting Yamaha workers

Police arrested around 600 demonstrating Yamaha India workers on October 2 during a protest outside the Kancheepuram bus terminus. The arrested workers were detained at a nearby hall. The demonstrations erupted after the company, a major two-wheeler manufacturer, sacked two workers for their involvement in union activities.

More than 750 Yamaha India employees began an indefinite strike and occupation of the plant on September 21 to demand the two workers be reinstated. The two workers had led the struggle to establish a new union, the Yamaha Motor Thozhilalar Sangham (India Motor Workers Association). The union is linked to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) and its Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

On September 26, police attacked the striking Yamaha workers as well as 1,300 Royal Enfield workers, who had walked out on September 24 and occupied their plant to demand a wage rise. Police violently broke up the occupation and ejected the auto workers from their respective plants. Both of the manufacturing facilities are located in Tamil Nadu's Oragadam special economic zone, near Chennai, the state capital.

Tamil Nadu sanitary workers protest for better compensation

On October 2, hundreds of contracted sanitary workers in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, held a sit-down protest blocking the Collectors Office to demand compensation for a fellow worker who was accidentally killed collecting garbage on September 28.

The sanitation workers also demanded abolition of contract employment and strong action against the contracting company who employed the dead worker. They also denounced company officials who failed to ensure the seriously injured man was given proper medical treatment. Protesters alleged that the officials had not even bothered to listen to workers' demands until three days after the incident.

Pakistan teachers, municipal workers and others demand unpaid wages and benefits

Protests have erupted across Pakistan over the non-payment of wages and other benefits because the federal, state and local governments have failed to provide the necessary funds.

On September 28, teachers at government schools in Karachi demonstrated to demand the immediate payment of five months' outstanding wages and benefits. About 1,500 teachers in the city have been impacted by the non-payment. According to the National Testing Service Teachers Ittehad, the union which organised the protest, the affected teachers were only recently given permanent jobs by the Sindh state government after a protracted industrial struggle.

Social austerity measures by the Sindh government have also affected workers running more than 450 reverse osmosis water treatment plants in the Thar district. Plant operations have been outsourced to a private firm but workers blamed the government for not paying the private firm. The osmosis water treatment workers have threatened to expand their protests and shut down the plant if the payments are not made.

On Monday, Municipal Committee Parachinar employees demonstrated in Peshawar denouncing the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa state government for not paying outstanding wages and other payments in the past three years.

Pakistan miners demand better safety and working conditions

Hundreds of miners demonstrated in cities throughout Pakistan last week for better working conditions and the implementation of modern safety measures. The IndustriALL Pakistan Council, a trade union syndicate, led the protests, which were held in Quetta, Karachi, Islamabad, Gujarat, Faisalabad, Multan, Lahore, Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan and other cities.

While mines in Pakistan are governed under the official Mining Act of 1923, mine owners are notorious for violating the most basic safety measures and imposing a super-exploitative work regime. Workers are only paid between 7,000 (\$US56.78) and 12,000 rupees, which is less than the government mandated minimum wage, and according to the union between 100 and 200 miners die each year in Pakistan.

The main demonstration last week was held on September 29 in Quetta under the slogan "Black Friday." Workers have called for mine owners to implement ILO Convention 176 on safety and health conditions in mines.

Ninety-eight workers have been killed so far this year. At least 23 workers were killed in two incidents in the past month. The most recent

incident occurred on September 30 when four mine workers were killed by a methane gas explosion in the Sanjdi area of Balochistan. Five miners were rescued by their co-workers.

Bangladesh airline workers stop work

Casual ground handling workers for Biman Bangladesh Airlines, the national carrier, at Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka, struck for five hours on Sunday and protested outside the company's Biman headquarters to demand permanent jobs.

While loading and unloading operations were hampered, Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh employees and members of the security forces were ordered to maintain operations.

The strikers returned to work after airline authorities claimed they would investigate workers' demands.

Sacked Hong Kong cabin crew protest termination arrangements

About 20 sacked crew members from British Airways Hong Kong staged a sit-down protest outside the carrier's office in Sheung Wan on Thursday night. The demonstration resulted in a two-hour negotiation between the airline and union representatives.

Last Wednesday, the airline sacked 57 crew members immediately, with another 24 to finish at the end of October.

Permanent staff were previously given until last Saturday, three days after being axed, to accept the company's compensation terms. If they did not agree, they would only receive the minimum required under Hong Kong labour laws. This deadline has now been extended to next Friday.

Britain's national airline has been reducing its international operations to cut costs. Cabin crews based in Singapore, Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo were laid off last year.

Burmese workers continue month-and-a-half strike over dismissals

Some 200 workers at the Chinese owned Fu Yuen garment factory in the Dagon Seikkan Industrial Zone in Burma's largest city Yangon have been on strike for more than 45 days over the dismissal of 30 fellow workers.

On August 14, hundreds of workers protested at the factory, demanding fair overtime pay and on time payments. They demanded the hiring of more workers to decrease demanding workloads.

On August 20, the 30 workers, all of them union members, were sacked for instigating the protest. The current strike began the next day when workers barricaded entrances to the factory. The company agreed to meet most of the demands of the strikers but refused to rehire the 30 former employees.

Ma Thet Htar Swe, one of the 30 and a union leader at the plant, said the workers had appealed to the regional and national government for help but received no reply. The National League for Democracy, the ruling party, claimed its Labour Affairs Committee was trying to resolve the dispute but put responsibility onto the arbitration court.

Hundreds of building workers strike in Queensland

Over 700 building workers went on strike this week at the financially troubled \$1 billion Jewel Resort construction development site in Surfers Paradise on the Queensland's Gold Coast.

The workers walked off the job after Multiplex, the major contractor, told a number of its subcontractors that it was reducing work on the development's three high-rise buildings. An earlier suspension of some work on internal floors in apartments had led to 150 job losses. Yuhu Group Australia, the project developer, has announced plans to re-tender some unfinished parts of the building and is also trying to find a hotel operator.

While Yuhu claims it is committed to completing the project, many subcontractors believe the developer will only be able to finish construction of the resort's hotel and around 90 of the 512 planned apartments. Some fear they will not receive payment for the materials they have already purchased and may have to lay off staff.

Lion cuts jobs at breweries amid dispute for work agreement

Castlemaine Perkins Four X brewery in Milton, Queensland announced this week that it will axe 25 full-time jobs, a quarter of the facility's workforce. The brewery is the site of a protracted enterprise agreement dispute involving the United Voice union.

The brewery workers have been involved in a number of stoppages and protests opposing the attempts by Lion, which owns the facility, to use contract labour to cover full-time employees' leave. They have denounced the proposal as a move towards greater casualisation. The contract workers would be paid up to 25 percent less than permanent staff.

In July, the Fair Work Commission (FWC), the federal industrial tribunal, upheld an application by the company banning all industrial action. United Voice had already restricted industrial action to extremely limited stoppages. The union immediately complied with the FWC order.

This week Lion also announced that it will reduce shifts at its West End brewery in South Australia, resulting in the axing of 36 full-time jobs or a third of its current workforce of 100.

New Zealand ministry of justice workers continue industrial action

After a two-hour nationwide strike on September 19, court workers throughout New Zealand continue to take various forms of industrial action, after pay negotiations with the Public Services Association (PSA) remain unresolved.

Court staff are maintaining a "work-to-rule", which is planned to last until October 19. An hour-long strike was held at district courts in South Auckland on September 27 and workers walked off the job at the Whangarei District and High Court buildings for an hour on Monday morning. The Whangarei strike included five security guards.

The PSA is limiting the court workers' pay dispute to closing the gender pay gap. It has not called for another nationwide strike and restricted any strike action to only one or two hours. The union recently negotiated and imposed a sell-out deal on Inland Revenue workers.

New Zealand primary teachers' union recommends rolling strike

The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) has recommended one-day rolling regional strikes in the face of mass opposition by primary school teachers to two government pay offers. The "recommendation" follows 24-hour, nationwide strike action on August 15. A vote for further industrial action in November will be taken between October 16 and 25.

The ministry of education offer was around 3 percent for three years, far below the 16 percent increase teachers are demanding, with no proposals to lessen workloads or increase support for students with special education needs.

NZEI delegates met on October 1 to discuss strike options. While there is popular support for a two-day, nationwide strike, the union claims that some delegates were concerned about the financial cost to teachers.

The union is continuing to sow illusions that the government will offer a better deal. Acting Education Minister Tracey Martin attended an NZEI conference dinner last Sunday but did not mention the pay dispute.

mass hiring and training of staff.

The strike follows industrial action by firefighters in Wallis and Futuna on September 18.



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New Zealand anaesthetic technicians strike

Apex, the union representing hospital anaesthetic technicians, announced strikes for its members in Hawkes Bay and Northland. Hawkes Bay technicians went on strike for 24 hours last Friday and strikes in Northland are planned for next month.

Industrial action is being taken after negotiations to improve pay and working conditions broke down.

According to the union, the technicians are understaffed with five out of 19 Northland positions left vacant. Strike action could spread to the Lake District and Southern District Health Boards (DHBs) if an offer is rejected.

The strike follows 30,000 healthcare workers who struck in July after numerous rejected pay offers from the DHBs. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation eventually secured a sell-out deal by dragging out the negotiations and wearing down workers until they accepted a deal far below what they were demanding.

Strikers lift blockade in French territory of Wallis and Futuna

On Wednesday, striking officials in the remote French territory of Wallis and Futuna were told by the court to lift their blockade. It follows an offer made the previous week from the French prefect that the workers could be reclassified as French public servants if they pass a written and oral exam.

The workers have been on strike over the issue since September 17 and set up the blockade on September 20.

New Caledonia firefighters strike

Firefighters on the French-Polynesian island of New Caledonia went on strike on September 27. Five unions presented the government with a series of demands to restructure the organisation of firefighting. This included creation of a professional corps and drawing up a plan for the