

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

Strikes in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan

27 October 2018

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

India: Haryana road workers' strike continues

Road workers in Haryana have continued their strike for the ninth consecutive day. The Haryana Roadways Employees Union had called the stoppage as a two-day strike on October 16, opposing the state government's decision to hire around 700 private buses.

Since discussions with the government failed, the union had to announce that the strike would continue indefinitely.

Thousands of commuters impacted by the lack of government buses have had to use alternative modes of transport. There are around 4,100 public buses transporting more than 1.2 million passengers in Haryana each day. According to trade union leaders, more than 4,000 buses are off the roads during the strike.

Workers from more than 100 other trade unions reportedly joined meetings to support the stoppage. The government has threatened workers with punishment under the Essential Services Maintenance Act.

So far, over 300 probationer conductors have been fired from their jobs and nearly 300 human resource employees have been arrested.

Bangladesh: Police attacks injure more than 40 protesting garment workers

Police tear gas attacks on garment workers demonstrating to demand owed wages and salary arrears have injured more than 40 workers. Several hundred workers from Soad Fashions and other factories in the Narayanganj Export Processing Zone of Siddhirganj in central Bangladesh started the demonstrations on Sunday morning, blocking the Adamjee-Narayanganj road for about five hours.

Later, they withdrew their blockade when the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and local Awami League leaders assured them they would be paid what they are owed on November 15.

Between 3,000 and 3,500 workers had worked in the Soad Fashions factory when it was closed on September 22 without any prior notice. By then, workers' pay was four months in arrears. The factory was reportedly sold by the original owner, a Bangladesh-Kuwait joint venture, to a Bangladeshi company, without any agreement on arrears payments.

India: Contract employees on strike in Delhi

Contract employees in Delhi, most of them working in schools, have stopped work to protest against pay cuts this month. The workers include security guards, caretakers and sanitation employees. The stoppage, which began last week, has grown rapidly over the past few days.

Last August, Delhi's High Court set aside the state government's March 2017 notification raising contract workers' minimum wages. The government decision had fixed gross salary at 13,350 rupees (\$US183) per month for unskilled workers, 14,698 rupees for semi-skilled staff, and 16,182 rupees for skilled workers. After the High Court's order, the salaries were revised down to 8,858 rupees for sanitation workers and 9,800 rupees for guards.

The High Court's order was in response to petitions filed by employer associations in a host of sectors, including hospitality, medicine, publishing and real estate.

Sensing unrest among school contract workers, the Directorate of Education issued a circular on October 15 stating that employees should be motivated to work in the "interests of schooling" and for the "welfare of students." It also said no "anti-social element" should be let into the schools lest they "misguide the deployed outsourced workers." A Directorate of Education official said the circular was issued because "Some union types were disturbing schools." "It became a matter of security when the workers started agitating," he said.

Pakistan: Retail workers oppose privatisation, demand permanent jobs

Workers at Pakistan's largest state-run retail chain, Utility Stores Corporation (USC), have held ongoing protests to oppose the government's plans to privatise it. Workers are also demanding permanent jobs for all contractors and a wage increase.

USC employs 14,000 workers. The main demonstrations have been held in Islamabad, with a sit-in protest near the government administrative complexes, known as the Red Zone, involving several hundred workers.

The USC provides state-subsidised groceries. Governments have failed over the last seven years to release funds for these subsidies resulting in an accumulated debt of 27.6 billion rupees (\$206.58 million). The USC's financial crisis is being used as a pretext to push for its privatisation.

Negotiations between officials from the All Pakistan Utility Stores Corporation Union and representatives of the prime minister broke down on Tuesday, with the government rejecting the demand for permanent jobs. The next day, the police used barbed wire to prevent protesters entering the Red Zone. Workers have said the protests will continue until all their demands are met.

Bangladesh: Transport workers demonstrate against new legislation

Transport workers belonging to the Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation staged an eight-hour strike on October 19, demanding an eight-point charter, including an amendment to the Road Transport Act 2018.

Under these laws, truck drivers can be sentenced to five years' jail and fined 500,000 takas (\$US5,913) for traffic offenses. The law also states that if a driver kills anyone in an accident, they can be charged with murder or culpable homicide.

Truck drivers earlier staged a three-day strike ending on October 3, to protest against the act. Rallies have been held since.

Federation leaders had threatened another two-day strike for October 28. They postponed it until October 31 after Home Minister Asaduzzaman Kamal said he would consider their demands.

Bangladesh: Police attack teachers demanding permanent employment

Police attacks prevented a pre-announced hunger strike of several hundred secondary school teachers demanding job permanency last Tuesday.

Under the banner of the Additional Class Teachers' (ACT) Association, they gathered in front of Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka. Police attacked them on the false pretext that the teachers did not have permission to protest.

"Many of us were injured and lost mobile phones and wallets when police launched the attack. We strongly condemn such attack on us at midnight, when we were asleep," the general secretary of ACT reported.

On Monday, the workers had staged an all-day sit-in, demanding the publication of a gazette regarding their job status and announcing Tuesday's event.

The teachers were recruited under a World Bank-funded project, called the "Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project," established to improve maths, science and English skills.

The government recruited 5,200 teachers in 2015 on three-year contracts. Though the project ended on December 31 last year, some 4,500 of the employees are still teaching without permanency.

BP oil refinery in Western Australia moves to cancel enterprise agreement

Management at BP's Kwinana oil and gas refinery in Perth, Western Australia has applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to terminate an enterprise agreement covering 163 of its 700 employees. The move followed 16 months of failed negotiations that included 42 meetings with the Australian Workers Union for a replacement to the expired Operations and Laboratory Enterprise Agreement (EA).

Workers covered by the EA, which was struck in 2014, could be forced onto minimum award conditions with considerable cuts to wages and conditions. Negotiations will continue in the FWC. The union, which has pushed through sellout deals at other refineries, has not called any industrial action.

Australian crane hire workers strike in Singleton

Workers at Boom Logistics in Singleton, north of Sydney, began an indefinite strike on October 15 over pay and working conditions. A spokesman from the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) said ten months of negotiations in the Fair Work Commission had failed to establish an agreement on pay and casualisation. Workers complained that there were four different entities working at the depot at four different rates of pay doing the same job.

Boom Logistics provides crane logistics and lifting services to the construction industry. It employs over 500 people at 18 depots across Australia. It has 23 permanent staff at Singleton. The CFMEU also covers Boom workers in Wollongong and Port Kembla.

Australia: Meat processing workers walk out in NSW

Workers from the Bindaree Beef processing plant in Inverell, in northern New South Wales walked off the job on Wednesday and rallied to protest over low wages. The Australian Meat Industry Employees Union (AMIEU), representing 700 Bindaree workers at the plant, has been in negotiations with management for several months. The union claims to be demanding a \$20 per week increase. Management has rejected calls for a raise.

Strikers returned to work on Thursday but continued industrial action in the form of token 20-minute rotational stoppages beginning in the boning room and on the slaughter-floor. Management has agreed to put an offer to workers by the end of the month.

The union and the company have enforced poverty wages. Around 80 percent of workers receive an annual wage of \$40-50,000, which translates to a net amount of roughly \$600-750 per week, well below the annual average wage of \$75,000. The company refused to lift their pay above the minimum award rate.

Workers complained that although bonuses lift their pay above the minimum wage, work is not guaranteed and is seasonal, which keeps their average income low.

Bus drivers strike throughout New Zealand's North Island

On Tuesday, bus drivers from West Auckland's Ritchies Murphy company and South Auckland's Pavlovich held a 24-hour strike. Around 350 services were cancelled. On the same day, a four-hour strike was held by Go Bus drivers in Hamilton from 5 am to 9 am.

Tranzit bus drivers in Wellington were also set to begin an indefinite strike on Tuesday, but the Tramways Union deferred the stoppage until Thursday based on a legal technicality in the Employment Relations Act, a bill passed in 2000 with the full support of the union bureaucracy. The strike is proposed to last until November 30.

Earlier in the year, Ritchies Murphy bus drivers struck twice. Go Bus drivers in the Waikato region have walked out five times. The strikes have been over low pay and long working hours. Wellington bus drivers are striking over attacks on their pay and working conditions after Tranzit took over a majority of the NZ Bus routes in July.

The unions are desperate to control the situation and reduce strike activity. The Tramways Union have deferred the strike and entered mediation with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

First Union has begun mediation with the Employment Relations Authority.

First Union has also leapt on the almost nation-wide strikes to promote the establishment of an industry-wide Fair Pay Agreement, which will extend the powers of the union bureaucracy and completely ban strikes during negotiations for new contracts.

New Zealand: Continued strikes by anaesthetic technicians

Six anaesthetic technicians in Hawkes Bay went on strike for 24 hours on Thursday. The technicians are overworked and are asking for a minimum of nine staff on the roster to allow for adequate sleep. They are also calling for professional development to meet the requirements of the Medical Sciences Council.

A 24-hour strike was held earlier in the month by the workers who were also joined by technicians in Northland, who are also grossly understaffed.

As with the 30,000 healthcare workers in the New Zealand Nurses Organisation, the technicians' union, Apex, has prolonged negotiations for nearly a year. NZNO members, who also have to deal with inadequate staffing and unsafe working hours, were eventually sold out by the union without any of their demands being met.

New Zealand court workers continue industrial action with “lightning strikes”

Court workers in Auckland held a one-hour strike on October 19 with only 30 minutes notice. Courtrooms in Manukau, Papakura and Waitakere were closed between 2pm and 3pm. The strikers included various administrative staff such as court reporters and victim advisors.

Ministry of Justice workers began rolling industrial action on September 19 with a two-hour nationwide strike of around 1,500 workers.

The Public Services Association, which also represents thousands of workers for Inland Revenue and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, has established a precedent for extremely limited strikes, all of two hours or less. They have also primarily focussed the court workers' dispute around closing the gender pay gap, rather than lifting wages overall.

Workers voted in favour of further industrial action in a ballot, which closed on Wednesday. Until November 9, a “work to rule” will be imposed, as well as a ban on overtime, and common daily breaks of 1 hour and 35 minutes.

New Zealand: Staff strike at Auckland University of Technology

Over 750 staff members at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) held a strike for 24-hours on October 19. Teaching staff are also withholding assessment marking for two weeks unless their demands are met.

The Tertiary Education Union says its members want at least a 3 percent increase, and that their lowest paid staff receive at least the “living wage.” Over a thousand staff and students have supported the living wage pay increase in a petition.

This modest target of \$20.55 an hour, set by privileged union

bureaucrats, would barely be enough for full time workers to get by on with just the basic necessities.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact