

Thousands of Indian contract workers remain on strike; 29,000 New Zealand primary school teachers to take national strike action

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 November 2018

India: Delhi Transport Corporation workers still on strike

Around 12,500 contract workers from the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) workers remain on strike in defiance of the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA). Last week some of the protesting workers marched to the transport minister residence demanding dialogue on day 13 of the strike.

Thousands of contract workers have been detained by police and demonstrators claim that water and power supplies to their protest camp area have been cut and public bathrooms made inaccessible.

The workers want permanent jobs and pay parity with permanent DTC employees. Strikers claim DTC management has terminated about 150 contract workers since the protest began while others had been issued notices to show why they should not be terminated over “absenteeism.”

Management has begun recruiting new contract workers who are only given one day of training. Some of the new recruits have left and joined the protest. One worker told the media, “If older workers do not have a future here, what is the guarantee that I will have one.”

Pricol workers on strike for 75 days in Tamil Nadu

The workers from Pricol, a multinational auto parts manufacturer, protested outside the plant at Periyanaickenpalayam in Tamil Nadu on November 3. The more than 300 workers, who are members of the Kovai Mavatta Pricol Thozhilalar Sangam (KMPTS) union, which is affiliated to the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), participated in the demonstration.

The workers, who have been on strike for over 75 days, want the company to stop punishment, victimization and denial of allowances to the workers. They are also demanding secret ballot union elections and have called for an increase in the minimum monthly salary from 23,000 rupees (\$US318) to 40,000 rupees and a higher festival bonus. The workers began the strike on August 21 after management consistently refused to meet and discuss their demands.

Last February India’s Supreme Court upheld the life sentences of two Pricol workers who were framed-up on murder charges over the killing of Pricol human resource vice president in 2009.

Indian union calls off Haryana Roadways 18-day strike

Haryana Roadways Workers Union leaders last week called off strike action by its members following management assurances that they could resume work the following day. Roadways employees began indefinite strike action on October 16 against the state government’s decision to hire the services of 720 private buses.

The strike paralysed Haryana Roadways, which employs about 19,000 people and has a fleet of 4,100 buses transporting around 1.2 million passengers every day. The strike action was supported by thousands of Haryana government employees.

Bangladesh police threaten protesting workers

On Monday around 750 Esteem Wears workers in Ujilab, Gazipur demonstrated to demand payment of their September and October salaries and an end to police harassment. The protestors blocked the Sreepur-Mawna road for nearly two hours.

Workers complained that authorities had promised to pay all outstanding amounts by Monday but when they arrived at the factory they were confronted by large numbers of police. The workers ended their demonstration following assurances by industrial police authorities that all outstanding payments by factory authorities will be made before next Monday.

Bangladesh health workers protest for pay rise and overdue wages

Health workers and employees held a sit-down protest outside the city health centre in Kawnia, Barisal district over four demands. This included payment by Sunday of 11 months’ outstanding wages.

Health care workers, service providers, midwives and other employees for Srijoni Bangladesh, one of the NGOs and government-run city health and maternity centres in Barisal city for the Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project. The UPHCSDP, which began operations in 1996, employs nearly 28,000 workers. Demonstrators warned that they will take more militant action if their demands are not met.

Pakistan: Karachi dock workers protest for outstanding benefits and permanent jobs

Hundreds of dock workers employed at Port Qasim, Karachi are continuing their sit-down demonstration outside the Karachi Press Club. They claim their wages have been withheld for several months by Huaneng Fuyun Port & Shipping (HFPS) company which operates two berths in the busy port. They have been on strike for seven weeks.

Workers have also accused the HFPS and other operators of not providing permanent jobs and allowances or the basic safety equipment required for dangerous jobs. Port Qasim is the second busiest port in Pakistan. The more than 1,750 dock workers employed by HFPS do not even receive the meagre minimum 8,000 rupees (\$134.69) per month paid to Port of Karachi workers.

Pakistan's ports are notorious for superexploitation of workers and hazardous work conditions. Welfare and safety regulations and minimum wage standards are wilfully flouted.

Sacked welfare workers in Punjab, Pakistan demand reinstatement

Workers terminated by the Punjab Population Welfare Department demonstrated in Attock, Punjab last Sunday. The protest involved all 144 of the workers affected. The welfare workers want immediate reinstatement and job permanency for all 3,700 workers at the department.

A protest was later held in Lahore by the All Pakistan Clerks Association demanding job permanency and a wage increase. The protest was called off after the authorities agreed to the clerks' demands, which included a seven percent wage increase.

The use of contract labour is prevalent among the government departments and services as a means of cost cutting.

Chinese police attack rally of terminally ill workers

Over 300 Chinese workers afflicted with fatal silicosis lung disease were pepper sprayed and beaten by police as they protested outside government offices in Shenzhen on Wednesday night. A number of them were taken to hospital for treatment.

Online videos show demonstrators coughing and falling to the ground. One worker said the pepper spray caused him to cough so hard he brought up blood.

The workers had travelled from Sangzhi and Leiyang in central Hunan province on Monday for the ninth time this year. They are petitioning authorities for compensation and medical costs after contracting the disease, caused by inhalation of crystalline silica dust.

The group includes 600 people who worked on construction sites across Shenzhen in the 1990s and 2000s. Many have succumbed to the disease since the campaign began in 2009. Workers have not been able to seek compensation because of a lack of documentation of their employment. Many migrant workers were employed precisely because of their lack of rights, conditions and workplace protection under China's Hukou system.

Taiwanese flight attendants protest against overwork

Scores of flight attendants protested in Taipei on Tuesday against overwork. They accused Taiwan's aviation regulator, the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA), of colluding with local airlines to deprive them of labour rights.

The protest was organised by members of the Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union (TFAU) and the EVA Air and China Airlines unions. The rally, outside CAA headquarters, urged the agency not to legalize excessive work hours.

The protesters were asking for flight attendants travelling to Tokyo, Beijing and Phnom Penh not to be forced to take round trips, which can result in shifts longer than 12 hours.

The protest came after Taoyuan labor authorities fined EVA Air \$NT550,000 (\$US17,800) last week for having its attendants work longer hours than allowed by law. This was the fifth documented infringement in three years. The CAA backed the airline, however, saying the excessive working hours were due to an unexpected air traffic control event.

Australia: Tasmanian public sector workers impose work bans

Paramedics and communications staff at Ambulance Tasmania began limited industrial action this week after rejecting the government's offer in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement (EA). Action by members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) includes staff writing slogans on ambulances, taking all allowances and breaks, not accepting any rostered overtime, attending rallies and only accepting offered overtime shifts at their choosing.

The government deal capped annual wage increases at a maximum of 2 percent, well below the rapidly rising cost of living. After years of stagnant wages enforced by the union, Ambulance Tasmania staff are reportedly paid \$10,000 a year less than their mainland counterparts. The union has not revealed how much of a pay increase it is demanding.

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Paramedics joined with thousands of other Tasmanian public sector workers in strike action for several hours on October 24 to demand the state Liberal government end its 2 percent cap on pay increases. Public sector workers in health, education, forensic services and other departments are implementing minor work bans over the issue.

Crane hire workers in New South Wales end strike

Workers at WGC Cranes, a mobile crane company with depots in Sydney and Wollongong, ended their two-week strike over a pay dispute on October 29. Workers were opposed to the company's demand that separate pay and conditions agreements be struck for the two depots.

The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) called an end to the strike after WGC management abandoned its two-tier demand. Details of the final enterprise agreement (EA) accepted by the union, however, have not been made public.

The stoppage at WGC coincided with strike action at crane hire company Boom Logistics in Singleton (north of Sydney), whose employees walked out on October 13 in a dispute for a new EA. Boom workers complained that they despite doing the same labour, they are employed by four different entities, each offering different rates of pay.

Hitachi machinery maintenance workers on strike in New South Wales

Around 50 workers at the Hitachi Construction Machinery depot in Muswellbrook, New South Wales are maintaining rolling two-hour stoppages they began last July in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The highly skilled maintenance workers are demanding upgraded pay and conditions in line with other workers in the Hunter region mining industry.

Workers have complained that although they do most of their work in coal mines on seven-day rotating shifts of over 13 hours duration, Hitachi is refusing to recognise them as mineworkers and give them appropriate entitlements. They are demanding industry standard long service leave, six weeks annual leave and improved accident pay.

qualifications for some teachers from 2020. NZEI president Lynda Stuart said the offers did not address union claims for lower class sizes and more professional time.

School were notified several weeks ago of the proposed strike dates, but the NZEI had indicated it was prepared to call off the strikes if a deal could be struck. Formal strike notices for Auckland were issued late on Thursday night.



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New Zealand midwives vote to strike

More than 1,100 midwives employed by New Zealand's District Health Boards (DHBs) have rejected a pay offer and voted by a 90 percent majority to strike. Eighty percent of members of the Midwifery Employee Representation & Advisory Service (MERAS) employed across 20 DHBs cast votes.

MERAS has given notice of daily two-hour work stoppages on every shift over a two-week period from November 22 to December 5.

The strike follows a year of negotiations. The rejected offer was the same as the sell-out 9 percent pay rise across three years accepted by the NZ Nurses Organisation in August. Midwives are seeking 3 percent above this, or alternatively a \$5,000 retention allowance.

There is a national midwifery shortage. Midwives have a high level of responsibility, study for a four-year direct-entry degree, and their work includes a high level of clinical decision-making.

The NZ Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), which covers 17,000 secondary school teachers, has begun nationwide stop-work meetings to discuss ongoing employment contract negotiations. The two-hour meetings began on November 7 in the South Auckland, Counties-Manukau, and Otago regions.

A PPTA conference last month voted to reject the ministry of education's (MoE) offer, including annual pay rises of between 2 and 3 percent for three years. The PPTA has claimed that it is demanding a 15 percent increase over one year, and measures to reduce workloads.

New Zealand primary teachers to begin rolling strikes

New Zealand primary teachers will start rolling regional strikes next week after rejecting the latest government pay offer. Some 29,000 teachers and principals will be involved nationwide over five days. Auckland teachers will start the action on Monday with rallies on more than 100 street corners and mass meetings later that day.

The NZ Educational Institute (NZEI) said facilitation under the Employment Relations Authority ended yesterday and the strike meetings will consider new offers from the Ministry of Education and recommendations from the facilitator.

The ministry made a new offer to teachers, but did not move on its earlier promise to raise pay scales by 3 percent a year for three years. Its latest offer included a new top step and the partial removal of a cap on