

Pakistan municipal workers protest for outstanding wages; Sri Lankan housing workers fight layoffs; New Zealand teachers reject new pay offer

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 December 2018

### India: Pricol strike ends, management relocates over 300 workers

Long-running strike action by Coimbatore District Pricol Workers Union members was called off on November 29 following negotiations with management. The walkout began in August, after the previous pay deal ended on June 30.

Pricol transferred 302 employees who were involved in the strike to its units in Pune, Pantnagar and Chennai. The company said it is ready to offer a VRS (voluntary retirement scheme) for its nearly 1,300 permanent employees based here if Coimbatore workers' demands were "reasonable." Workers oppose these transfers and, according to union, the company "offer" violated an agreement management during negotiations.

### Haryana Roadways employees hold statewide protest

Haryana Roadways employees held two-hour protests at depots across the state in response to the company's decision to terminate services of at least 365 bus drivers. Workers raised slogans denouncing the state government. Haryana Roadways Workers Union general secretary said that the government had previously decided to hire private buses, end overtime and stop night buses in rural areas. It has terminated the services of 365 temporary drivers recruited in 2016.

The roadways employees' unions and Haryana state government have been at loggerheads over a range of issues during the past few months. The roadways employees unions have taken action against the state government's decision to hire 700 private buses.

### India: Midday meal workers demonstrate in Karnataka state

Protesting midday meal workers at Freedom Park in Bengaluru, Karnataka have threatened an indefinite hunger strike if the state government fails to meet their demands. The workers want the state government to increase their honorarium and provide job security for midday meal workers. The protest, which is led by All India Trade Union Congress, began on December 3.

Midday meal workers have also called on the government to scrap contracts with private companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to supply midday meals in schools.

### Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa municipal workers protest for outstanding payments

Hundreds of Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) workers in Mingora, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, protested on Tuesday over two months' outstanding wage payments. The government's failure to pay wages on time has affected 352 workers, including cleaners, drivers and tube-well operators.

Municipal workers are paid poverty level wages. A cleaner with seven years' service, for example, is only paid 15,000 rupees (\$107.48) a month.

Mingora TMA claims that the funds have been transferred to the Water & Sanitation Services Company (WSSC) and that it should be paying the workers. The WSSC claims that the workers are employed by TMA and that it is responsible. While the TMA and the WSSC are supposed to receive funds from the government it has systematically slashed development funds and public expenditure.

The protesting workers have threatened to begin a hunger strike if authorities fail to resolve the issue.

### Pakistan health program workers demand permanent jobs and a pay rise

Employees of the Pakistan government's Lady Health Workers (LHW) scheme in Lahore demonstrated on Sunday outside the Supreme Court to demand a pay increase and permanent jobs.

While the Supreme Court has previously ruled that the government must give LHW employees permanent employment, the government is using the administrative procedures to delay implementation of the order.

The Lady Health Workers program provides essential health services, including vaccinations, in the poverty-stricken and remote regions of Pakistan. Despite the crucial services they provide, thousands of

permanent and contract workers are kept at minimum wage conditions. Contract based workers have reported wages as low as just 7,000 rupees (\$50.33) per month.

### **Sri Lankan housing workers fight lay offs**

Hundreds of National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) non-permanent workers blocked the main road in central Colombo on December 3 to demand reinstatement. About 2,500 workers, including more than 1,000 graduate workers, were terminated in one day by the NHDA.

Workers' carried placards with slogans such as, "Oppose the termination of workers", "Secure our jobs" and "Stop political victimisation."

Riot police were deployed to prevent workers reaching the NHDA's head office. Water cannons and Special Task Force contingents were also mobilised. The protest ended after the NHDA told the ousted workers to report to work next day.

### **Bangladesh police attack sacked workers' protest**

Sacked CA Knitwear factory employees were baton-charged by the police, who also fired blanks and tear gas, after the workers blockaded Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Bhabanipur area of Gazipur for four hours on November 29.

The sacked CA Knitwear workers were demanding compensation from the company authorities in line with Bangladesh labour laws. About 400 were dismissed last week alone over trivial matters, such as talking to each other during work hours, taking time for prayers and spending excessive time in the lavatory, one worker told the *Daily Star*.

### **South Korea auto workers protest new factory**

Hundreds of autoworkers rallied at Hyundai's factories in the south-eastern city of Ulsan on Wednesday, to protest the creation of a low-cost car-manufacturing plant in the city of Guangju.

The factory, slated to begin production of mini-SUVs in 2021, will be a joint venture between Hyundai and the local government. It will be classified as an "independent entity," relieving it of pay commitments negotiated with unions. Wages are slated to be less than half those of existing Hyundai workers.

Conflicts between the company and city authorities broke out last week, over Hyundai's insistence that it will not allow for any, even nominal, wage increases in the first five years of production. The Hyundai union, covering 50,000 members, has threatened strike action.

### **Australia: Brisbane ferry drivers' strike over pay and conditions**

Around 130 workers who operate ferry services in Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, walked off the job for 48 hours on Thursday morning.

They are demanding higher pay and greater job security in a proposed enterprise agreement.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has been in negotiations for nearly a year with Transdev, a private transport company contracted by the city council to operate commuter ferry services on the Brisbane River.

An MUA spokesman said many workers are paid below the award rate and have no job security because they are employed on casual contracts. The union has not indicated what its demands are, or what Transdev has offered.

### **New Zealand teachers reject new pay offer**

Around 30,000 primary and intermediate teachers and principals voted overwhelmingly last week to reject a third government pay offer, which failed to address the crisis in education, including a serious teacher shortage.

Primary teachers have twice taken strike action, in August and again last month, fighting for better work and pay conditions. Teachers have demanded a 16 percent pay rise over two years, and improvements to staffing and workloads.

The Labour-led government has claimed it has "no more money" to substantially increase its pay offer, of a \$9,500 to \$11,000 increase over three years, and a \$500 bonus for those on a collective agreement.

Around 17,000 secondary teachers also voted last month to reject a pay offer of between two and three percent, and endorsed a one-day strike in Term 1 next year.

### **Midwives' union ends rolling stoppages in New Zealand**

The Midwifery Employee Representation and Advisory Service (MERAS) ended a fortnight of stoppages on December 5 with a day of action involving pickets at hospitals across the country. Midwives had begun staging twice-a-day, two-hour rolling strikes on November 22.

Some 1,155 public hospital midwives across 20 district health boards (DHBs) earlier voted overwhelmingly to reject a pay offer of 3 percent per annum for three years. MERAS had put in a claim for a 3 percent increase above this, or a \$NZ5,000 retention allowance.

Midwives complained that during the stoppages they were unable to leave the workplace in case they were needed for so-called "life-preserving services." The union and DHBs returned to mediation yesterday after more than a year of negotiations.

### **Air New Zealand engineers announce pre-Christmas strike**

Air New Zealand engineers have announced plans to strike on the airline's busiest travel day of the year, December 21, just four days before Christmas.

The Aviation and Marine Engineers Association and ETU, the unions representing Air New Zealand's aircraft maintenance engineers, aircraft logistics and related staff, have served notice of the stoppage which will involve almost 1,000 staff. The plans of 42,000 customers could be affected on the day.

The planned strike is over annual pay increases. Engineers have rejected

recent proposals by the airline including a two percent pay increase followed by a further three percent increase after 12 months. Workers are also demanding an extra week of annual leave after five years' service.



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