

Pakistan police attack dock workers' march; Sri Lanka Telecom workers demonstrate over poor conditions; Tigerair pilots vote to strike in Australia

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 December 2018

India: Aurabindo pharmaceutical workers protest in Andhra Pradesh

Scores of Aurabindo pharmaceutical workers demonstrated outside the company's main gate at Pydibhimavaram in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh on December 8. They were protesting management's refusal to pay government mandated minimum wages or provide job security.

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions, which organised the rally, told the media that 12 villages have been polluted by emission from the plant but the company had refused to allocate corporate social responsibility funds to the affected villages.

Indian paper mill workers protest against the non-payment of salaries

Around 2,000 former employees of the Cachar Paper Mill and their families in Assam state are protesting against the state and federal government's refusal to restart the closed mill and ensure payment of wages that have been outstanding for years.

Hundreds of workers staged a boycott of local elections to protest outside the mill carrying banners and posters declaring "No salary, No vote." The mill was suddenly closed on October 20, 2015 leaving millions of dollars in raw materials, such as lime, bamboo and coal, going to waste.

According to workers, 49 former employees have died because they could not afford medical treatment or starved to death since the closure of Cachar Paper Mill and the Nagaon Paper Mill.

A convener of the HPC Paper Mills Revival Action Committee told the media that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal had previously promised that they would revive the mill but this assurance never materialised. He said the state and central governments had shown no interest in the fate of the mill employees.

India: Swiggy fast food delivery workers strike over pay in Chennai

Workers employed by food-delivery platform Swiggy took limited strike action over pay-related demands in different parts of Chennai, the Tamil state capital on December 5. Workers gathered in Vadapalani, Mylapore,

Porur and other parts of the city to demand increase in the per-order pay and withdrawal of recent cuts to various incentive payments.

They also called for regularisation of per mile compensation and an end to police harassment of late night delivery personnel. The striking deliverymen have threatened to strike indefinitely if Swiggy management do not respond to their demands.

Indian airport workers on hunger strike against privatisation

Surat airport workers held a hunger strike on December 10 against the Modi government's decision to develop six airports under a public private partnership (PPP) model.

The protest was organised by the Airport Authority Employees' Union (AAEU) and is part of nation-wide action by airport workers. AAEU members have threatened to hold a mass "casual leave" strike on December 28 against the government's decision.

Pakistan: Karachi real estate development workers demand outstanding pay

Hundreds of workers from Bahria Town Karachi, a giant real estate project expected to house one million people, demonstrated last Saturday to demand immediate payment of outstanding wages. The Bahria Town Group, which owns the massive project, is currently being investigated for the illegal acquisition of land and the company's financial operations placed under court authority control.

More than 5,000 permanent and contract workers have not been paid for six months or received overtime payments for four months. The workers blocked the Karachi-Hyderabad highway for several hours during the protest.

Pakistan police attack dock workers' march

Demonstrating Port Qasim Authority workers were attacked by the police using batons and water cannons in Karachi last Sunday during a march to Government House. The workers were demanding the payment of five months' outstanding wages and benefits. They have been protesting outside the Karachi Press Club for the past two months.

The private operators of berths at Port Qasim, Pakistan's second busiest port, do not provide permanent jobs or pay decent wages and allowances for those employed in the dangerous and backbreaking work.

Protesting workers chanted slogans denouncing government authorities for disregarding safety violations and failing to regulate working conditions. Port Qasim workers receive less than the meagre 8,000 rupees (\$57.20) per month paid to Port of Karachi employees.

Bangladesh port workers strike for unpaid wages

Benapole port contract workers in Jessore District walked out on strike for three consecutive days this month to demand payment of five months' outstanding wages. They returned to work after December 11, following assurance by the Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) that all monies would be paid within a week.

The workers are employed by the SIS Logistical Systems contracting company to loading and unload of heavy goods. SIS Logistical Systems that BLPA suspend payments after the expiration of its contract. The dispute between the contracting company and BLPA is being heard in the High Court. The port handles exports and imports of machinery and goods for factories, industries and garments.

Sri Lanka Telecom workers demonstrate over poor conditions

Around 200 Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT) workers protested near the company's head office in Colombo on December 12 to demanding outstanding pay increase increments and other incentives. The demonstration was called by Sri Lanka Telecom Employees Union (SLTEU).

Protestors said that incentive payments for medicine, transport, bonuses and etc. had been cut for middle- and lower-scale workers while special privileges were given to a few top-level employees.

According to workers, basic salary scales of a group of contractual workers, recently given permanent jobs, have been reduce to almost half the usual basic salary of SLT permanent workers.

Sri Lanka health workers protest outside provincial council office

Uva health workers, including medical officers, nurses and junior staff, demonstrated in front of the Uva Provincial council on December 12 to demand payment of outstanding overtime.

Chief Minister Chamara Sampath told the protesting workers that the council was awaiting parliamentary approval for the payments but it had been held up by the ongoing government crisis in Sri Lanka. Workers refused to accept this "explanation" and after discussions with the chief minister decided to occupy the provincial council office for several hours.

Queensland rail haulage workers strike

Up to 1,000 Queensland rail workers employed by coal hauler Aurizon were due to strike for 11 days starting yesterday. Miners companies, such as BHP Billiton, Glencore, Anglo-American and Peabody Energy, use Aurizon's four major railways in Queensland to transport coal from Bowen Basin to ports on Australia's east coast.

The stoppage follows a breakdown in negotiations for new work agreements covering members of the Rail Train and Bus Union, the Electrical Trades Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE).

An AFULE spokesman said major disputes were over Aurizon's refusal to back pay any negotiated wage increase, rostering, proposed changes to the "voluntary" redundancy scheme and changes to the dispute procedures, including removal of "arbitration."

Tigerair pilots in Australia vote for strike action

Pilots from Tigerair Australia have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action starting December 21 in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. They have not received a pay increase for two years.

A spokesman from the Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP) said pilots will refuse to fly jets with minor, non-safety related defects, refuse to start work within 90 minutes of being called in from stand-by and conduct in-air go-slows.

Tigerair (owned by Virgin Australia) and the AFAP will go before the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for conciliation next week. The AFAP represents the majority of Tigerair's 200 pilots. VIPA, another union which represents about 50 Tigerair pilots, has applied to the FWC for permission to take protected industrial action.

Unions call off Air New Zealand strike

A planned strike by almost 1,000 Air New Zealand engineers, logistics workers and other staff was cancelled late on Wednesday, after Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern reportedly urged the partly state-owned company and the two trade unions involved to reach an agreement.

The unions, E Tu and the Aviation and Marine Engineers Association, cancelled the three-day strike which was scheduled for December 21-23, the busiest days of the year for air travel. The union bureaucracy made the decision without any democratic participation from workers.

Workers had voted overwhelmingly to strike after rejecting an offer of a 2 percent pay increase, about the same as the rate of inflation, followed by a further 3 percent in 12 months. In addition to the pay freeze, workers were unhappy with the company's proposals to cut overtime rates. An E Tu spokesman told the media workers would vote next week on the new offer, details of which have not been made public.

First Union stops fuel tanker strike

On Thursday, First Union announced it was calling off a planned five-day strike by 180 fuel tanker drivers employed by Pacific Fuel Haul,

which supplies hundreds of Z Energy and Caltex petrol stations.

The workers had voted earlier this month to strike from December 16 to 20. A union press release said they were demanding a “fair and reasonable” pay increase and “modest redundancy protections.” There is a nationwide shortage of truck drivers and most of them work well over 40 hours a week, for low wages.

The union said it would recommend the new proposed agreement to its members. It includes two pay increases of just 3 percent over two years, barely above the rate of inflation, and more sick leave entitlement. Nurses and teachers have held nationwide strikes after rejecting a similar percentage pay increase, which is not enough to cover the soaring cost of living, especially housing.



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Wellington doctors strike to support dentists

Twenty-one doctors at five general practices across the Wellington region went on strike for an hour on December 13. It was the third strike by the doctors, who are employed at medical centres in Porirua, Cannons Creek, Titahi Bay and Newtown operated by Ora Toa Health, which is run by the Maori tribal-based corporation Te Runanga o Toa Rangatira (TROTR). Two more hour-long strikes are planned for December 18 and 19.

The doctors, members of the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists, are taking industrial action in solidarity with their dentist colleagues, who were excluded from a recent collective employment agreement despite working alongside the doctors. TROTR has not explained the decision to exclude dentists, but told the Health Central website that it had received “very little public money” for dental services.

The strikes are reportedly the first ever in New Zealand’s history by general practice doctors.

Council workers vote to strike in Canterbury

Workers employed by Environment Canterbury (ECan), the regional council in the Canterbury region surrounding Christchurch, voted this week to hold a one-hour strike on Monday. About 150 members of the Public Service Association, one quarter of ECan’s workforce, are involved in the dispute over wages. According to reports 80 people will take part in Monday’s action in Christchurch and 12 in the regional town of Timaru.

ECan has offered a pay increase of 1.1 percent, well below the cost of living. The PSA has made a claim for 4.9 percent.

New Caledonia public servants vote to strike

New Caledonia public service staff have voted to strike on 21 December. Around 7,000 workers are demanding inclusion in the PPCR (Parcours Professionnels, Carrières, Rémunérations) protocol that governs career advancement in several industries in France because it provides a mechanism for reviewing pay scales, and better career advancement options.

In March this year, 850 teachers in New Caledonia struck and eventually won inclusion in the PPCR scheme.