

India: Pricol autoparts workers continue strike in Tamil Nadu;
Chinese food delivery workers protest pay cuts; 3,000 New Zealand
doctors hold two-day strike

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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India: Unions betray MRF tyre workers' 20-day strike

Strike action by almost 1,000 workers at MRF's Tiruvottiyur plant in Chennai was shut down after 20 days by the MRF Employees Union early this week following an agreement with management. MRF is India's largest tyre manufacturer.

The strikers' main demands were for a pay rise, removal of CCTV cameras from certain areas of the plant and reinstatement of 31 workers victimised and dismissed by management over the past two years.

Workers told the media that the value of the plant's daily output was approximately 35 million rupees (\$US500,000) but the average monthly wage of each worker just 23,000 rupees, or 18,000 rupees in take home pay. According to press reports, the company has agreed to increase monthly pay by 16,500, effective February 1, and a 500-rupee monthly increase in two years. Management has only agreed to remove some CCTV cameras and reinstate just 10 of the 31 victimised workers.

Pricol autoparts workers in Tamil Nadu continue eight-month strike

A group of workers from Pricol, a leading auto part manufacturer in India, remain on strike in defiance of union directives, after walking out seven months ago. The Kovai Mavatta Pricol Thozhilalar Sangam (KMPTS) union, which is affiliated to the All India Central Council of Trade Unions, called the strike on August 21, 2018.

The autoparts workers want Pricol to increase the minimum monthly pay from 23,000 rupees (\$US318) to 40,000 rupees, increase the festival bonus and pay other allowances. They are also demanding that management end its punishment and victimisation of employees and for secret ballot union elections.

While the KMPTS union called off strike action on November 29 following negotiations with management, a section of workers refused to return to work and remain on strike. Management has transferred 302 employees to its other plants in Pune, Pantnagar and Chennai.

Sri Lankan government service executives threaten indefinite walkout

Around 15,000 government service executives, who are members of the All Island Service Executive Officers' Joint Committee, held a one-day strike on February 27.

The government workers were protesting over salary anomalies caused by a recent pay rise for judicial services executives and in violation of Sri Lanka's national wage policies. While the judicial services executives were granted a 300 percent salary rise, the increase was not given to other government service workers who have been demanding higher pay.

The white-collar workers were also protesting against the government's suspension of vehicle permits, pensions and cut to other benefits.

Joint union committee officials met with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Public Administration Minister Ranjith Madduma Bandara but the talks were fruitless.

The joint union committee said that 17 different unions, including the Sri Lanka Administrative Service Union, the Inland Revenue Trade Unions' Collective and the All Island Teacher Education Service Union, would take indefinite strike action if their demands are not met.

Sri Lankan government television workers protest victimisation

Sri Lanka Television Corporation workers are continuing their protests over the management victimisation of union officials and workers. On February 26 they wore black armbands, protested outside corporation premises and presented a petition against management. The Sri Lankan Television Corporation is one of the two main government funded television networks.

The workers said that 21 union officials, including the secretary of the executives' association, the deputy director general and a producer, were victimised and transferred after a protest on February 6.

Pakistan health workers end protest over hospital restructuring

An eight-day protest, including daily two-hour outpatient department shutdowns, by Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) employees in Islamabad was called off on February 22 by the All Employees PIMS Restoration Movement after negotiations with the minister of health.

According to media reports, the government plans to operate the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences through a Board of Governors, which is different to the current administrative methods at other government medical institutes. The restructuring is in line with IMF demands that the government restructure its services and slash government expenditure.

PIMS management rejected workers' demands and suspended three employees for chanting slogans against health ministry officials. Workers responded with a total one-day shutdown of outpatient services last Friday. The protests and industrial action was called off after the health minister held negotiations with the All Employees PIMS Restoration Movement and promised to review the proposal for a Board of Governors.

Bangladesh garment workers protest factory closure

Minar Industry garment workers demonstrated last Sunday in protest against the shutdown of the factory and for full payment of outstanding wages. They formed a human chain outside the National Press Club in Dhaka.

The factory, which employed about 500, is located at Fatullah in Narayanganj, near Dhaka. Employees were given no warning of the closure and only found out when they reported for work on February 14. The workers are members of the Bangladesh Shanjukta Garments Saramik Federation, which called the demonstration.

Thousands of Indian farmers march over poor conditions

Around 8,000 farmers, youths, students and other workers arrived in Mumbai this week, after marching 170 kilometres from Nashik, an agriculture city in Maharashtra state. The farmers want waivers of farm loans, minimum support prices for their goods, irrigation facilities and pensions. The march was organised by the All India Kisan Sabha. Last year 30,000 farmers marched from Nashik to Mumbai.

Chinese food delivery workers strike

Hundreds of food delivery workers in at least five Chinese cities staged wildcat strikes and demonstrations over the past fortnight in protest against cuts in pay rates after the recent New Year holiday. The stoppages have hit the Meituan and Ele.me companies in Linyi, Dongguan, Jinan, Pinghu and Qingdao.

Workers carried placards with slogans such as: "Not taking orders. Meituan's crazy price cuts mean we can't earn a living wage." One driver told the media that transporting 40 to 50 orders a day would only net an income of 130 yuan, down from 230 yuan before the changes. Other drivers say their wages have been halved.

The reductions stem from cuts to payments for variable rate orders, which drivers compete for, as opposed to fixed rate orders which drivers have no choice but to deliver. The drivers also complained that the App that manages their orders consistently under-calculates the actual distance travelled, and that their allowable travel times have also been reduced. Meituan has reportedly responded by blacklisting the workers who organised the strikes.

Garment workers march on Cambodian Labour Ministry

On Monday, over 1,000 workers marched from the W&D garment factory in the Meanchey district of Phnom Penh to the Cambodian Labour Ministry. They were demanding the government intervene to force the company to reinstate 127 blacklisted workers.

A dispute at the plant began last year over cuts to seniority indemnity payments. In January, the company sacked 1,200 of its 1,800-strong workforce, after they refused to obey a court order illegalising their strike action. The courts and the Cambodian Council of National Unions backed the mass layoffs.

On February 13, the company said most of these workers could return, except for a group that had been blacklisted for allegedly "inciting" the industrial action.

Around 1,050 workers who participated in the demonstration have refused to accept the offer until all of them are allowed to return. Workers say the company has discriminated against older male workers and pregnant women.

Ministry officials told the workers they will negotiate a resolution to the dispute on March 6.

Australia: Telstra technicians vote for strike action

Some 88 percent of Telstra technicians who participated in a protected action ballot have voted in favour of strike action for a wage increase. Telstra and the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU) have been in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement since early 2018.

CEPU members rejected Telstra's proposed pay rise of 4.5 percent over the next three years, an increase of just 1.5 percent per year. This is below the rate of inflation and would amount to an effective wage cut.

Despite the vote, a CEPU representative said no action was planned, stating only: "This result provides workers with the option of taking protected industrial action if we need to go down that track."

The latest attack on Telstra technicians follows its announcement last year that it would eliminate 9,500 jobs over the next three years. Around 750 positions are set to be destroyed over the coming months. The first round of sackings, which eliminated 1,200 jobs, were imposed last year. None of the unions representing Telstra workers have done anything to oppose the sackings, which are the largest in Australian corporate history.

Port Kembla Coal Terminal again extends lockout

Fifty-one permanent workers at the Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT) facility near Wollongong have been locked out for six weeks. On Monday, the company announced it was extending the lockout for another nine days in response to proposed industrial action by the Construction Forestry Mining Maritime and Energy Union (CFMMEU). Counting a one-week strike and lockouts the workers have not been paid for nearly two months.

The union and PKCT have been in a dispute since the previous enterprise agreement expired in 2015, which means workers have not had a pay increase for four years. The union claims that the main problem is

management's refusal to carry over the previous job security clause, which prevents a sacked permanent employee from being replaced by a casual contractor. The company has threatened to shut the facility if workers do not accept "flexible" conditions.

The CFFMEU has organised a token picket outside the terminal which has done nothing to prevent the company from using temporary contract labour to continue operation.

New Zealand doctors hold fourth nationwide strike

Thousands of junior doctors in New Zealand public hospitals held a 48-hour strike on February 26–27 in opposition to attacks on their working conditions. It was the fourth two-day strike so far this year involving about 3,000 doctors who are members of the Resident Doctors' Association (RDA). They are opposing a push by the country's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) to force them to work shifts longer than 16 hours; extend the maximum number of consecutive workdays from 10 to 12; and compel doctors to relocate to any part of the country.

The doctors' action follows strikes by thousands of nurses, healthcare assistants, ambulance paramedics, anaesthetic technicians and midwives in opposition to the Labour Party-led government's austerity measures, which have continued to starve hospitals of funding and resources.

The strikes have caused significant disruption, with thousands of non-urgent consultations and procedures rescheduled. The RDA has reportedly balloted its members on a potential fifth strike to be held in mid-March, but the results have not been announced. At the end of February the RDA's collective agreement with DHBs expired, meaning doctors are now working without a contract.

The RDA is not seeking any improvement in conditions but wants to maintain the status quo, including extremely long shifts that lead to fatigue and inevitably place doctors and patients at risk. The union is currently in negotiations with the DHBs and a government mediator.

New Zealand secondary teachers to strike

New Zealand's secondary teachers' union, the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA), announced today that its 17,000 members will hold a national one-day strike on April 3.

The teachers voted last November in favour of strike action but a date has only now been confirmed by the union. The PPTA has been in negotiations with the Labour Party-led government since last August on a new pay agreement. Teachers voted overwhelmingly to reject pay increases of 3 percent per year for three years—which barely keeps pace with inflation and does not make up for rising living costs. Teachers have called for a 15 percent pay increase and better resources and staffing.

PPTA officials told the media that they hoped the strike scheduled for one month from now could still be called off. The union will go into negotiations with the government again next week.

Meanwhile, the New Zealand Educational Institute, the union representing 30,000 primary teachers, will hold a series of stop-work meetings from March 18. The union is in talks with the ministry of education in an attempt to reach a deal and avoid a strike. Primary teachers want a pay rise of 16 percent over two years, better staffing and reduced workloads.

Dunedin bus drivers strike

Bus drivers in the city of Dunedin, on New Zealand's South island, are holding a 24-hour strike today after rejecting a pay offer of just \$19 an hour from Ritchies, which operates buses on behalf of the Otago Regional Council.

The offer is little more than the legal minimum wage of \$16.50 and not nearly enough to meet the cost of living. The action follows bus driver strikes in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington in recent months over low pay and grueling conditions, including lengthy shifts.

FIRST Union has called for the drivers to be paid the so-called Living Wage, just \$20.55 per hour, which the unions falsely claim is enough "to provide the basic necessities of life."

Fuji Xerox workers walk out for two days

About 50 workers at Fuji Xerox in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin held a two-day strike on February 25–26, after rejecting a pay increase offer of just 2 percent—effectively a wage freeze. The engineers are members of the E Tu union, which says the company has refused to backdate the pay offer to the expiry of their previous agreement in August 2018. The union has not announced a counterclaim.



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