

Indian rail workers protest; Bangladeshi food workers demand pay rise; New Zealand doctors to strike for five days

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 April 2019

India: Rail project workers protest

Hindustan Construction Company Limited (HCC) and Al Fara'a Infraproject (AFI) workers on the Pune Metro Project, owned by Maharashtra Metro Rail Corporation (MahaMetro), walked out on April 19 to protest non-payment of salaries for five months. Some workers had to leave these companies earlier after payment delays spanning 10 months.

On April 22, HCC and AFI laid off 100 workers after MahaMetro terminated contracts with these companies, citing "inconsistency" and "slow progress." HCC and AFI accused MahaMetro of causing the problems by withholding funds, but MahaMetro rejected these claims.

Indian coal contract workers demand unpaid salaries

Contract workers at the regional exploration department of the government-owned Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) in Kothagudem, Telangana, staged a protest on April 23, demanding immediate payment of their salaries for March.

Rallying outside the SCCL assistant general manager's office, the workers also demanded that management resolve several other issues, including the enhancement of semi-skilled workers' salaries.

The workers' other demands included giving all workers Coal Mines Provident Fund passbooks. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (Singareni) organised the protest.

Punjab teachers protest against non-payment of salaries

On April 12, dozens of teachers at LR DAV College, Jagraon, launched a sit-down protest (dharna) demanding salaries that have been unpaid for the past five months. Teachers said they were conducting the dharna during free periods so that students should not be affected by their protest.

Teachers said they would have no other option but to go on a hunger strike if the authorities continued to refuse to consider their demands and pay their salary arrears. The protesters also criticised the state government for reducing house rent and medical allowances for aided colleges staff members.

The Punjab and Chandigarh College Teachers Union organised the

protest, following a similar one at the end of 2018.

Punjab BSNL employees protest against redundancies

Around 50 employees of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), an Indian state-owned telecommunications company, staged a protest against a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) in front of the BSNL, Bharat Nagar Chowk on April 12.

Members of the BSNL Employees Union, National Federation of Telecom Employees and All-India BSNL Executive Associations participated. The BSNL management has created panic among employees by not paying salaries for the month of February on time.

The DoT [Department of Telecommunication] claims that the VRS is purely voluntary. However, workers denied that, saying the DoT and BSNL management want to implement the VRS scheme to reduce the workforce.

Bangladesh: Food and beverage workers demand pay increase

Hundreds of workers at Akij Food and Beverage Factory Limited, in Dhaka's Dhamrai area, demonstrated on Monday, demanding a pay increase from 120 taka (\$US1.42) to 180 taka per day, and days off during government holidays. They blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for approximately two hours, starting from 6.30 am.

After police assurances that a meeting would be arranged with the factory owners, workers called off the demonstration. However, a company official said the factory ran on seasonal production, so it could not have days off during all government holidays.

The factory employs about 3,000 workers, producing carbonated soft drinks, energy drinks, juices, dairy products, snacks, chips and drinking water for both the local and international markets.

Garment workers demand unpaid wages

Hundreds of Star garment factory workers in Dhaka staged a

demonstration on Sunday, demanding unpaid wages. They blocked a road in Dhaka's Moddho Badda area for an hour, before calling off the protest on the basis of management promises to pay the 850 workers their arrears. Police were deployed to prevent the protest spreading.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa doctors continue protests against privatisation

Government hospital doctors in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province started to boycott outpatient department duties from Tuesday in protest against the privatisation of healthcare services, resuming a previous round of protests a week earlier. On April 18, doctors held a demonstration outside the provincial assembly building. They also protested against a mass transfer policy and political interference in hospital affairs.

The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Doctors Council called the boycott. Under Pakistan's Medical Teaching Institutions Reforms Act, hospitals and other state-backed health facilities will have to fund these institutions themselves. Doctors said fees had been increased for various healthcare services, such as outpatient treatment, laboratory tests and X-rays, placing the burden on patients while facilities were deteriorating due to lack of maintenance.

The doctors also opposed the establishment of district and regional boards to govern the hospitals, saying these were further measures to reduce the government's responsibility for healthcare.

Australia: Telstra union ends work bans

The Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU), which covers over 3,000 Telstra technicians, called off indefinite work bans after Telstra said it was willing to resume talks over a proposed new enterprise agreement. The union did not call off half-hour work stoppages by field technicians between 7am and 8am, due to end on April 30.

The industrial action suspended from April 25 included indefinite bans on performance of essential customer service work, emergency work, additional hours and overtime, and accepting stock or equipment at homes. During the limited industrial action, which commenced on March 12 with a 24-hour strike, Telstra refused to hold talks with the union and even after the bans were lifted has not given a date for resuming negotiations.

After one year of negotiations, CEPU members rejected the company's proposed pay rise of 4.5 percent over the next three years. This amounts to an increase of just 1.5 percent per year, barely above the official inflation rate. The union has called for a meagre 12 percent wage rise over three years.

New Zealand doctors to proceed with five-day strike

New Zealand's 3,000 junior doctors, who are employed in public hospitals, will proceed with a five-day strike beginning on April 29. The strike will be the fifth by the doctors so far this year, following several 48-hour strikes. The union, the Resident Doctors Association (RDA), previously suspended industrial action, supposedly "out of respect for the victims of the Christchurch shooting and technical reasons."

The strike will go ahead despite the RDA preparing to enter talks facilitated by the Employment Relations Authority, beginning on May 9, over its dispute with the country's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs). The DHBs, which manage hospitals, are attempting to impose major attacks on working conditions, including an end to the current limit on 10 consecutive working days. Employers also want the ability to force doctors to work shifts longer than 16 hours and to relocate to any hospital in the country.

The RDA has accepted the DHBs' pay offer of 7.5 percent over three years, barely above the official rate of inflation, so effectively a pay freeze. The union is not seeking any improvement to current working conditions, but is asking for the status quo to be maintained.

The fact that the RDA is committed to re-enter talks indicates that it is seeking to reach a settlement and shut down any further strike action, even as ambulance paramedics, radiation specialists and anaesthetic technicians are engaged in pay disputes with the DHBs that has also seen them take strike action.

Fisheries workers strike

Workers at fisheries company Moana New Zealand in the town of Ruakaka began a three-day strike on Friday morning to demand better pay. The current offer by the company would see workers paid just 3 percent above the minimum wage of \$17.70 an hour. FIRST Union is calling for workers to receive \$21.15 an hour, which unions describe as a "living wage." The Ruakaka site produces abalone (also known as paua), which is considered a delicacy and sells for high prices on the export market.

It is unclear how many workers are involved in the strike. FIRST Union has not announced actions at any of Moana's other sites throughout the country, including Wellington and Nelson.

Moana's parent company, Aotearoa Fisheries, is one of New Zealand's largest seafood producers. It is owned by 58 Maori tribal corporations and claims on its website to work "for all Maori." In fact, Moana's workers are among the lowest-paid the country, while the company's profits are increasing. According to the union, Moana reported a net profit after tax of \$21.4 million for the year ending September 30, 2018, and declared a shareholder dividend of \$8.6 million.

New Caledonia council workers strike over unfair dismissal

Council workers in the town of Houailou, New Caledonia, began an unlimited strike on Thursday to protest the dismissal of a trade union delegate. A picket has been set up outside the town hall. Council management claims that the technical services officer was dismissed for "serious misconduct" following an incident in January. The STGINC union claims that proper procedures were not followed and management ignored repeated requests for a meeting.



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