

Hundreds of Indian workers strike over unpaid wages; Bangladesh jute mill workers continue protests; Auckland rail workers locked out in New Zealand

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 May 2019

### West Bengal: Howrah council workers demand wages

More than 700 Howrah Municipal Corporation contract workers protested on May 13 to demand outstanding pay and entitlements. Over 410 workers have not been paid for the last six months. Other workers' wage payments have been cut after the previous 30-day work scheme was reduced to just 10 days.

The workers demonstrated for about two hours outside the council chambers and also blocked a major road for half an hour.

### India: Municipal workers in Telangana demand outstanding wages

Karimnagar Municipal Corporation workers in the southern Indian state of Telangana protested outside the corporation's office on May 13 to demand payment of outstanding wages. The workers denounced corporation authorities because salaries had not been paid for at least two months and in some areas for five months. The demonstration was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

### Power workers in India's Punjab state rally over several demands

Hundreds of Punjab State Power Corporation workers protested outside the chief engineer's office in Bathinda on May 10. The Technical Services Union members later marched through the city denouncing the state government over their long-pending demands.

The power workers want reinstatement of dismissed employees, withdrawal of moves to curtail pensions, job permanency for contract and temporary employees and other major demands.

### Pune education workers demand wages

Seven workers from the Sinhgad Technical Education Society (STES) in

Pune, in the Indian state of Maharashtra have been holding regular Saturday protests over unpaid wages. The latest demonstration was on May 11. The workers have not been paid for 16 months.

Engineering lecturer Sachin Shinde, who organised the demonstration, told the media that at least 6,000 staff members have not been paid. Indian academic and technical staff unions have not organised any industrial action over the issue.

### Bharat Heavy Electrical contract workers protest for wage rise

Bharat Heavy Electrical contract workers held a short protest on May 10 to demand higher pay. The harmless protest, which was organised by the Labour Contract Society, was held near the company's Thuvakudi factory and involved workers holding begging bowls. Most of the contract workers were recruited to helper, store-keeper and supervisor positions more than four decades ago.

### India: Punjab Agricultural University employees rally for better conditions

Punjab Agricultural University non-teaching employees demonstrated on May 9. They were demanding improved promotion procedures and more jobs, in particular for car/jeep driver supervisors, permanent jobs for contract workers, payment of wages, the removal of teachers from non-teaching positions, payment of outstanding wages and other claims.

### Bangladesh jute mill workers maintain protests

Thousands of private jute mill workers and employees from the state-run Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) continued demonstrations to demand their unpaid wages and other entitlements. The strikes have been maintained over the past week.

Some 4,000 workers from Amin Jute Mill, who have not been paid for

the last 12 weeks, blocked a train running between Chittagong and Nazirhat and along the Muradpur-Hathazari Road. BJMC workers have also blocked roads and railways.

### **Unemployed medical workers demonstrate in Bangladesh**

Unemployed medical technologists demonstrated on Saturday outside the National Press Club in Dhaka over several demands.

The workers were members of the Unemployed and Private Services Medical Technologists Association. They want government health services jobs, higher wages, the implementation of a Supreme Court order for medical technology courses to be run by the health ministry and an amendment to the Health Services Non-Medical Employee Recruitment Rules.

### **Pakistan: Unions call off Punjab doctors' and health workers' strike**

The Grand Health Alliance of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff unions in Punjab government hospitals called off a planned 10 day-strike against the Medical Teaching Institutes Reforms Act on May 13.

The cash strapped Pakistani government is under pressure from the International Monetary Fund to present and carry out a drastic reforms plan that enforces the strictest budgetary constraints as well as privatisation.

The unions claim the government had agreed to its demands and would establish a negotiating committee. Under the planned reform act hospitals and other state-backed health facilities will have to fund the teaching institutions. Government health workers have opposed similar legislation in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.

According to the health unions, the government has pledged not to table the act in the provincial assembly until the negotiations are over. Previous claims by the unions and government assurances have been proven worthless.

### **Australia and New Zealand**

#### **Uber food delivery workers protest in Sydney**

Uber Eats food delivery riders and drivers protested at the company's Australian headquarters in Sydney on Tuesday to demand better working conditions. The workers are mainly employed as individual contractors in order to deny them a guaranteed wage, sick leave, annual leave, superannuation and other basic entitlements.

A worker from another delivery company who supported the protest told the media, "Every year they decrease the price of each delivery. One year ago it was \$14, after it was \$10 per delivery, now it's \$8 per delivery. If this continues the same way maybe next year it's going to be \$6 each delivery."

The average pay of rideshare drivers in Australia is just \$16 per hour before fuel, well below the legally required national minimum wage of \$18.93 per hour.

The protest was part of worldwide industrial action by thousands of

Uber and Lyft rideshare drivers on May 8 to protest poverty wages. Rideshare drivers participated in the US, Great Britain, France, Nigeria, Kenya, Chile, Brazil, Panama, Costa Rica and Uruguay. Last year Uber in the US cut drivers' payments by 25 percent with the company now taking an average 33 percent in commission for each ride.

#### **New Zealand primary and secondary teachers to strike**

Some 50,000 teachers are scheduled to hold a one-day nationwide strike on May 29. The decision was announced on Monday following voting by members of the Post-Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) and the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI). It will be the first time that primary and secondary teachers have taken united strike action.

NZEI members held two one-day strikes last year after teachers rejected offers from the Labour Party-led government of a pay increase amounting to just 3 percent per year. Teachers voted for an increase of 15 or 16 percent and significant improvements in working conditions and staffing levels. The government has failed to address the crisis in schools, including oversized classes and a lack of basic resources or support for children with learning difficulties—conditions produced by more than a decade of austerity measures.

Teachers were scheduled to strike early in April but the walkout was cancelled by the unions, using the March 15 Christchurch massacre as a pretext. Union officials have repeatedly said they do not want to strike and are in continual negotiations with the Ministry of Education in an attempt to reach a deal.

#### **New Zealand: Auckland rail workers locked out**

On May 13, Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles (CAF), a Spanish-owned company which services trains in Auckland's commuter rail network, suspended 26 of its 29 maintenance workers. The workers have been locked out for 30 days after they announced their intention to strike over low wages.

The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) says CAF pays the workers between \$NZ27 and \$30 an hour, which is 13 percent less than workers at the state-owned company KiwiRail. The union says the suspension means train services will be cancelled, as they cannot be maintained properly.

An RMTU spokesperson told the media the lockout was a "declaration of war." However, the union has not sought to mobilise other rail workers in Auckland and other cities in support of the locked-out members.

#### **New Zealand health workers suspended after industrial action**

Dozens of call centre staff employed by Access Community Health have been suspended following industrial action this week. About 120 workers at sites across the country are involved in the dispute. The Public Service Association claims more than 40 were suspended early this week.

The workers earn close to the minimum wage. According to the company, the current pay claim would amount to a 25 percent increase. Workers have taken low-level industrial action including refusing to reply to texts and emails during specific times, and held pickets. A full day

strike was held on Friday.

The union is in negotiations with the company, which provides care for people in their homes. It is owned by Green Cross Health, a major health sector business that also owns pharmacy chains.



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