

Chowel India auto-parts workers arrested; Chinese teachers protest over pay; Fast food workers strike in New Zealand

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 May 2019

Indian police arrest 150 protesting auto-parts workers in Sriperumbudur

Around 150 workers protesting outside Chowel India's auto-parts manufacturing plant in Sriperumbudur were arrested on May 19. The workers have been holding a sit-down protest since May 14 over delayed wage payments.

The arrests occurred when workers stepped up protests against moves by Hwasin Automotive India Private, a supplier to the company, to seize machinery at the plant because of outstanding debts. The protesters complained that they would not have jobs if the equipment was seized. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) organised the protest.

Jet Airways workers demonstrate in Indian capital

Around 200 Jet Airways employees demonstrated outside the civil aviation ministry on May 21 to demand revival of the bankrupt airline.

Jet Airways, which employs about 20,000 workers, ceased operations in mid-April, following an acute liquidity crisis. A State Bank of India-led consortium of lenders was unable to find a buyer for the airline.

While some representatives of the protesters met with India's joint secretary of ministry of civil aviation no information was made public about their discussion. India's air industry unions have taken no action to defend Jet Airways workers' jobs.

India: PGI employees march in Punjab

PGI workers held a black flag march on May 20 at the Principal Accountant General (Audit) Punjab's office. The protest involved members of the PGI Union, PGI Medical Technologists Association (MTA) and the Contract Workers Union. The protestors want 4,600-rupee (\$66) monthly pay rates for medical technologists and other demands.

Punjab public works department workers protest over unpaid salaries

Public Work Department workers in Bathinda in Punjab state, demonstrated on May 21 over unpaid wages and other long-outstanding demands. The protest was organised by the Field and Workshop Workers' Union.

According to the unions, contract workers in the suburbs of Bhuchandi, Goniana and Kot Fatta have not been paid since April. The workers have threatened to intensify their protests if their wages are not paid soon.

India: New Delhi doctors strike over unpaid salaries

Hindu Rao Hospital doctors walked out indefinitely on May 20 over non-payment of wages. The hospital is run by the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC). Resident doctors have not been paid for three months.

NDMC officials claim that the salaries were not paid because the Delhi government has delayed its release of funds. The strike was called off the next day by the union following management promises to pay the wages. No details were given about the promises.

Bengaluru sanitary workers demonstrate

Sanitary workers in Bengaluru have protested against Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) management for victimising two workers who spoke out against the municipal council's non-payment of minimum wages.

Hundreds of workers organised by the BBMP Pourakarmikara Sangha, which is affiliated to the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), gathered at the Mahadevapura BBMP office on May 15. BBMP officials falsely claim the workers were dismissed because of discrepancies in waste collection and were not working properly. Workers told the media that the workers were targeted for filing a complaint against a contractor.

In 2018, the workers had staged protests against the BBMP because the civic body failed to pay wages for up to six months.

Retrenched workers blockade a Goa mine entrance in India

Over 50 retrenched workers blocked the gates of a mine in Costi, Sanguem on May 19. The workers are demanding they be provided alternative employment by the company at its other units.

Employees pointed out that several workers from the Costi mine were previously reinstated when one of its industrial units shut a few years ago. This week's protest delayed ongoing pre-monsoon work at the mine.

Kashmir workers protest over three-years' outstanding wages

The resident Sawara panchayat workers from Doba, a small village in Jammu and Kashmir, demonstrated on May 20 over the non-payment of wages for the work carried out under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) Act.

"We have been denied wages for this work," one worker told the media. Protesters have threatened to block a nearby highway if the Indian government does not resolve the issue.

Pakistan: Unions call off Khyber Pakhtunkhwa doctors' strike

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Doctors Council and the Young Doctors Association called off strike action by government hospital doctors over health sector privatisation measures, and the assault of a doctor.

The union made the announcement on Tuesday evening after negotiations with the government, which agreed to form two distinct committees to investigate the two issues. No other details have been released by the unions. The doctors' strike impacted on hospital out-patient departments throughout the province for over a week.

The striking doctors claim the government's Regional Health Authority and District Health Authority Act is a move towards privatisation of the public health sector and will give extensive powers to hospital administrators.

In a highly provocative act on May 14, individuals accompanying the Pakistani health minister assaulted a senior doctor from Khyber Teaching Hospital inside the premises as he was attempting to complain to the minister. The police refused to record or act on the assault.

While the government has promised to form committees to address the doctors' grievances, it has made clear it would not tolerate any opposition to its reform agenda, which is dictated by the International Monetary Fund.

Chinese teachers protest over pay and conditions

Around 200 public school teachers protested in the southwestern county of Jianyang last Tuesday. It was the latest in a series of rallies by Chinese teachers over low pay, unequal pensions and benefits and wage arrears.

The Jianyang demonstration was called because teachers are paid less and have fewer benefits than other public servants in the same district.

The national 1993 Teachers Law stipulates that teachers should have similar benefits and pay to other civil servants of a comparable grade. But teachers' pay has rarely, if ever, reached the same level as civil servants.

Teachers' monthly wages can be as little as 3,000 yuan per month, barely enough to live on.

Teachers in rural areas are often denied pensions and other benefits, and can go months without pay if the school's funds run out.

Malaysian workers protest union busting by health services provider

Protests outside the headquarters of Engenta Mediserve, a private health provider in the city of Ipoh in Malaysia's Perak state, have forced company executives to agree to a meeting over threats to workers and union busting. The meeting will be held after June 6 national holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

Friday last week 20 members of the National Union of Workers in Hospital Support and Allied Services picketed the company because its executives threatened disciplinary action against workers who are active members of the union.

The workers held a banner and placards demanding an end to the company's "union busting" activities. While the company claims that the workers are employed by a subcontractor it agreed to the meeting after the picket.

Australian rail haulage workers to strike

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE) told freight haulage company Aurizon that workers from its Queensland East Coast and North-West depots will strike for 48 hours on May 28. The action comes during a 14-day overtime ban and follows failed negotiations this week for a new enterprise agreement. Aurizon responded to the overtime ban by reducing the AFULE's negotiating team from four to one.

The unions accuse Aurizon of serious attacks on conditions, including the removal of clauses relating to shift lengths, definition of two-man train crews, locality allowance and forcing employees to use 160 hours of annual leave for planned shutdowns. Aurizon also wants to deny some allowances for new recruits.

Aurizon's extensive Queensland rail network hauls coal and bulk freight (grain, sugar, cement and other goods). Separate enterprise agreements cover workers in coal and bulk haulage. Negotiations by the AFULE, the RTBU, the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union for new agreements covering over 1,000 Aurizon employees have been dragging on since September. Industrial action began in December but has been limited to short stoppages and work bans at different times over Aurizon's vast rail systems. Workers have not had a pay increase for 17 months.

New Zealand department store workers strike

Workers from Farmers department stores in the Auckland suburbs of Botany, Manukau and Pukekohe struck on Thursday to protest low wages. Partial stoppages have also been held at Farmers stores in Henderson, St Luke's, NorthWest and LynnMall in Auckland, along with Paraparaumu, Dunedin, Tauranga, Bay of Plenty, North Shore and Timaru.

The walk-outs are part of two weeks of industrial action at Farmers

outlets throughout the country and involving 800 members of FIRST Union, 40 percent of the company's workforce.

The union wants workers' wages to be increased to at least \$21.15 an hour, which they claim would be a "living wage." About 80 percent of Farmers staff are paid less than this, with many receiving little more than the minimum wage of \$17.70, including some with many years' experience. Workers also claim Farmers' performance review system is rigged to keep wages down.

Fast food workers strike in New Zealand

Around 1,500 workers at KFC, Carl's Jr and Pizza Hut outlets across New Zealand held a two-and-a-half day strike last weekend. Restaurant Brands, which owns the franchises, told the media that the Unite union members want wage increases of more than 7 percent.

The lowest paid workers recently had a pay rise to \$18 an hour, barely above the minimum wage. More senior employees, however, did not receive any similar increase. They earn little more than new hires. The current offer for salaried workers is below 3 percent, according to the union, which says the company has also pushed to reduce break times from 15 to 10 minutes. While it employs some of the lowest paid workers in the country, Restaurant Brands last year made a profit of \$36 million and paid its shareholders \$881 million.



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