

Thousands of Bangladesh bidi cigarette workers demonstrate;
Taiwanese flight attendants protest harsh conditions; New Zealand
hospital workers strike at Waikato

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 June 2019

India: Punjab revenue department workers strike

Punjab revenue department workers stopped work in Bathinda on Tuesday over a series of long outstanding claims. These include a 25 percent increase in the number of assistant officers by 25 percent, immediate filling of Super Grade 1 vacancies and wage increases in line with India's 6th pay commission recommendations.

The workers chanted slogans denouncing the state government and its current finance minister and warned that if the government did not address their demands within 10 days they would begin indefinite strike action.

Telangana village council workers protest over wages

Village council workers from southern India's Telangana state demonstrated in Hyderabad on Monday against low wages and the non-payment of six months' salaries. Protesters said that the state's chief minister, K. Chandrashekar Rao, had failed to fulfil a promise made after a previous protest that workers' wages would be increased.

Workers told the media that most village council workers were Dalits or members of India's most oppressed minority group, state government and other officials deliberately ignored them.

Ambedkar University sanitary workers oppose sackings

Hundreds of contract sanitary workers and students from Ambedkar University in Delhi protested on Monday against the sudden dismissal of 40 contract employees. The workers were originally recruited through Sulabh International, an NGO labour hire agency.

Sulabh International, however, failed to pay employees' state insurance (ESI) and provident funds (PF) and so university administration hired workers from Bhagwati Enterprises. The terminated Sulabh International contract employees told the media that

they had worked at the university for the past seven years.

Karnataka community workers demand wage increases

Hundreds of community health workers or accredited social health activist (ASHA) workers demonstrated on Monday outside a Mysuru district health office in south Indian state of Karnataka over for higher pay and other demands.

Protesters denounced the state government and local health authorities and called for immediate payment of five month's outstanding pay, higher wages, fixed working hours, holidays with retirement benefits and permanent jobs.

There are 10 million community workers employed under various programs throughout India. This includes 2.7 million in the Integrated Child Development Scheme, 1 million in the National Rural Health Mission program and 2.8 million in Midday Meal Scheme.

Pakistan: Baluchistan Development Authority workers call off strike

Baluchistan Development Authority (BDA) contract workers in Pakistan ended a two-week hunger strike on Tuesday after a provincial government minister promised to resolve their demands.

The workers were demanding immediate payment of five months outstanding wages and permanent jobs. The BDA employs over 720 contract workers. The government has previously promised to resolve the long-running dispute but regularly stalled negotiations with a joint union action committee.

Bangladesh bidi workers protest tax increases

Over 5,000 bidi (cigarette) workers rallied on May 30 in Bangladesh to demand cancellation of a planned government tax increase on the industry in the forthcoming national budget. The low paid workers have threatened a national shut down of the industry if the tax increases are not withdrawn.

The tax increase is expected to be announced in the 2019–20 financial year. Workers fear it will seriously impact on the industry and see the destruction of two million jobs.

Taiwanese flight attendants protest work conditions

About 500 flight attendants and 300 of their supporters protested outside the Taipei headquarters of Evergreen Airways (EVA) this week. The flight attendants are in dispute with the company over overtime arrangements, long working hours and pay.

Protesters denounced company management and carried placards declaring “EVA Air flight attendants want respect” and “Fight for flight.” The demonstration followed failed negotiations between management and the Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union on May 2.

Crane operators hold national strike in South Korea

Crane operators held a one-day national strike in South Korea on Tuesday to demand a 7 percent wage rise and to oppose the growing use of small tower cranes which weigh less than 3 metric tons.

The operations of some 2,500 tower cranes were halted by members of the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. The unions have stated that small tower cranes are more vulnerable to accidents and that the companies operating them lack clear safety standards. Many of these cranes have illegally altered equipment and are falsely registered.

Small tower cranes are often called driverless tower cranes because they do not have a driver’s seat and can be operated by remote-control. The number of small tower crane operators currently stands at 8,256 or almost half the 16,883-strong tower crane workforce.

Victorian bus drivers strike

Drivers from the Martyrs Bus Service in Victoria’s Yarra Valley struck for 24 hours on Tuesday after talks for a new enterprise agreement reached a deadlock. The company operates 51 buses in northwest Victoria servicing schools and tourist programs.

A Transport Workers Union (TWU) spokesman told the media that drivers’ previous wage increases were based on unreliable Victorian Average Weekly Earnings percentage rises. The union has instead called for pay increases to be in line with the Bus Industry Agreement claim for a guaranteed 4 percent and 1 percent superannuation rise per year.

The TWU, however, has overseen regressive enterprise agreements at a host of private transport companies, enforcing poverty-level

wages and onerous working conditions.

Melbourne airport workers to hold strike ballot

The TWU, which covers Victorian aircraft refuelling workers, has applied to the Fair Work Commission for a ballot of members to take industrial action, following six months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement (EA). The workers are employed by Viva Energy Australia, which currently services the majority of domestic and international flights departing Melbourne’s Tullamarine Airport.

The TWU has called for a pay increase of 3 percent per annum over the three-year agreement. Viva offered a 1 percent increase in the first year and a 2 percent increase in the second and third years. It is also refusing to back-pay workers to the beginning of negotiations. The company has indicated that it will put its EA offer directly to workers, despite having been unable to cobble together a sell-out deal backed by the union.

New Zealand hospital workers strike

About 100 attendants at Waikato Hospital in Hamilton held a 24-hour strike on Thursday to demand a substantial pay increase. About 50 took part in a picket outside the hospital.

The Unite Union has been in negotiations with the Waikato District Health Board (DHB) since November 2018 over a new contract for the workers. The workers are calling for starting wages to be increased from the present rate of \$NZ17.70 an hour, the legal minimum wage, to \$20.55, a rate described by New Zealand’s unions as a “living wage.”

Attendants are responsible for moving patients around the hospital, managing mail, delivering patient records, medications and equipment and managing medical waste.

The DHB has offered the “living wage,” but in two years’ time, not immediately. A union press release said “all the other union claims were either dropped or reduced significantly during bargaining” in order to push for the wage increase, but the hospital refused to move. The union reportedly offered to sacrifice some benefits for senior staff. The DHB says the same offer made to Unite was accepted last year by the E Tu union, which covers other workers at the hospital.



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