

Indian health workers demand fixed salaries; Bangladesh fishermen demonstrate; NZ disability care workers strike

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

15 June 2019

### India: Sanitation workers in Chandigarh protest wages and conditions

Sanitation workers from Lions, a leading municipal road sweeping company, demonstrated in Chandigarh, capital of India's Punjab state on June 10, over salary arrears and severe working conditions. The workers protested and chanted slogans outside the municipal council office.

The demonstration was supported by the Safai Karamchari Union, the Door to Door Union, All Contractual Karamchari Sangh and several other unions. Workers are demanding wages be paid on the 7th of every month and all outstanding salary increases be paid. Workers also demanded an end to the severe exploitation of all contract and outsourced workers.

While the demonstration ended after Mayor Rajesh Kalia promised to fulfil workers' demands, no details have been provided about when this would occur.

### Telangana community health workers demand fixed salaries

Hundreds of the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) community workers protested outside 25 District Collectorate offices in India's Telangana state on June 10 to demand fixed salary levels and the payment of five month's outstanding wages. The workers, who are currently paid on a below-poverty level activity-based remuneration system, also demanded better working conditions and basic welfare provisions.

The protest was supported by members from the Telangana Voluntary and Community Health Workers' Union and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Police arrested around 100 workers involved in the mass state-wide action.

### Swiggy food delivery workers demonstrate in Hyderabad

Swiggy food delivery workers protested outside Telangana's Labour Department office in Hyderabad, the state capital, for several days beginning on May 31. The demonstration was organised by the All India Trade Union Congress.

Workers said that the company has reduced payments from 35 to 25 rupees for each delivery and called for job security, payment of two

million rupees accident insurance to the families of each worker killed in accidents, pension facilities, continuation of a previous incentive policy, payment of an additional 30 rupees for each late-night order and an end to management harassment.

The Swiggy workers said that they were not paid what they were promised and pointed out that 20 workers had been killed in recent accidents.

### E-sevai and Aadhaar enrolment workers protest in Tamil Nadu

Nearly 1,000 E-sevai workers and Aadhaar enrolment workers held a hunger strike protest in 20 district centres across India's Tamil Nadu state on May 31 to demand payment of outstanding salaries and better working conditions. The workers have been fighting over these issues for the past five months.

The E-sevai and Aadhaar enrolment workers are employed by the Tamil Nadu Arasu Cable TV Corporation (TACTV), a government-run company, which offers a variety of services including proof of identity and address documents for ordinary people. E-sevai centres are outsourced to private contractors who hire the workers on contract basis.

While the government previously paid E-sevai workers 7,600 rupees (\$US107) per month, seven months ago this was reduced to about 4,000-rupees. Neither the Tamil Nadu state government nor the TACTV has given any reason for the pay cut. Workers have also not been given their Employees' State Insurance (ESI) card even though money for ESI was deducted from their salaries.

The UNITE union, which covers these workers has demanded full payment of all salaries, with back pay for the past seven months, provision of workers' ESI cards, and a fixed monthly payment of 18,000-rupees, the prescribed minimum wage by the central government.

They also want employers to provide or pay for all necessary stationery, which is currently paid for by the workers.

### Hundreds of Pricol auto-part workers demonstrate in Tamil Nadu

Auto parts workers demonstrated outside Pricol's Coimbatore plant in Tamil Nadu on May 30 to demand reinstatement as ordered by the Madras High Court.

Over 290 workers were dismissed following their strike action last August. The dismissed workers are members of the Kovai Mavatta Pricol Thozhilar Ottrumai Sangam (KMPTOS) affiliated to the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU).

### **Bangladesh fishermen and boat owners protest**

Hundreds of fishermen and their families, and the fishing boat owners in Chittagong demonstrated last Sunday and Tuesday to demand the government withdraw a 65-day national ban on coastal fishing in the Bay of Bengal. There are about 375,000 fishermen along the 100km coastal belt from Mirsarai Upazila to Patenga in Chittagong.

The fishermen ended the protest after state officials and local members of parliament assured them that their demands would be raised in the parliament. The government ban, expected to be in force between May 20 and July 23, is supposed to ensure higher fish stocks.

Protestors on Tuesday told government authorities that they had 72 hours to lift the ban or face more militant action. One fisherman told the media that they never work in deep-sea areas and that the sea resources were never damaged.

The coastal fishing ban, which was previously limited to only 21 days, was suddenly expanded without any warning. The Bangladesh government cynically offered 40 kilogram of rice and 5 kilogram of lentils per month to compensate the ban. Fishermen rejected this denouncing it as an “insignificant amount.”

### **Cambodian garment workers strike over conditions**

More than 1,500 garment workers stopped-work and rallied outside the Sunrise Light Enterprise garment factory in Bavet city, in Cambodia’s Svay Riengon province, on Wednesday.

The workers had signed a petition demanding the right to elect their own representative; overtime payments for holiday and weekend shifts; a 10 percent reduction in production; the posting of signs in the factory in Khmer and Mandarin; a more lenient attitude to leave; health insurance; an end to arbitrary sackings, and the firing of a manager.

One worker told the media that if the company did not meet their demands, the workers would continue to strike.

### **Australia and New Zealand**

#### **Sydney ferry crew resume strike action**

Sydney harbour ferry deckhands employed by the NRMA on its My Fast Ferry and Manly Fast Ferry services continued industrial action this month with a six-hour stoppage from 5 p.m. yesterday. The action, in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement, followed restricted two-hour stoppages in March and April.

The strike was sparked when the NRMA cancelled a meeting scheduled for Thursday following enterprise agreement negotiations on Wednesday. A spokesman from the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) said the strike follows six months of

unresolved negotiations with the NRMA, which has failed address wage demands or offer a single permanent job to the casual workforce.

The Fair Work Commission last December rejected a workplace agreement for deckhands after finding that full-time shift workers were being short-changed by \$136.37 per week and part-timers were being paid \$36.32 below the award for a 12-hour week. Workers are demanding more permanent full-time positions, regular shifts and higher wages.

### **New Zealand: Thousands of disability care workers hold one-day strike**

About 3,000 workers at IDEA Services, which provides support for people with disabilities, will hold a nationwide 12-hour strike on Sunday. The strike is an escalation of industrial action that has already involved four one-hour strikes since April.

The workers, who are members of the E Tu union, are demanding better working conditions, including better levels of staffing to improve safety and reduce workloads. A press statement by E Tu says workers are also concerned about job security. The union has applied for formal facilitation by the government to settle the dispute.

### **New Zealand retail workers vote on industrial action**

Staff at the Farmers department store chain are voting this week and next on possible industrial action. Workers have held partial strikes and pickets at stores across the country in recent weeks. FIRST Union has not said what options for industrial action are being presented to workers.

About 20 percent of Farmers employees are paid the minimum wage of \$17.70 an hour. Many are paid little more than this. Workers claim the company’s performance assessment system is rigged to keep wages down, regardless of how well workers have performed. The union is calling for workers to be paid a “living wage,” which is designated by the unions as \$21.15 an hour.



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