

National strike by Indian doctors; Taiwanese flight attendants launch indefinite strike; Sydney Harbour ferry crews walk out again

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 June 2019

### Indian doctors strike over harsh conditions and patient violence

Up to 800,000 doctors walked out on strike on Monday and protested outside Indian hospitals holding placards and wearing black arm bands and bloodied mock bandages. The national action was organised by the Indian Medical Association (IMA), which covers over 300,000 doctors as well as half a million junior doctors, medical students and other staff.

The action was in support of West Bengal doctors who struck the previous week over escalating attacks by patients or relatives. Doctors in Kolkata, the state capital, decided to walk out indefinitely following physical attacks on junior doctors at Kolkata's NRS Medical College on June 10.

The Kolkata doctors were later joined by their counterparts across the state and almost 550 doctors resigned in protest. The IMA ended the West Bengal industrial action and ordered doctors back to work nationally later on Monday after talks with that state's chief minister.

According to IMA surveys, 75 percent of Indian doctors have complained of verbal abuse and 12 percent of physical violence. At India's top hospital, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, doctors became so fearful that the Resident Doctors' Association began providing self-defence classes in 2017.

The IMA wants tougher punishments for anyone who attacks doctors and increased recruitment to support the overworked doctors. Doctors in Indian outpatient units are often forced to see more than 100 patients in a day. India only spent an estimated 1.4 percent of its gross domestic product on healthcare in 2017/18, one of the lowest proportions in the world.

### Punjab Deputy Commissioner's Office workers strike indefinitely

Deputy Commissioner's Office workers in Punjab's Kapurthala district began indefinite strike action on June 18 to demand three outstanding dearness allowance payments and for agreed Pay Commission report increases.

The protests and strike were organised by the Deputy Commissioner's Office Employees' Union, which has threatened to intensify action if its demands are not granted. Workers also held rallies and demonstrations on June 19 outside all Punjab district headquarters.

### Day care centre workers protest in India's Telangana state

Day care centre or Anganwadi workers in Parigi, a village in Telangana, held a sit-down protest outside the Integrated Child Development Services office in the nearby city of Shadnagar on June 18. They were demanding increases in salaries and other long-outstanding claims. The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) had organised the demonstration.

The anganwadi workers do not have minimum amenities and do not receive a provident fund and employee state insurance. The workers also want a minimum 20,000 rupees (\$US288) monthly salary and immediate job permanency. They have threatened to step up their protests.

### Electricity meter readers protest in Telangana state

Hundreds of electricity meter reading employees demonstrated at Dharna Chowk in Telangana state on Monday after walking out on strike two days earlier over the current contract work system and lack of basic benefits. There are 1,600 meter reading employees in the state.

The demonstrators are demanding Employee State Insurance, Employee Provident Fund and minimum wages. Workers told the media that some of them had been working as meter readers for the last 18 years but not received any employee benefits.

### Uranium Corporation of India workers strike indefinitely in Jharkhand state

Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) workers began an indefinite strike on June 10 in the east Indian state of Jharkhand. UCIL is a government-owned entity and comes under the central government's Department of Atomic Energy.

The corporation, which was founded in 1967, is responsible for the mining and milling of uranium ore in India. It operates mines at Jadugora, Bhatin, Narwapahar, Turamdih and Banduhurang.

The strikers, who were demanding a wage increase and other service benefits, blocked the gates of the Turamdih Mine gate. The unions ended all industrial action after six-days on June 15 after signing a pay deal with company management. According to some media reports, workers would

be given a guaranteed benefit equivalent of 12 percent of their basic wage. Some workers denounced the wage agreement proposal, calling it the worst proposal in the last five decades.

### **Pakistan: Islamabad university faculty boycotts exam duties**

Teaching staff of the COMSATS University Islamabad boycotted exam duties on Tuesday to demand permanent jobs, timely promotions, medical allowances and for the merging of current ad-hoc allowances into a regular allowance plan.

The main entrance to the university was locked in protest. Staff also denounced the administrative measures taken against the faculty members during previous protests.

Administration shut the university for a whole week in response to the strike, impacting about 40,000 students. It also used a temporary worker contract system to cover all teaching positions and break the strike.

### **Bangladesh: Private primary school teachers and workers demand schools be nationalised**

Teachers and workers at non-government primary schools held a sit-down protest outside Dhaka's National Press Club on Monday to demand the government nationalise their schools.

Private school teachers and other staff are not paid under the Monthly Pay Order—a government recommended pay scheme of state controlled schools. They have previously demonstrated to demand nationalisation of their educational institutes and their inclusion in the Monthly Pay Order scheme. There are nearly 80,000 teachers and 6,000 education workers employed in Bangladesh's non-government education sector.

### **Taiwanese flight attendants launch indefinite strike**

Flight attendants from EVA Air began an indefinite strike over wages last week after negotiations between management and the union broke down.

The strike was organised by the Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union, which has been in talks with the company over allowances, annual bonuses and overtime work since 2017. The union claims to be demanding an increase in allowances for unionised flight attendants working offshore from \$NT90 (\$US3) to \$NT150 per flight hour. They are also calling for overnight breaks after the completion of one leg, rather than the present two, on nine regional routes.

The strike involved 3,000 flight attendants of the company's 4,300 cabin crew. It has led to the cancellation of a number of flights to Hong Kong, Hangzhou, Bangkok, Chicago, Paris and Vienna. The Taiwanese carrier operates nine return flights between Taipei and Hong Kong daily. Long queues were reported on Thursday and Friday.

### **Australia: Sydney Harbour ferry crews strike again**

Sydney harbour ferry workers employed by the NRMA on its My Fast Ferry and Manly Fast Ferry services walked off the job for 24 hours on Thursday, in their second strike in a week. The action, by 30 vessel masters and 50 deckhands, is the fifth since negotiations for a three-year agreement began in November with the Maritime Union of Australia (a section of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU)).

Union delegates and workers picketed the NRMA's head office in Sydney calling for the company CEO to meet over the ongoing enterprise agreement dispute. The company had cancelled scheduled talks with the union last week.

The NRMA is offering workers an immediate pay rise of 10 per cent, followed by annual rises of 2.5 per cent over three years. The MUA claims the offer leaves workers on rates of pay well below the salaries of their counterparts at Transdev, which operates the government-owned fleet of vessels on Sydney Harbour and the Parramatta River. Workers are demanding more permanent full-time positions, regular shifts and higher wages.

There are no permanent jobs on NRMA's Sydney ferry services. The company said it was prepared to "look at" converting half of the casual workforce to permanent status over two years, which the union rejected. 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.

### **Qantas worker sacked for leading strike while rostered off**

The Fair Work Commission (FWC), Australia's pro-business industrial tribunal, has backed Qantas' sacking of a long time employee for supporting a strike against the airline's catering arm Q Catering. The employee, a member of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), provided placards and led the strike while on her rostered day off.

The worker, Loata Petronic, and four TWU delegates were fired for their alleged role in the "unprotected strike" in June 2018 which disrupted 50 domestic and international flights. More than 40 employees walked off the job in solidarity with a sacked union delegate and in protest over the uncertainty of their conditions amid Q Catering's pending sale to international airline service provider Dnata.

All strikers were sacked but later reinstated, except for the four union delegates and Petronic, who has 22 years' service at Qantas. Petronic has been dumped by the TWU, which did not represent her in her unfair dismissal case. Petronic argued that she was not informed that the strike, initiated by the TWU, was not "protected action" as defined by Australia's anti-democratic industrial laws.

### **New Zealand healthcare call centre workers strike**

On Friday, workers at Access Community Health began a four-day strike. The company employs about 4,000 support workers and nurses who provide services for elderly and disabled people. The present strike, which follows industrial action in May, only involves coordinators, administrators, and call centre workers employed by the ACH, who are represented by the E Tu union and Public Service Association. It is not clear how many workers are taking part in the strike.

The company claimed last month that the workers' current pay claim

would amount to a 25 percent increase. A union press statement did not call for any specific pay increase, but urged ACH to “come back to the bargaining table” and offer “a fair increase.”

### **New Zealand retail workers strike**

Workers at Farmers department stores throughout New Zealand continued industrial action this week. Partial strikes began on June 20 and affected stores in Auckland, Hamilton, Masterton, Upper Hutt and Palmerston North, according to FIRST Union.

Workers are demanding a decent pay increase. The union has called for them to receive a “living wage” of \$NZ21.15 an hour. Many Farmers workers receive the minimum wage of \$17.70 or slightly more. Workers have also denounced the department store chain’s performance evaluations as a sham, saying that workers are not rewarded with higher pay despite strong performance.



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