

Assam tea workers on strike; 3,000 Sri Lankan railway workers walk out again; Tasmanian and South Australian teachers fight for better pay

## **Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific**

**29 June 2019**

### **Assam tea plantation workers continue strike action**

Thousands of Rosekandy tea estate workers in southern Assam remain on strike after walking out in early June to demand the removal of a harsh garden manager. The low-paid mainly women workers held a mass protest on June 23. All tea harvesting and production has halted for the past two weeks.

The workers have accused the estate manager of “running the garden with unprecedented strictness.” Rosekandy, which is a major tea estate in Assam, produces around 1.4 million kilograms of tea annually.

### **West Bengal teachers protest for higher pay**

West Bengal primary teachers demonstrated outside the state education department’s headquarters on June 24 for a salary increase. When some demonstrators attempted to enter the building they were baton-charged by the police who arrested several teachers. Primary teachers’ wages have been frozen for the last eight years. A similar protest was held at the same location earlier this month.

### **Uttar Pradesh hospital workers demonstrate against removal of IT employees**

Uttar Pradesh government hospital employees walked out on June 24 to protest against a state government decision to remove IT workers from government hospitals. All works related to online registration, patient details, cash counters, and patient discharge files were brought to a halt in many hospitals across the state. The government falsely claims that it does not have enough money to maintain IT staff.

### **Hindustan Aeronautics workers demand better pay and benefits**

Union officials from the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics began a so-called relay hunger strike on June 25 to demand workers be given increased pay and benefits in line with other state-owned employees.

Hindustan Aeronautics employs 18,000 workers across nine units in seven Indian states. The hunger protest, which has no impact on production, is a common tactic used by the unions to deflect workers’ demands for strike action.

### **Central government contract nurses protest in New Delhi**

Central government contract nurses demonstrated outside the Indian Health Minister’s residence alleging that they have been sacked without reason. The protesters included nurses from Safdarjung, RML, Lady Hardinge, Kalawati and other New Delhi hospitals. The sit-down protesters said that the hospital services need at least 5,000 staff.

The protest was held a week after nationwide strikes and demonstrations by doctors nationally in support of West Bengal doctors, who walked out following violent attacks on two interns at Neel Ratan Sarkar (NRS) Hospital in Kolkata.

### **Ford India workers strike in Sanand, Gujarat**

Over 900 Ford India workers began an indefinite strike on June 21 in Sanand, Gujarat state over the sacking and victimisation of a local union representative.

Strikers allege that management sacked the worker claiming that he behaved inappropriately towards a female employee. Management has provided few details to substantiate its allegations.

In February this year over 800 workers protested over a long-outstanding wage settlement and boycotted the company-provided meals. In 2018, over 400 employees at Ford’s Maraimalai Nagar facility in Tamil Nadu protested the sacking of nine fellow workers by management on false claims that they had violated the company’s “code of integrity.”

## **Karachi doctors boycott duties**

Doctors at the government-run Abbassi Shaheed Hospital in Karachi stopped work at the outpatient department and demonstrated outside the medical superintendent's office on June 21 to demand the payment of up to 10 months' wages and benefits. The payments are due to over 300 doctors, post-graduate trainees and house officers.

Hospital administration responded by firing 10 of the protesters. The doctors responded by resigning en masse. The protest was shut down by the Young Doctors Association after the administration promised to solve the issue by August 12.

The Karachi mayor and the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, which is responsible for the hospital, had previously agreed to pay the dues by April 1 following similar protests in March but reneged on the promise. The doctors have said they will resume their protests if the issue is not resolved in August.

## **Bidi workers protest across Bangladesh**

Thousands of bidi (local cigarette) workers demonstrated in Bangladesh on Sunday over increased duties in the industry for the fiscal year 2019-20. The workers are members of the Bangladesh Bidi Sramik Federation.

Some workers staged a human chain outside the National Board of Revenue (NBR), in Dhaka and later submitted a memo to the NBR chairman.

This year's budget will impose major taxes on bidi cigarettes and further impoverish the more than two million workers employed in the industry.

## **Bangladesh private primary school teachers and workers protest**

Teachers and workers at non-government primary schools demonstrated across the country on Wednesday to demand the government nationalise their schools and employ them in line with official Monthly Pay Order.

The action, which includes an ongoing protest outside the National Press Club in the capital Dhaka, was organised by the Bangladesh Non-Government Primary Teachers' Association. Union officials said that they would consider a protest hunger strike if the government does not grant their demands.

## **Railway workers strike over salary anomalies**

Around 3,000 Sri Lankan railway workers including station masters, examiners, drivers, controllers and guards are continuing industrial action this week following a two-day strike which began on June 20 and brought the entire rail system to a halt. An alliance of railway trade unions called the strike to demand an increase in salary scales.

Two-day national strikes will be held weekly, starting midnight every Thursday until workers' demands are met. The government has announced that it will invoke the essential services law and has begun hiring retired railway drivers and other strike-breakers.

## **EVA Airline flight attendant remain on strike**

Flight attendants at Taiwan's second largest carrier are continuing an indefinite strike that began on June 20. Grievances from EVA staff include low pay and long working hours on flight journeys, with shifts in excess of 12 hours.

As of Wednesday, the stoppage had resulted in \$43.2 million in lost revenue, and the cancellation of 295 flights. EVA has already announced that it will cancel 369 more flights from next week as the strike continues.

The union representing the cabin crew made several concessions on Thursday, in a bid to restart negotiations with the company. The company has filed legal action against the union, with a \$NT34 million lawsuit alleging that the stoppage is an "illegal strike."

## **Tasmania's public school teachers reject union pay deal**

Public school teachers in Tasmania have rejected their union's recommendation to accept the state Liberal government's latest pay offer. The Australian Education Union (AEU) endorsed the proposed one-year enterprise agreement (EA) that included a 2.1 percent pay increase in return for changes in conditions.

Teachers said that under the proposed offer, relief teachers' loading would be cut by more than 50 percent. Teachers threatened to put a motion of no confidence in the union executive if it did not reverse its position.

The Liberal state government has been in dispute with public sector employees for over a year since it applied a 2.1 percent cap on all pay increases for government employees. On Tuesday, prison workers walked off the job and education department cleaners and grounds keepers downed tools.

In an attempt to head off the escalating industrial action, Tasmanian Premier Will Hodgman announced this week that he will attempt to have the dispute dealt with in the Tasmanian Industrial Commission. Anxious to do a deal with the government, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) said it would consider the proposal. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) is currently pushing a sell-out deal in line with the government wage cap.

## **South Australian public school teachers vote to strike**

South Australia's public school teachers have voted to walk off the job on Monday in their dispute with the state Liberal government for a new enterprise agreement. AEU members will protest outside parliament in Adelaide and in regional centres. Their action follows a strike in November over the issue which involved 28,000 teachers from 900 schools.

The teachers have not had a pay rise since June 2017. The union wants a 3.5 percent interim wage increase to bring teachers in line with other Australian states, followed by annual increases up to 2022. The government has offered only 2.35 percent annual pay increases and rejected teachers' demands for reduced class sizes, improved resources for special-needs children, greater incentives for teachers to work in rural

areas and expanded permanency.

### **Queensland: Aurizon unions negotiate sell-out**

The two major unions representing around 1,000 workers in Aurizon's coal and bulk cargo train haulage network have endorsed a sell-out enterprise agreement (EA).

Representatives from the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE) and the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), along with company managers, are visiting work sites throughout the rail network to sell the new deal. Members, including train crews and maintenance workers, were given only 24 hours to read the EA document, which ties them to limited pay increases and company friendly conditions for the next three years.

These workers have not had a pay increase or improvement in conditions and allowances for nearly two years, while the unions dragged out the dispute by limiting industrial action to sporadic stoppages and token work bans.

In return for marginal wage increases, the unions have agreed to the introduction of a two-tier redundancy agreement that reduces entitlements for new employees by more than half.

### **New Zealand retail workers continue industrial action**

Workers at the Farmers department store chain across New Zealand continued partial strike action last week. Workers picketed at Silverdale Mall in Auckland and outside the Lamton Quay store in Wellington on Thursday and Friday.

Pickets and walkouts have been held in several locations over the past month in protest against low wages. About one in five Farmers workers receives the minimum wage of just \$17.70 an hour. FIRST Union is calling for a pay increase to \$NZ21.15 to bring Farmers workers into line with those at Kmart and other competing companies.



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