

Indian doctors and health workers strike for higher pay; Sri Lankan postal workers hold nationwide walkout

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 July 2019

### **India: Tamil Nadu government doctors impose bans on hospital outpatient services**

Hundreds of doctors refused to work for two hours in outpatient services at government health services and hospitals in the city of Trichy on July 18. They were demanding equal pay with central government doctors and an improved promotion scheme. The strike was organised by the Federation of Government Doctors Associations with the support of five other doctors' associations.

As many as 300 doctors at 10 government hospitals, 66 primary health centres, 18 urban primary health centres in Trichy district and a few doctors from the Mahatma Gandhi memorial government hospital participated in the industrial action.

The protesting doctors want higher pay and promotions on their 4th, 9th, 13th and 20th years of service and opposed cuts in jobs at government medical college hospitals and government health care facilities. They claim that government doctors in Tamil Nadu receive the same salaries as nurses at the central government hospitals.

### **Gandhi hospital contract workers in Hyderabad strike over delayed salaries**

Hundreds of Gandhi hospital contract workers in Hyderabad went on strike on July 24 over delayed salaries. About 500 outsourced workers, include sanitation, security and casualty employees, participated in the walkout and demonstrated at the entrance of the hospital's main block. The All India Trade Union Congress called the strike.

### **Telangana local government workers hold sit down protests**

Local government (gramapanchayat) workers staged a dharna or sit-down protest outside the Mandal Parishad Development Office in Dubbaka in India's Telangana state on July 17 to demand minimum wages and equal pay.

The workers denounced the state government for not paying a promised 8,500-rupees (\$US122) month salary to each worker. The gramapanchayat workers also want insurance and regular medical checkups and have

threatened to step up their agitation if their demands are not granted.

### **Telangana transport workers hold hunger protest**

Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) workers held a one-day hunger protest on July 19. They were opposing rising diesel prices, which have drastically increased running costs, and have also demanded a tax holiday on all motor vehicle taxes for four years and for rental buses to be replaced with new vehicles.

### **Kerala state government employees march**

Thousands of government employees marched to the Kerala Governor's Residence and Office in Thiruvananthapuram and other district headquarters across the state on July 18 over the Modi government's big business policies and communalist agenda.

Union officials addressing sit-down protests at various locations called for a nationwide strike and protests to demand repeal of the government's cost-cutting Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA). They also called on the Kerala state government to roll back the contributory pension scheme.

### **Andhra Pradesh midday meal workers demonstrate**

Thousands of midday meal (MDM) workers in Andhra Pradesh protested in Vijayawada on July 22. They were demanding the government rescind its MDM contract with Akshaya Patra Foundation and for increased spending on children's meals and the payment of outstanding bills of self-help groups.

State funding of the private foundation has triggered protests by the local self-help group workers, mainly women, who fear they will lose their jobs under the new arrangements. The demonstrating workers were blocked by police, who arrested eight workers.

## **Durgapur Alloy Steel factory workers protest in West Bengal**

Durgapur Alloy Steel factory workers held a hunger protest in West Bengal on July 23 to oppose privatisation of the plant. The plant, which was established with British assistance in 1960, is part of Steel Authority of India and employs over 1,600 workers. The Modi government wants to privatise hundreds of state-owned industries.

## **Andhra Pradesh emergency workers walk out to demand permanent jobs**

Indian emergency services workers in Andhra Pradesh's Krishna district held a one-day strike on July 24 for better wages and conditions. The strikers said they have been waiting for permanent jobs for 13 years. The workers protested at the Machilipatnam government hospital and demanded that the government immediately address their demands.

"We are neglected by the government," one worker told the media. "The authorities have ignored their promises [for permanency and] the previous regime promised to increase our salary. But it has simply turned a blind eye."

## **Karnataka garment workers demonstrate against management bullying**

Over 200 workers from a privately owned Himmath Singh Garment Factory in Karnataka's Hassan district clashed with police on July 24 during protests against bullying and physical attacks by factory supervisors. Workers accused plant bosses of repeatedly assaulting them.

Reports claimed that around 5,000 people joined the demonstration, which was attacked by the police who fired shots in the air and physically attacked the workers.

## **Sri Lankan postal workers launch nationwide strike**

Around 26,000 Sri Lankan postal workers held a one-day national strike starting on midnight July 22 to demand the government pay outstanding salary increases, give timely promotions and higher additional workers.

The entire postal service was brought to a standstill. The Department of Posts admitted that 600,000 letters have been delayed at the Central Mail Exchange. Central postal exchange workers held a two-day strike on July 16 and 17.

## **Bangladesh water transport workers end strike action**

Water transport workers walked out on Tuesday evening over 11 basic demands. The strike, which paralysed national river transport, was suspended after union officials met with government authorities and transport vessel owners.

No details have been provided about the meeting but federation officials

justified the suspension of the strike claiming they did not want passengers to be affected ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha religious festival and the danger of floods.

The transport workers want a salary increase, full implementation of the 2016 pay scale, identity cards, a provident fund, service books for water transport workers, compensation for the families of employees killed on the job and various other claims. The workers have been making these demands since September 2018.

## **China: Rural doctors and teachers protest over chronic underfunding**

Around 200 rural doctors in three separate counties in China have resigned in protest over low pay, excessive workloads and the repeated failure of local governments to pay owed healthcare subsidies.

Over 100 doctors in Yilian county, Heilongjiang, collectively resigned in mid-July. They claim the county government owes them around 16 million yuan in fees paid out for patients under the New Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme but has only agreed to reimburse them 600,000 yuan.

On July 18, 22 doctors from Xihe township in the southwestern province of Guizhou resigned over decreased wages and missing pension fund contributions.

Sixty-four doctors from two townships in Tongxu county, Henan, also submitted their joint-resignations in late June and early July. They complained of delayed reimbursements as well as the heavy burden of providing grassroots medical services to the rural community.

Rural doctors are hired to provide basic medical care in the community. They carry heavy workloads and are paid less with fewer benefits than their fully qualified counterparts in public hospitals. Their status mirrors that of China's community and substitute teachers who have consistently been denied the same rights as public school teachers by rural county governments that claim they don't have the financial resources to pay them.

## **Australia's industrial court restricts industrial action at DP World ports**

In the wake of two weeks of rolling strike action by 1,800 workers at DP World Australia's four terminals in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle, the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ruled that indefinite work bans by striking workers were illegal due to an industrial relations law time limit on strike action.

The FWC ruling came a week after DPWA announced last week that it intends to reduce its workforce by 10 percent. Management announced through local media that 100 jobs would be axed at Port Botany, Sydney and 100 at Port Melbourne.

The current DPWA enterprise agreement expired in February and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has been in negotiations for a new three-year agreement since September. The company has demanded that the union abandon its entire log of claims, including restrictions on the use of casual labour. It has also rejected calls for a 15 percent pay increase over three years. Instead, the company has offered just 2.6 percent annually, an amount that bears no relationship to the rapidly rising cost of living.

The major concern of members is over the loss of jobs through automation. DPWA is seeking to emulate its competitors, which, with the

crucial assistance of the unions, have automated large parts of their operations over the past two decades and drastically slashed their workforce.

### **Australia: Glass manufacturing workers strike for new enterprise agreement**

Over 100 employees of multi-national glass manufacturer OI Glass are taking protected industrial action for a new enterprise agreement (EA). Maintenance workers at factories in Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide are members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. They have implemented work bans and are holding temporary pickets at the factories and at OI Glass headquarters in Melbourne.

The ETU, which said the company has offered a substandard agreement that provides an inadequate pay increase, reduces hard-won conditions and compromises safety, is isolating the OI workers. Maintenance workers at OI's Melbourne factory are maintaining work bans but management is using scab labour from South Australia to undermine the bans.



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