GM Korea auto workers strike for higher pay

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

24 August 2019

India: Tamil Nadu government doctors protest for pay rise

A group of government doctors protested with a human chain outside the Government Medical College Hospital at Vellore in Tamil Nadu on August 20. They were demanding implementation of Government Order 354 which involves a pay rise.

The demonstration was organised by the Federation of Government Doctors Association, a major union in the medical sector. Earlier this year, Tamil Nadu government doctors boycotted outpatient services over outstanding promotions and for equal salaries with state and national counterparts.

Puducherry society colleges' employees begin sit-down strike in Tamil Nadu

Academic and non-academic staff at Puducherry society colleges began an indefinite sit-down protest on August 20 in Tamil Nadu over delayed salary increases. A similar protest was held between January 18 and 28 this year.

The Puducherry Government Society College Staff's Joint Action Committee, which called the protest, wants immediate implementation of the 7th pay commission recommendations. Organisers said that over 4,500 staff and teachers at 21 society colleges across India are planning a series of protests.

South Indian beedi workers call for wage rise

Kongu Regional United Beedi Workers' Association members demonstrated on August 20 near the Veerappanchatiram bus stop in Tamil Nadu to demand the Tamil Nadu state government increase wages.

The low paid local cigarette workers want a fixed minimum wage of 300 Indian rupees per 1,000 beedis, a six monthly increase in the dearness allowance, and for all workers to be covered by the Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance and pensions and gratuity given all workers on retirement.

Sanitary workers in India's Telangana state demand minimum pay

Sanitary workers organised by the Indian Federation of Trade Unions held a sit-down protest outside the Revenue Divisional Office in Nizamabad on August 19. They called on the state government to immediately pay workers 8,500 rupees ($121) per month. A similar demonstration was held at Kamareddy district's RDO office on the same day.

The sanitary workers are also demanding immediate payment of 2018 salary arrears, and the provision of a Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance and accommodation.

Workers from Indian state-owned arms factories strike

Thousands of workers from Indian state-owned arms factories began scheduled strike action on August 20 in protest against the Modi government's plans to corporatise the facilities. There are more than 7,000 military manufacturing workers at 41 defense equipment manufacturing companies in India. Talks between the unions and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) remained deadlocked on August 19.

The Indian government plant has decided to convert the state-owned production units into so-called Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) with 100 percent government equity. Workers fear it is a move towards mass job destruction and privatisation of the facilities.

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation workers demonstrate in New Delhi

Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) workers began five-day lunch-hour demonstrations on August 19 over outstanding promotions, recruitment and pay. More than 170 workers chanted slogans during the lunch-hour protest.

Workers said the demonstrations were the second phase of their agitation. On August 1, about 18,000 EPFO workers across India began protests and demonstrations over their demands.

India: Punjab health mission employees strike

Chandigarh National Health Mission (NHM) workers, including medical

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officers, staff nurses, lab technicians, pharmacists, counsellors and others, walked out on strike on August 19 in protest against management demands that they resign and become outsourced employees. Workers also demanded salary increases. The strike was organised by Chandigarh National Health Mission Employees Union (CNEU).

South Korean workers strike for higher wages

Thousands of General Motors Korea workers held a partial two-day strike last week to demand a pay rise. Industrial action included a four-hour walkout at all the company's plants on Tuesday, followed by another strike the next day.

The stoppage followed seven rounds of talks between unions and the employer since July 9. Members of the 10,000-strong union originally sought a 5.6 percent wage rise, bonuses based on performance worth two-and-a-half months of wages and a cash bonus of $US5,400.

The company rejected these demands and claimed it faced an "unfavourable business" environment and profit losses. GM Korea sales fell 7.2 percent between January and July.

Philippines police attack picket, arrest workers

Philippines National Police officers broke up a picket line of workers on August 19 outside the Peerless Products Manufacturing Corporation in Calamba City, Laguna, about 50 kilometres south of the capital Manila.

Twenty of the workers were arrested and bundled off to the city jail. Picketer Myra Viray told the media that the police "simply arrested and handcuffed us. We tried to ask for a warrant but they didn't reply."

The workers had been on strike since June 24 to demand permanent jobs and an end to the use of temporary workers with reduced rights or benefits.

Malaysian newspaper pays staff after picket

Owners of the Malay-language daily *Utusan Malaysia* agreed to pay outstanding salaries to 800 staff on August 20 after a protest picket by 100 staff outside the newspaper's Kuala Lumpur headquarters the previous day. The ongoing dispute involves outstanding salary payments since June.

Utusan Malaysia has been a longtime mouthpiece of the former Malaysian ruling party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Declining circulation in recent years meant that the publication has been financially dependent on government-funded advertising.

When UMNO was thrown out of office in the May 2018 national elections, the party sold most of its majority share in the business. The paper's financial position resulted in the destruction of 700 jobs and two series of withheld wages, retirement fund levies and union dues.

Workers were each paid 2,000 ringgit ($US479) after management met with UMNO officials and the party provided a cash payment of $US383,481 to the paper.

Australian airport workers protest over wages and conditions

Hundreds of ground crew workers at airports across Australia—in Brisbane, Cairns, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth—demonstrated on Wednesday to demand better pay and conditions.

The workers are part-time employees of contract companies, such as Swissport, which provide baggage handling, aircraft loading, towing and other ground services. They face gruelling split shifts and uncertain work hours. Because of understaffing safety has become a major concern, with one company, which employs 324 workers at Sydney Airport, recording 132 injuries in 2018.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) told the media that the protests were not meant to inconvenience the contract companies' operations but were held in the lead up to negotiations involving over 200 pay deals in the road and air transport sectors.

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) this month terminated a collective agreement by Aerocare (now Swissport) on the grounds that employees are worse off under the deal than they would be if they were covered by the Airlines Award.

The 2012 agreement pays below award rates on weekends and public holidays. The company is allowed to roster workers for as little as 3 hours and can force them to work split shifts. This means that a worker could be on duty for 12 hours and only receive 6 hours pay. Swissport's new proposed agreement would allow the company to change a worker's roster at any time without paying overtime.

Strike action at OI Glass in fifth month

About 100 employees of multinational glass manufacturer OI Glass are taking protected industrial action over a new enterprise agreement at factories in Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claim that workers have not had a real pay increase in seven years.

Industrial action began with an indefinite ban on overtime and communication with contractors. In late April, workers began 24 hours on-24 hours off stoppages which continued for three months. They are currently holding temporary pickets at OI Glass factories and the company's headquarters in Melbourne.

While the ETU claims that OI Glass is using scab labour to maintain production at its Melbourne and Brisbane factories, the union has isolated the striking workers.

OI Glass has 90 percent of Australia's market share with a revenue of $2.62 billion between 2013–17. According to the AMWU, the company's CEO receives an annual $11 million compensation package.

New Zealand: Hospital pharmacists, psychologists strike

Pharmacy workers at the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB) began four days of strike action on Thursday. The APEX union initiated bargaining for a new collective agreement last year but has not been presented with a formal offer. The union claims the CDHB has been facing continued recruitment and retention issues since the 2011 Christchurch earthquake.

APEX represents 98 pharmacists, technicians and assistants employed by the CDHB at Christchurch, Hillmorton, Burwood and Ashburton

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hospitals. APEX withdrew a previous strike notice, purportedly as a result of the March 15 Christchurch mosque attack, and last met with the CDHB in May.

Psychologists employed by 16 DHBs around the country have also voted in favour of further strike action. From September 3, more than 600 psychologists will stop accepting allocations of new patients onto their caseload and will not participate in group work with patients. The strike will last for four weeks and follows a nationwide overtime ban that began on July 31 and will continue until Tuesday 3 September.

APEX cites low pay, understaffing and lack of professional support as reasons for the action, and is calling on the DHBs to return to negotiations and "present an offer to lift wages and staffing levels."

Port Otago workers to ban overtime

Port Otago workers have voted to impose overtime bans if talks with management about pay and safety issues are not successful. The action was confirmed on Thursday after more than 250 workers at the Dunedin port voted for the ban. The move was made in response to Port Otago's "failure to engage on our key claims in collective bargaining," a combined unions' spokesman said.

Over 250 Port Otago staff are represented by the Rail and Maritime Transport Union and the Maritime Union.

The unions have been in bargaining with Port Otago, which is owned by the Otago Regional Council, since May. The company has offered workers a 2 percent pay rise, but the unions have called for a 4 percent rise. Far from mobilising a struggle against the company, the unions are criticising it for not "engaging" with them.

A union spokesman alleged the company has suppressed a 2017 report on roster management which recommended management "work with" the unions. The unions said they are committed to reaching a deal.

NZ school principals' strike vote withdrawn

New Zealand secondary school principals have received a last-minute pay offer from the government ahead of a scheduled strike vote next week. The negotiating team for the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) immediately recommended that the strike ballot be called off and members accept the deal. Voting on the offer will now take place next week. The deal will give principals an average pay increase of 14.5 percent over three years, six weeks annual leave and a $500 payment for union members.

If secondary principals accept the offer, it will bring to a close more than a year of industrial action in the education sector. The PPTA recently forced through a sell-out contract settlement for teachers that did not meet their demands over pay and workload.

Primary and intermediate school principals last week accepted their latest pay deal, taking further strike action by them off the table. The offer, recommended by the NZ Educational Institute, gives pay parity with secondary principals of similar-sized schools. Included in the agreement is an "accord," which is an empty agreement with the government to address "workload and wellbeing issues" at an indefinite time in the future.

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