

Motherson autoworkers strike in India; Madhya Pradesh railway workers oppose privatisation; Melbourne tram workers walk out

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

31 August 2019

India: Hundreds of Tamil Nadu auto workers take indefinite strike action

Motherson autoworkers in Tamil Nadu began indefinite strike action on August 26 to demand better pay and conditions and in protest against management's anti-union tactics. Workers held sit-down protests on July 31 and August 1 against a management demand that all workers sign an agreement that they would not join a union.

Motherson is one of the largest auto components manufacturers in India with factories in Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Three of the plants are in Tamil Nadu's Chennai industrial belt.

Workers say they are only paid 9,000–10,000 rupees (\$128–\$142) per month, even after eight years' experience, and do not receive proper benefits. The Chennai plants do not have proper transportation or canteen facilities and night-shift workers are not provided with a meal but only snacks.

Shivam auto parts workers in India demand reinstatement

A group of Shivam Auto Tech workers demonstrated outside the company's plant in the Binola Industrial Belt just outside New Delhi on August 21. The auto-parts workers were demanding reinstatement of 45 employees, including five union office bearers, who were suspended by management following a year-long struggle for higher wages. Workers inside the plant boycotted the company canteen in solidarity with the protest.

Andhra Pradesh health workers demonstrate against the state government

Thousands of Andhra Pradesh state government health workers protested in Vijayawada on August 26 to demand the chief minister implement previous promises he had made to these workers. Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) employees and Community Health Workers came from all 13 districts of the state to participate in the demonstration. The protest was organised by the Andhra Pradesh ASHA

Workers Union.

Workers want the government to pay a 10,000-rupee (\$US142) monthly salary as previously pledged by Chief Minister Reddy before election. They also demanded the immediate release of an honorarium, which is over and above the monthly salary, but has not been paid for four months.

Punjab medical education and research workers hold two-day strike

Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) contract workers walked out on strike from August 26 to 27 to demand equal pay for equal work and permanent jobs. Most of PGIMER's 2,000 contract workers, including hospital attendants, kitchen workers, trolley staff and security guards, participated in the strike.

Punjab Subordinate Services Federation members demonstrate in Bathinda

Punjab Subordinate Services Federation members protested outside Bathinda Municipal Corporation offices on August 23 to denounce the Punjab state government and demand improved working conditions and benefits.

The contract workers, daily wage employees and temporary workers have long been demanding permanent employment, release of Dearness Allowance (DA) payments, resumption of a previous pension scheme, cancellation of a 200-rupee tax (\$US2.90) imposed on employees and an end to the privatisation of government departments.

Madhya Pradesh railway workers hold 11-day protest

West Central Railway workers in Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal, Jabalpur and Kota divisions began an 11-day protest against the Modi government's 100 Days Action Plan on August 26.

Members of the West Central Railway Employees' Union (WCREU) oppose the Indian government's corporatisation and privatisation of the country's massive rail system. Chanting slogans such as "Save the

Railways, Save the Nation,” workers also demanded an end to a new pension scheme and for higher allowances as recommended by the Seventh Pay Commission.

Pepsu Road Transport Corporation workers hold rally in Punjab

Pepsu Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) employees held a rally outside the Bathinda PRTC depot on August 23 to demand job permanency. Workers criticised the government for not adding 100 new buses to the service as promised.

The transport workers also want direct contract employees who have completed three years’ service to be made permanent immediately and outsourced workers brought into the direct contract system and given full time employment as soon as possible. They called on the state government to pay 1.4 billion rupees (\$US20 million) in wages and benefits.

The PRTC has around 640 direct contract employees, 2,450 outsourced workers and just over 1,000 regular employees.

Hundreds of child care workers protest in Haryana

Hundreds of Anganwadi (child care) workers demonstrated on August 25 in Karnal city in Haryana state to demand higher pay, retirement benefits and for trained employees to be classified as workers and semi-trained workers designated as helpers.

The demonstrators attempted to march to Haryana chief minister’s office but after being blocked by the police staged a sit-down protest nearby.

Bangladesh garment workers demand reinstatement of sacked workers

About a hundred garment workers protested on August 23 to demand immediate reinstatement of workers sacked during the December 2018–February 2019 wage strike. They also want withdrawal of all frame-up charges against these workers. The rally, which was held outside the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka, was organised by the National Garment Workers Federation.

According to the federation, over 12,400 workers from 104 garment factories in Dhaka and the industrial hubs of Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur and Narayanganj were sacked during the industrial dispute. Tens of thousands of garment workers walked out to demand their basic monthly wage be increased from 8,000 taka to 16,000 taka (\$US190).

After the unions shut down the strike, the police, who killed one worker during the dispute, filed 38 frame-up cases against 7,458 workers.

Bangladesh garment workers demand unpaid salaries and reopening of factory

Hundreds of workers from Alif Apparels in the capital Dhaka staged a two-day demonstration on August 21 and 22 to demand unpaid salaries,

other allowances and the reopening of their factory.

Alif Apparels management closed down the plant during the Muslim Eid holidays. The police, who were mobilised to break up the demonstration, claimed they would organise a meeting between garment union officials and the factory owners.

Hundreds protest sacking of Hong Kong union leader

Over 700 workers demonstrated on Wednesday in Hong Kong after the August 22 sacking of Rebecca Sy On-na, an airline union leader, over her alleged politicised posts on social media. At least 20 aviation professionals have either resigned or been sacked after Beijing exerted pressure on local companies.

The protest involved members of the Dragon Airlines Flight Attendants Association. Rebecca Sy On-na has worked for the Cathay Pacific airline for 17 years. The Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) has accused the airline of intimidating its staff.

The rally began in Edinburgh Place at 4 p.m. and continued for over two hours before spilling over into Pacific Place, a luxury shopping centre and the headquarters of Swire Pacific, Cathay Pacific’s largest shareholder. Cathay Pacific has threatened to sack any employee who joins demonstrations in Hong Kong.

CTU leaders told the crowd on Wednesday that they were in solidarity with those who suffered political persecution. The speakers demanded reinstatement of all those who had lost their jobs as a result of political pressure.

Taiwanese labour rights groups protest unsafe fishing practices

A protest was conducted outside the Ministry of Labor in Taipei on Thursday calling for an end to unsafe fishing practices. The demonstration came after 15 migrant fishers were reported missing this month due to accidents.

Migrant fishers are banned from wearing life jackets by their respective companies that claim bulky sizes slow down production. Lightweight life jackets cost in the vicinity of NT\$3,000 to NT\$6,000.

Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union members participated in the demonstration. The union claims it has handled nearly 10 cases of drowning since 2017.

Melbourne tram workers walk out

Around 1,500 drivers and customer service personnel from Melbourne’s tram network walked off the job between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Friday after negotiations with Yarra Trams over a proposed enterprise agreement failed this week. The strike action was in addition to work bans imposed at the beginning of the week. These include bans on voluntary overtime, covering shifts on days off or wearing uniforms.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) has been negotiating with the company, which is owned by international company Keolis Downer, for four months. Yarra Trams management has rejected most of the union’s 107 claims. The union wants 6 percent annual pay increases and improved conditions.

Workers have twice rejected the company's proposed new agreement, which includes 3 percent annual pay increases over four years in exchange for lifting an existing cap on part-time work from 4 percent to 15 percent. The operator originally wanted the cap lifted to 35 percent and attempted to buy off workers with a \$A1,000 sign-on bonus plus \$400 if they agreed.

Australian hairdressers fight to retain weekend penalty rates

The newly formed union Hair Stylists Australia, which is backed by the Australian Workers Union, demonstrated outside the Fair Work Commission (FWC) in Melbourne on Monday in protest against moves to cut their weekend penalty rates. The Hair and Beauty Australia Industry employers' group wants Sunday and public holiday rates for hairdressers cut from \$A45.39 to \$A34.05 per hour.

Professional hairdressers are among the lowest paid workers in Australia. Most begin their four-year apprenticeship on \$11.02 per hour before progressing to Certificate III on \$22.04. Australia's minimum wage is \$18.93 per hour.

In February 2017 the FWC ordered the cut of weekend and holiday penalty rates for over 700,000 retail and fast food workers. Sunday rates for retail workers were reduced from 175 percent to 150 percent, while fast-food workers' Sunday rates were lowered from 150 percent to 125 percent. Public holiday rates were cut from 250 percent to 225 percent. No industrial action was called by the unions to stop the cuts.

Auckland SkyCity workers vote to strike

SkyCity Casino workers in Auckland have voted overwhelmingly for strike action, demanding compensation for the unsociable hours they are required to work. Almost 94 percent of 900 of the casino's employees, who are members of the Unite Union, voted at a meeting last week to reject the employers' last offer and for strike action.

A strike notice has been issued for 5 p.m. Saturday August 31 to 8 a.m. Sunday. The main union claim is for penalty rates to be paid for night and weekend work and allowances for more choice in working hours.

Earlier this year management carried through three re-structures requiring workers to work unpopular night and weekend shifts. Almost all low paid workers are forced onto rotating rosters irrespective of their personal or family situation. The union says it has been trying to negotiate more "humane" rosters for years but SkyCity refuses any extra pay for nights and weekends.

The union has offered some undisclosed "concessions" on its claim but SkyCity has so far rejected any movement on the issue. Unite is seeking mediation, but this is not available until September 6. SkyCity, which also runs the Adelaide casino in South Australia, announced a half-year profit in January of \$NZ189 million.



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