

Thousands of Assam tea workers strike over bonus payments;  
17,000 non-academic university workers remain on strike in Sri Lanka

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

5 October 2019

### India: Assam tea workers walk out over festival bonus payments

Thousands of Assam tea workers held strikes and protests late last month after estate companies said they would only pay the puja (religious festival) bonus in two or three instalments. Most of the largest tea companies claimed that they could not provide the bonus amount in one payment because of major losses last financial year.

On September 29, nearly 3,000 workers from the McLeod Russel owned-Margherita tea estate in Tinsukia district protested outside the manager's office opposing the bonus pay instalments. The demonstration, which continued throughout the day, halted all operations on the tea estate.

Similar protests were also reported from the nearby Powai tea estate. Budlabeta tea estate workers in Doomdooma also walked out over the issue.

casual workers are pending for up to a maximum of eight months.

### Punjab state government workers hold casual leave strike

Workers from various Punjab state government departments held a mass casual leave strike and held a protest march and sit-down protest on September 26. The walkout involved workers from education, health, irrigation, co-operation, revenue, agriculture and horticulture.

Workers demanded the release of outstanding instalments of the dearness allowance (DA), increased pay according to the pay commission's report and permanent work for contract and outsourced employees.

### E-rickshaw owners demonstrate in Uttarakhand

Hundreds of e-rickshaw owners held a one-day protest and strike in Dehradun, Uttarakhand state, on September 30 to demand the repeal of an order banning the battery-powered vehicles in parts of the city. In August, the city administration barred e-rickshaws from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on eight prominent city roads, claiming it would ease traffic congestion. Drivers of the eco-friendly three-wheelers, however, ignored the ban and continued to operate on the designated streets.

### Sri Lanka: Indefinite strike by thousands of university non-academic workers continues

An indefinite strike by about 17,000 state university non-academic workers and executive officers entered its fourth week on October 1. The workers are demanding salary increases granted to other state-sector employees, pension rights and other benefits. The strikers are holding regular demonstrations and rallies.

### BSNL workers strike in Tamil Nadu

Contract and casual workers from the public sector telecom company Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) held a three-day strike in Tamil Nadu starting on September 26 over outstanding wages and working conditions. The strike was organised by the Tamil Nadu Telecom Contract and Casual Workers Union.

BSNL has ignored numerous strikes and protests by the low paid workers, some of whom have not been paid for eight months. Despite various struggles and protests, the hard-earned wages for contract and

### Sri Lankan railway workers still on strike over salary anomalies

Strike action by over 2,000 railway engine drivers, guards, station masters, supervisors and technical officers in Sri Lanka, continued on Wednesday—the seventh continuous day of industrial action—and crippling national train services. The strikers are demanding rectification of salary anomalies and several other demands.

The government has suggested that the railways be made a “closed service” to resolve the salary issue, but workers have opposed this and said they will remain on strike opposing those proposals.

The transport ministry claims that the strike has led to about 110 million

rupees (\$550,000) in lost revenue. Railway management is attempting to maintain some office services by using retired drivers.

### **Sri Lankan government executive officers return to work after five-day strike**

Strike action by executive officers affiliated to several government institutions was called off by the trade unions on October 2, after discussions with a cabinet subcommittee appointed to investigate the officers' salary demands. The media has not reported on whether the strikers' demands will be met.

Joint Committee of All Island Executive Officers members, which included management assistants, development officers and others, walked out on strike to demand an equal pay rise for all employees.

### **South Korean pharmaceutical workers demonstrate against restructuring**

On Monday, workers held a rally at the Seoul headquarters of Merck Korea, in opposition to the company's coerced restructuring of a division. The action, organised by the Korean Democratic Pharmaceutical Union, also demanded stable employment.

The workers demanded that management withdraw its decision to sell the General Medicine Primary Care division in charge of marketing chronic disease treatments. Complaints were raised by the union over the lack of consultation from the company, which announced the restructuring unilaterally.

The company issued a statement rejecting the demands and citing the need for "competitiveness."

### **Water utility workers in Sydney on five-day strike**

About 20 workers employed by engineering services company Ventia to maintain the water supply network of Sydney Water, servicing over five million customers, struck on Monday in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement (EA). The stoppage lasted for five days.

Workers accused Ventia of using its proposed EA to take hard fought conditions away from them.

### **Newcastle port workers hold stop-work meeting**

Employees of three stevedoring companies in Newcastle walked off the job for four hours on Monday against the port owner's plan to hire its own workforce. The move effectively adds a fourth stevedore operator in the port, potentially leading to fewer hours for existing workers.

The meeting voted for a ban on the unloading of a new bulk loading crane. A Maritime Union of Australia spokesman, however, said the union was willing to do a deal with port management.

The Port of Newcastle was privatised in 2014. Hastings Funds Management and China Merchants paid \$1.75 billion for a 98-year lease.

### **Crown Casino workers in Melbourne vote on strike action**

Some 5,000 workers at Melbourne's Crown Casino are voting to decide on strike action in their dispute with the company over a proposed enterprise agreement. The ballot, organised by the United Voice union and approved by Fair Work Australia, ends on October 28. The union has stated industrial action would likely commence on November 1.

Workers are demanding 5 percent annual pay increases over the three-year agreement and improved job security. According to the union, up to 70 percent of Crown's workforce are part-time or casual. Crown has offered 2.5 percent annual increases.

### **Casino workers in Perth reject pay offer**

Crown Casino workers in Perth have rejected the company's latest offer of annual one percent pay increases in a new three-year enterprise agreement. When compared with inflation, the offer represents a pay cut each year.

The United Voice union is demanding annual pay increases of 3 percent, barely in line with the rapidly rising cost of living. The union successfully applied to the Fair Work Commission to hold a ballot on strike action. Voting will close on November 1.

### **Newcastle City Council workers hold stop work over sackings**

Over 200 council workers in Newcastle attended a United Services Union (USU) stop-work meeting on Thursday. The meeting condemned the "unfair" dismissals of three workers in the city council's IT department, amid a restructure and move into a new office.

The members endorsed a no confidence resolution in three management staff on the grounds that the sackings violated this year's enterprise agreement. Union official Luke Hutchinson suggested the members return for a further stop-work if the Council did not meet the retrenchment standards of the EA.

The EA signed by the USU in collaboration with the employer provides an open cheque for the council to sack workers at will in any restructure, as long as the unions are consulted.

### **New Zealand hospital workers strike**

More than 1,000 radiographers employed by New Zealand's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) walked off the job for 24 hours on Monday, after months of pay negotiations reached a stalemate. A second 24-hour stoppage was held on Wednesday, with a third scheduled for October 14. X-rays were cancelled, and surgeries disrupted, for more than 12,000 people each day.

Mostly Auckland-based Sonographers, who take ultrasound images, joined the radiographers, striking from Thursday to Saturday. From October 11 hospital laboratory workers will also walk out for 24 hours.

DHB-employed psychologists are stepping up current strike action by only completing two hours of patient-facing time a day for all of October.

Apex, the union covering the four groups of workers, said demand for medical services has skyrocketed, resulting in recruitment and retention issues. All but one of the DHBs have million-dollar budget deficits and are imposing cuts to jobs, working conditions and services.

A DHBs spokesman declared there was “no basis” for the striking workers to get “more generous settlements than those already agreed with other unions covering the same or similar workforces.” The sell-out pay deal imposed by the NZ Nurses’ Organisation last year, which saw a 3 percent per annum wage increase over three years, has become the benchmark throughout the health sector.



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