

Tens of thousands of Indian transport and aircraft manufacturing workers strike

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Chinese workers stage protests against layoffs

A series of protests have taken place across China after a logistics company announced a major restructuring earlier this month. Demonstrations began in Beijing on October 12, followed by workers' actions in Chongqing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Wuhan and Nanjing.

Couriers with YTO Express were told they had to resign or transfer to lower-paying jobs, and some found their long service leave reduced to zero. Workers who previously earned between 8,000 and 9,000 yuan per month with benefits, above the industry average, now face cuts of 50 percent and an uncertain future with no minimum salary.

Workers demanded the company formally dissolve their labour relationship and pay the compensation required by law.

## India: Strike by Telangana state transport workers enters third week

Around 49,000 Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) workers have been on strike since October 4. Organised by the Joint Action Committee (JAC), comprising various TSRTC unions, they have intensified protests including human chains, rallies and sit-ins at depots across the state.

The Telangana government has rejected strikers' demands, which include the merger of the TSRTC with other state sector transport entities and a pay rise. The chief minister has ordered that all strikers be sacked. Several union leaders have been taken into custody by police. Workers have gained support from civil rights organisations that condemned the government for its actions.

## Military aircraft manufacturing workers in India strike for wage increase

About 20,000 workers from the Indian state-owned aerospace and

defence equipment manufacturer Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) walked out on an indefinite strike in seven states on October 14 to demand a pay increase. Workers want their salary increases to be on par with recent pay hikes provided to HAL executives. Their demand is a 15 percent basic wage rise and 33 percent increase in allowances.

The All India HAL Trade Unions coordinating committee rejected the company's "final" offer of an 11 percent basic wage increase and 22 percent for allowances, saying they would remain on strike until a fair offer was made.

HAL is under the management of the Indian Ministry of Defence. It is involved in the design, fabrication and assembly of aircrafts, jet engines, helicopters and spare parts.

## Unemployed teachers in Punjab protest over delayed job appointments

A group of unemployed youth who have passed the teacher eligibility test staged a protest in front of the residence of Congress candidate Sandeep Sandhu on October 15 demanding immediate job appointments. The protesters chanted "No jobs, no vote." They condemned the ruling National Congress state government, claiming that they were given false pre-poll promises of jobs.

Protesters demanded 2,500 rupees (\$US35) per month as unemployment allowance. A spokesman from the Unemployed Teachers union said that thousands of posts are lying vacant in schools, but teachers are not recruited.

## Punjab teachers protest over electoral duties

Members of the Booth Level Officer (BLO) Teachers' Taalmel Committee rallied at the Children Park in Bathinda on October 11 and marched to the district administration complex. They held banners protesting extra work given to them on election duty. Teachers complained that they remain engaged in election duty throughout the year, affecting the academic work of students.

Protesting teachers submitted a memorandum of demands to the district administration. One was that they not do technical work during election duty such as data entry, which they said they were not qualified for.

hour demanding three months of unpaid salaries.

### **Tamil Nadu electricity workers demand permanent jobs**

Contract workers of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) recently initiated protests demanding job permanency. There are over 10,000 contract workers at TANGEDCO who have been working more than 10 years in various capacities, including electricity generation and maintenance. The actions have been called by the Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees (COTEE) affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

Thousands of protesting workers have been arrested. Demands include a fixed minimum wage, the filling of 43,000 existing vacancies, disbursement of bonuses to contract workers on par with regular employees and the payment of a minimum salary of 380 rupees (\$5.50) per day, which was promised in 2018. Workers are also calling for a reversal of steep price hikes for new electricity connections. Full-time employees at the utility announced their support and threatened to join the protests.

### **Haryana auto workers protest over cuts to jobs and wages**

Several hundred workers from different automobile units in Gurugram, Haryana demonstrated on October 11 to protest against the axing of jobs and cuts in salaries and allowances. The protest was called by the Bellsonica Auto Component India Employees Union and involved ten other unions.

Demands included abolition of the labour contract and fixed-term employment systems, along with allowances for workers who have been sacked.

The workers submitted a three-page memorandum to the local government administration with additional demands. These were that the policies of liberalisation and privatisation be reversed and that all new jobs be permanent; that cuts to jobs, salaries and allowances be immediately halted and that closed factories be nationalised. They also called for indirect taxes to be abolished and for free healthcare and education to be provided to all.

### **Bangladesh: Uber drivers in Dhaka strike**

The Bangladesh Ridesharing Drivers' Association and Dhaka Ridesharing Drivers Union called a 24-hour strike on Monday putting forward eight demands. They called for a fare increase to cover increasing fuel costs, a reduction of the company commission from 25 percent to 12 percent and the removal of the present restriction of 12 hours' work per day.

### **Garment workers in Dhaka demand unpaid wages**

Around 200 workers from the Air Fashion garment factory blockaded the Dhaka Rampura-Malibagh road in front of the Abul Hotel for over an

### **Burmese garment workers strike for improved conditions**

Around 400 workers from the Chinese-owned Unitedtex Overseas Garment factory in Yangon's Hlaing Tharyar Township walked out on September 26 to demand higher wages and improved conditions. Several workers were injured when a manager from a labour hire company drove his car into the picket line on October 1.

Workers issued 17 demands that included the payment of an additional 10,000 kyats (\$US6.5) for not taking leave during the month. They also insisted that their wages not be cut when they do take leave, and that their leave allowance be calculated based on length of service, in accordance with the law.

Other demands were that all new workers at the factory be paid the minimum daily wage of 4,800 kyats, that workers who suffer a death in the family be given a week's paid leave and that management arrange for sufficient ferries for all workers to get to the factory.

### **Burmese steel workers protest over factory closure**

Some 30 people, including ten striking factory workers, their family members and supporters, have been protesting outside the Chinese-owned Sky Man steel factory in the Myaungdaka Industrial Zone in Yangon Region's Hmawbi Township since October 1. They are demanding reinstatement after the factory abruptly announced its closure.

Management claimed the shuttering was due to increased power charges. Workers said it had more to do with their demands for unpaid wages. In August, a dispute arose between the employees and management after some workers were suspended from work for a week after refusing to work on a public holiday. Workers later demanded the factory pay them a year's worth of unpaid daily overtime and holiday pay.

After management was ordered by local labour officials to pay compensation for unpaid wages it announced that the factory was to close. Management offered compensation below the official amount, which 94 workers reportedly accepted. The ten protesting are demanding full compensation and the reopening of the factory.

### **Cambodian garment workers return to work with improved conditions**

More than 10,000 workers from the Taieasy International garment factory in Phnom Penh's Krakor district agreed to end their three-day strike on Tuesday after government officials accepted their four demands. Demands were for a year-end bonus, an allowance of 500 riel (\$US0.13) per day, a five percent seniority allowance and 15 kilograms of milled rice a month. Factory management told workers it would fulfil their demands by October 18.

### **Australian coal miners strike for better pay**

Over 300 workers at the Idemitsu-owned Boggabri Coal open-cut mine in north west New South Wales struck for 48 hours on Tuesday demanding pay and conditions in line with miners in other regions. The action, called by the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), followed a stoppage on September 24 and 25.

Boggabri Coal workers are attempting to win back conditions that were lost when their employment moved from contractor Downer to Idemitsu two years ago.

The workers are reportedly paid \$40,000 a year less than Idemitsu's coal miners in Muswellbrook in the Hunter Valley and Ensham in Queensland. Redundancy entitlements are half those of other Idemitsu miners.

### **Hospital support staff in Perth walk out**

For the second time in two weeks around 80 support staff at the Sir Charles Gardiner Hospital and Perth Children's Hospital in Western Australia walked off the job and rallied against the casualisation of jobs in the health sector. The protest was organised by the United Voice union.

The state Labor government announced last year that it would address casualisation, but since then there have been no new permanent positions created at both hospitals. Workers threatened to stage further actions if the issue is not resolved.

### **Crown Casino workers protest in Melbourne**

Around 1,000 Crown Casino workers and supporters marched in Melbourne on Monday to protest against the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

Some 5,000 Crown staff are participating in a ballot approved by the Fair Work Commission to decide, for the first time in 16 years, whether to strike. The ballot closes on October 28. The United Voice (UV) union has stated industrial action would likely commence on November 1.

The union claims to be demanding 5 percent annual pay increases over three years and improved job security. Up to 70 percent of Crown's workforce are part-time or casual. Crown has offered 2.5 percent annual increases.

Crown Casino workers in Perth are also voting on strike action in a ballot that closes on November 1. Workers rejected the company's proposed EA which offered annual pay increases of just 1 percent. UV is demanding wage hikes of just 3 percent per annum, barely enough to cover the rapidly rising cost of living.

### **Truck drivers protest outside Aldi supermarkets over safety**

Hundreds of truck drivers demonstrated outside Aldi supermarkets and distribution centres across Australia on Wednesday over safety concerns. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) claimed cost-cutting by Aldi and other supermarkets at the top of the supply chain is putting pressure on drivers and operators to speed, skip rest breaks and delay vehicle maintenance.

Drivers complained about unsafe conditions at the loading bays of Aldi supermarkets and distribution centres. They told the media that they

frequently found obstructions in front of fire exits and blocked drains, along with flooding near electrical equipment and poorly wrapped pallets that broke open when moved.

The German supermarket giant has taken the TWU to court accusing it of propagating lies.

### **New Zealand health workers strike**

Nearly 1,200 Medical Imaging Technologists (MITs) employed by New Zealand's 20 District Health Boards continued strike action this week, involving a complete withdrawal of labour. A third in their series of strikes began Monday October 14 and ran for 24 hours. Another 24-hour strike took place on October 16.

Negotiations by APEX union for the MIT Multi Employer Collective Agreement covering all DHBs started in December, however 10 months of negotiations have failed to reach a settlement. MITs are essential to radiology services, assisting with diagnosis and treatment of patients using general x-rays, CTs, MRIs, mammographies, angiographies and nuclear medicine.

Medical Laboratory Workers at nine DHBs and the NZ Blood Service also struck on October 11 after rejecting a salary offer two months ago. According to APEX, no attempts have been made by the DHBs to improve the offer, despite multiple meetings and strike notices issued.

Some 600 DHB-employed psychologists are also undertaking limited strike action over pay and excessive workloads. APEX, which represents all the groups of workers, is fearful that the strikes will escalate, and is separating and opposing any nationally coordinated action.

### **Auckland SkyCity workers picket over unsociable hours**

SkyCity casino workers involved in a pay dispute picketed a function at an Auckland hotel this week. SkyCity chairman Rob Campbell, a former top union bureaucrat, was a guest speaker at a \$2,200 per ticket "Wellbeing at Work" conference, talking about "fair and transparent practices" for pay.

The workers, including cleaners, security guards, gaming techs, cashiers, dealers, and food and beverage staff, have gone on strike and protested several times during the past two months, demanding time-and-a-half pay for working unsociable hours. This would bring them into line with the SkyCity casino in Adelaide. No agreement has been reached with the company, which made a \$144 million profit last year.

One casino dealer, who didn't want to be named, told radio NZ the pay has not kept up with the rising cost of living. "When I started the work seven years ago, the rate of pay somehow covered all the issues of giving away the weekend time or night time, but at the moment it's not, which is why we're trying to get recognition for all the hours that go in those unsociable hours," she said.

The casino employs 900 staff, most of whom are members of SEA-Unite, the Unite Union's SkyCity division. The union has restricted the strikes to 48 hours on weekends in support of its slogan "Back to the Weekend," effectively dragging out the dispute while seeking a mediated settlement.

Unite revealed this week that the union is collaborating with SkyCity management over job losses at its Convention Centre. Claiming that 100 jobs are at risk, a Unite spokesman declared; "It is a redundancy process. We are trying to get people transfers and stuff."



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