

Honda motorcycle and Kerala state transport workers strike in India;
Pakistan health workers oppose privatisation

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 November 2019

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

India: Kerala state transport workers strike over sackings and unpaid wages

Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers in Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital, struck for 24-hours on Monday to protest the non-fulfillment of various demands, including timely payment of salaries, a pay rise and disbursement of six pending instalments of dearness allowances.

The strike was called by the INTUC-affiliated Transport Democratic Federation (TDF) but was not joined by other KSRTC unions, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) union and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh. The TDF includes the Transport Drivers Union and the Transport Workers Union, and has support of 30 percent of 31,000 employees on the rolls in the KSRTC.

Workers are also protesting against the sacking of 3,864 empaneled conductors, 2,107 drivers, 650 clerks, 950 mechanics engaged in body building and 1,661 permanent staff since the Left Democratic Front came to power.

KSRTC employed conductors and drivers on a daily wage basis during the strike and invoked “dies non” (no legal work could be done for employees on strike). The strike followed the collapse of talks between TDF leaders, KSRTC and the Labour Commissioner on November 1.

Honda contract workers in Haryana down tools

Around 2,500 contract workers at the Manesar plant of Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) downed tools on October 5 to protest the retrenchment of around 400 contract workers at the facility. The action erupted after retrenched workers were stopped from entering the factory.

The HMSI Employee Union leaders alleged that the company has reduced production of the facility by 50 percent and will retrench more contract workers. The Manesar facility has 1,900 permanent workers and 2,500 contract employees. The plant has the capacity to make around 3,000 two-wheelers a day and produces popular models such as Dio, Activa and Unicorn motorcycles.

Ambulance workers in Rajasthan strike for job security

Nearly 1,500 employees of Ambulance Services contract company GVK-EMRI are on an indefinite strike to demand job security. The tenure of GVK-EMRI, which operates ambulances in Rajasthan state, will end in December.

The government has issued a request for tenders to run the service causing alarm amongst workers who fear that they could lose their jobs if GVK-ERMI loses the contract. Workers are demanding that there should be a condition in the new tender document that gives current employees priority in the new firm.

Sacked contract workers at government hospitals in Uttar Pradesh protest

Around 61 contract workers from government hospitals in Gonda demonstrated at the district hospital gate on November 1 to oppose the termination of their services. Workers said their contracts had been renewed for the past four years but this time the government gave instructions to end the services of contract health workers in 51 districts, claiming lack of budget finances.

The protesters, who say the contract workers will have no source of income, demanded the reversal of its decision. They want all contract workers to be accommodated in the National Health Mission.

Karnataka handloom weavers protest flood compensation

Handloom workers in Ramdurg, Karnataka marched in the town on October 31 over government flood compensation. The workers accused the chief minister of reneging on his commitment to pay 25,000 rupees (\$US357.5) for each loom lost in the floods.

The government recently released a circular that effectively reduced compensation by limiting it to 25,000 rupees for each weaver. Weavers complained that many of them have more than one handloom and want the government to honour its original promise.

Hospital resident doctors in Bangalore demonstrate over assaults

Resident doctors from four hospitals affiliated with the Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI) demonstrated in Bangalore over physical attacks on members on November 2. The protest followed the “manhandling and harassment” of two female doctors a day earlier at the state-run Minto Ophthalmic Hospital.

Doctors held placards while protesting on hospital premises in Minto, PMSSY, Trauma and Emergency Care Centre and Victoria hospitals. The BMCRI Resident Doctors’ Association demanded more guards be placed at hospitals and compensation for the doctors attacked.

Andhra Pradesh: BHEL workers oppose privatisation

Workers from India’s largest power generation equipment manufacturer, the state-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), participated in a bike rally in Ramachandrapuram, to oppose privatisation on November 1. Protesters held banners saying “Save BHEL,” “Save government undertakings.”

The protest was organised by the BHEL Workers’ Union to oppose the central government’s plan to privatise BHEL and other government undertakings. Various BHEL trade unions, in coordination with labour organisations and associations, were involved in the protest.

Former Kerala textile factory workers on hunger strike

Fifteen former employees of the closed factory of Comtrust (Commonwealth Handloom Weaving Factory) have been on a relay hunger strike since October 22 to demand the factory reopen. The protest is being held outside the Kerala State Industrial Development Council (KSIDC) office in Thiruvananthapuram.

Comtrust produced high-quality textiles for the international market and upholstery for leading Indian airlines. When the business was wound-up in 2009 a group of employees launched a campaign demanding the government acquire the business. The property is now under the KSIDC and the employees receive a monthly honorarium.

Ready-mix concrete workers in Bangalore demand permanent jobs

Hundreds of workers from the ready-mix concrete industry demonstrated outside the Department of Labour in Bangalore on November 5 to demand equal pay with other labourers in the industry and for the state government’s intervention in the dispute.

Organised by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), workers demanded minimum wages as per the Labour Act, plus employee state insurance, provident fund, leave facility and abolition of the contract system. According to the union, there are more than 150 companies with close to 15,000 unregistered employees in Bengaluru alone.

Tamil Nadu Electricity Board workers strike

More than 250 contract workers from the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) have been on strike since November 1 demanding permanent appointments and a 380-rupee increase in their daily wage as promised by the state electricity minister. Striking workers protested in the state’s capital Coimbatore on Tuesday that interrupted road traffic. The government has refused to discuss the issue with the TNEB.

Municipal workers in Maharashtra demand salaries on time

Nashik Municipal Corporation employees demonstrated outside the corporation’s headquarters in Nashik on November 5 to demand their unpaid October salaries. Workers said they normally receive their salaries on the first day of every month but due to a newly installed biometric attendance system their pay has been delayed for the last two months.

Workers were assured by management that the problem had been identified and the system software would be upgraded.

Pakistan: Health workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab still on strike

Doctors, paramedics, nurses and other workers from government hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces walked out in early October to demand repeal of the regressive Regional and District Health Authorities Act (in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and the Medical Teaching Institutions Act (in Punjab).

The Acts are aimed at slashing expenditure, winding back services and paving the way for further privatisation. As a result of the strike, outpatient departments remain closed and most non-emergency services are affected.

The walkouts were called by the Grand Health Alliance, an umbrella organisation of the health sector unions. The two provincial governments have insisted on the implementation of the so-called reforms. The Punjab government has formed a five-member committee to negotiate with the unions.

The Pakistan government is increasingly under pressure from the International Monetary Fund and other international banks to carry out unpopular reforms, including extensive privatisation. In response, the government has relied on a combination of brutal police force and the unions to contain and ultimately defuse workers’ opposition.

Bangladesh: Garment workers in Dhaka demand unpaid salaries

About 700 garment workers from the Trendy Outerware factory in Belma area, Dhaka demonstrated on October 30 against the factory’s closure on October 15. Workers were demanding unpaid salaries for September and October. They held a rally and blocked the Bishmail-Zirabo Road for an hour.

Previous protests ended after workers were falsely assured by the factory owner and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association that their salaries would be paid.

Bangladeshi textile dyeing workers demand unpaid salaries

Hundreds of workers from the Adib Dyeing Mills factory, in Gazipur's Sreepur sub-district, demonstrated on October 30 on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway demanding two months' unpaid salaries. They later demonstrated outside the factory, where they have maintained a protest since September 29.

The Adib Dyeing Mills Ltd is part of the garment maker Welltex Group which is 100 percent export oriented. Its business involves textile manufacturing and dyeing and washing.

Migrant workers in Taiwan hold multiple protests

Protests in Taipei last week demanded the abolition of placement agencies for migrant workers and their replacement with a government to government (G2G) hiring system.

Workers involved were from Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. They demonstrated at multiple sites including the Indonesia Economic and Trade Office, the Manila Cultural and Economic Office and the Vietnam Economic and Cultural Office.

The placement agencies act as brokers for migrant workers. They fleece workers through fees associated with starting, continuing or changing contracts with employers. Typical "job buying" fees range from around \$NT35,000 (US\$1,139) to NT\$80,000. The protest is widespread despite being in breach of labour regulations.

Takeda Korea pharmaceutical workers protest restructuring

Korea Democratic Pharmaceutical Union members at Takeda Korea held a rally in Seoul on Thursday in opposition to management's sacking of one of its leaders. About 100 workers were involved. They condemned the sacking, along with the company's rumoured plans to sell off of its primary business unit dealing with chronic diseases.

Takeda Korea replied that the sacked union leader, Kim Young-buk, was dismissed over threats to the head of a business unit. It denied that it was intending to sell the unit.

The union stated that both claims were false, declaring that the sale rumor came "out from the mouth of the head of the business unit."

Cambodia: Phnom Penh hotel workers protest over unpaid wages

Around 100 workers at the luxury Great Duke Phnom Penh Hotel protested on Monday over unpaid wages and benefits. Hotel worker and protest leader Toch Kosal said it was the fifth such protest since June. Kosal said staff had still not received their October wages and claimed management only paid workers when it was forced to do so through protests.

Victoria: Unions move to impose pay cut at Australian Paper

The three unions covering 160 maintenance workers at the Australian Paper mill in Maryvale, southeast of Melbourne, are continuing to call workers out on limited strike action in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the National Union of Workers (NUW) are negotiating with the company behind closed doors in the Fair Work Commission. They have allowed workers to let off steam with three short duration strikes since early September.

The company wants a two-tier agreement that would result in the wages of new recruits being 15 percent less than current employees. Australian Paper is also seeking a freeze on existing employees' wages until the pay of new starters catches up. Proposed changes could lead to full-time staff being replaced by contractors, a reduction of sick and personal leave and alterations in the way overtime is calculated and rosters devised.

Workers unanimously rejected the company's proposed EA in July and voted for unlimited strike action. In wage negotiations in 2016 and 2017, the unions used a threat from Australian Paper that the mill would be closed due to non-competitive wages to force workers to accept pay cuts without any threat of industrial action.

Queensland Catholic school teachers impose work bans

Over 7,000 members of the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) from 195 Catholic schools across Queensland implemented work bans on Thursday in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Action included banning staff meeting attendance, duties during scheduled meal breaks, supervision lessons or cover periods, playground and transport supervision and employer requests for data collection or analysis.

The unions prevented a 24-hour strike on the pretext that the employer made an improved offer in negotiations on Wednesday. A union spokesman acknowledged, however, that critical concerns about workload and wage parity with the state sector remain unresolved.

Teachers are demanding a \$1,250 one off payment to all staff to maintain the 30-year wage parity with the state sector and a realistic proposal to address workload. The union said work bans would continue until these issues were resolved. Further negotiations are scheduled for November 27.

Crown Casino workers in Perth walk out

Over 300 workers at Crown Casino in Perth walked off the job for four hours on Tuesday in a dispute over Crown's proposed enterprise agreement covering around 6,000 staff. The strike was aimed at affecting Crown's profits during the running of the Melbourne Cup, its busiest period of the year.

Workers protested at the casino's main entrance and encouraged patrons not to cross their picket line. Members of the United Voice union rejected management's latest pay offer of annual increases of 1.75 percent, up from its original offer of 1 percent. The union has called for 3 percent annual increases during the three-year agreement.

Workers at Woolworths Sydney distribution centre issue strike notice

Workers at Woolworths' Minchinbury distribution centre in Sydney's western suburbs carried out a 24-hour strike on Friday. The National Union of Workers is currently negotiating a new enterprise agreement covering over 400 workers at the site.

The union's limited demands are for wage increases that keep up with the rising cost of living in Sydney, "fair" redundancies, and "respect" for casuals.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact