

Indian Honda contract workers still on strike; West Bengal teachers demand pay rise; maintenance workers take industrial action at Australian paper mill

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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India: Honda contract workers in Haryana still on strike

Around 2,500 contract workers at the Manesar plant of Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) remain on strike after walking out on November 5 in protest against the retrenchment of around 400 contract workers. The action erupted after retrenched workers were stopped from entering the factory. Around 1,900 permanent workers are supporting the strike and production has stopped.

The HMSI Employee Union leaders allege that the company has reduced production of the facility by 50 percent and will retrench more contract workers. 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.

Maharashtra electronics manufacturing workers protest unpaid wages

Hundreds of workers from the electronics manufacturer Videocon Group demonstrated in Aurangabad, Maharashtra on November 7 and marched towards the residence of the company's chairman demanding unpaid wages. Over 100 workers were detained by police while 340 began a hunger strike outside the office of the deputy commissioner of labour.

The Videocon Group is a \$US5.5 billion global conglomerate. It had obtained a \$US8.3 billion loan from the banks but not repaid it and not paid the salaries of employees for at least one year.

West Bengal primary school teachers demand pay rise

Almost 10,000 primary school teachers have been demonstrating in West Bengal's capital Kolkata to demand a wage increase and equal pay with other teachers in India. A protest that began in Jabalpur on November 6 was forced to move to Baghajatin after police intervened.

The demonstrations follow an 18-day hunger strike by thousands of teachers in May outside the office of the education minister in Salt Lake. They ended the hunger strike after the government falsely agreed to meet

their demands.

Teachers want their salary increased from 2,600 rupees (\$US36.50) a week to 4,200 rupees, the same amount as government teachers in other Indian states.

Tamil Nadu Electricity Board workers continue statewide strike

Contract workers from the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) have been on strike across the state since November 1 to demand permanent jobs and a 380-rupee increase in their daily wage as promised by the state electricity minister. Workers have established a protest camp at the Superintending Engineers office.

The Electricity Board Contract Labourers Union want experienced contract workers to be recruited into 5,000 newly created gang-man positions. The government has refused to discuss the dispute with the TNEB.

Construction workers in Telangana strike over unpaid wages

Contract workers at the construction site of Ramagundam Fertilizers and Chemicals (RFCL) in the Ramagundam industrial area have been demonstrating outside the site's main gate since Tuesday. They are demanding management instruct the contractor to provide three months of unpaid wages. Workers complained that when they asked for their pending wages, as well as Provident Fund, Employee State Insurance and other benefits, they were sacked. Most of the contract labourers had migrated to the Ramagundam industrial area to work at the ongoing RFCL construction site.

Tamil Nadu child care workers call for improved benefits

Anganwadi (childcare) workers marched in Madurai on Tuesday and demonstrated outside the Collectorate for improved benefits. The workers

were organised by the Tamil Nadu Nutritional Noon Meal Workers' Association.

They want their retirement benefits to be increased from 300,000 rupees (\$42,857) to 500,000 rupees, permanent jobs for contract workers and the filling of all vacancies. They allege that there are at least 1,800 vacancies across the state. Protesters submitted a petition to the district administration seeking grievance redress.

Gujarat textile workers hold multiple protests in Surat

Textile workers in the seaport city of Surat protested on Monday to demand a pay increase. Protests began in the Jolva and Laskana industrial estates and spread to other industrial areas.

Textile workers in Pipodara entered factories which house power loom units and forced the owners to shut their units. They want 20-paise (\$0.0028) per metre of textile produced. The power loom unit owners are refusing to give an increase, citing poor market conditions and reduction in the overall production of grey fabrics since last year.

Telangana medical contract employees protest over unpaid salaries

Contract workers at Employee State Insurance (ESI) hospitals in Telangana demonstrated outside the ESI Directorate office in Haryana on November 12 to demand unpaid salaries. The workers, including sweepers in pharmacies, staff nurses, ward and security staff, at seven ESI hospitals in the state had not been paid for the past six months.

The Telangana Medical Contract Employees and Workers' Union (TMCEWU) has threatened to call an indefinite strike from November 22 if the arrears are not paid immediately.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government begins sacking striking health workers

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa state government fired three workers, including a doctor, on November 8 in response to an ongoing strike by doctors, paramedics, nurses and other workers from government hospitals.

Notices were also issued to 50 leaders of the Grand Health Alliance, the umbrella union that called the strike in early October, to demand repeal of the regressive Regional and District Health Authorities Act. The state government warned that disciplinary action would continue until the strike was ended.

Meanwhile, striking health workers at Punjab government hospitals have demanded the repeal of a similar piece of legislation known as the Medical Teaching Institutions Act. The Punjab government has formed a five-member committee to negotiate with the unions.

The two Acts aim to slash expenditure, wind back services and pave the way for further privatisation.

Karachi sanitary workers demand promised pay increase

Sanitary workers from the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) dumped garbage at the entrances to the KMC complex on Tuesday over the delayed payment of the 15 percent wage increase for 15,000 current and 22,000 retired employees pending since July.

While the workers cleared the garbage in the afternoon after they ended the protest, they have threatened to litter the main roads and the residences of government officials if the wage increase is not paid.

Punjab government employees protest in Lahore

Punjab Land Record Authority workers began an indefinite protest outside the Punjab Assembly in Lahore on Monday to demand a salary increase and a service structure. Despite long service and continued increases in the cost of living, the workers said they have not received a salary increase for several years.

At the same time, Communication and Works (C&W) department sub-engineers were maintaining a protest begun a week earlier outside the assembly to demand payment of a technical allowance and an upgrade to pay-scales. Another group of government employees—visually impaired workers—were protesting nearby demanding permanent jobs. They began their protest on October 28.

The Punjab unions are ensuring that the protesting government workers remain separated and isolated.

Bangladeshi transport workers protest newly imposed transport regulation

Transport workers in Sunamganj struck on Tuesday to demand repeal of the Road Transport Act, 2018, which was gazetted on October 22. If the measure becomes law it will impose harsh punishments and long imprisonments over driving offences.

The workers refused to drive on the Sunamganj, Derai, Jagannathpur, Jamalganj and Chattak transport routes. Transport workers in Sylhet division in May held a one-day strike over the issue.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation (BRTWF) has demanded that sections of the Act be amended.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest against sackings

Hundreds of Madinaple Fashions Craft factory workers in Ashulia's Shimultola area demonstrated on November 7 over the sacking of 60 co-workers without prior notice. Factory management claimed the sackings were necessary because they did not have sufficient work or orders. Police were deployed to the area.

A representative from the Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers' Federation said factory management authorities sacked the workers without following the labour law and without proper compensation.

South Korean workers protest labour policies

Last Saturday, around 100,000 workers participated in a rally in Seoul called by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the death of Jeon Tai-il, a textile worker who committed self-immolation in protest against harsh working conditions.

The rally was also used to protest the labor policies of the Moon Jae-in administration. Workers demanded the abolition of irregular employment and an end to attacks on workers conditions.

Australian Paper mill workers strike for five days

Some 160 maintenance workers at the Australian Paper mill in Maryvale, southeast of Melbourne, walked off the job for five days on Wednesday against the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

Called by the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union, the walkout follows three short-duration strikes since September designed to let off steam and drag the dispute out. Meanwhile, the unions are negotiating with the company behind closed doors in the Fair Work Commission.

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.

City of Sydney garbage collection workers down tools

Almost 100 waste services workers from the City of Sydney council walked off the job on Wednesday. They were protesting a proposal to outsource household garbage collection to a private contractor.

The United Services Union (USU) had been seeking a meeting with management for several weeks in an attempt to resolve the dispute. It decided to take action after being told they would not have their questions answered.

Workers fear they will lose their jobs and do not trust the commitment from management to transfer them to positions within Cleansing Operations in the local government area. City of Sydney management has stated that it will hand over the work to Cleanaway which currently is contracted to provide waste management in some parts of the city.

Queensland Catholic school teachers to stop work

Over 7,000 teachers and support staff from 195 Catholic schools across Queensland will stop work for 30 minutes at 9 a.m. on November 19 in a dispute over a new work agreement. The action was called by the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) after the employers refused to meet for further negotiations.

Teachers are maintaining a range of work bans put in place on

November 7, covering 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 union has called for a \$1,250 one off payment to all staff to maintain the 30-year wage parity with the state sector and for a proposal to address excessive workloads. Further negotiations are scheduled for November 27.

Jetstar pilots threaten strike action

The Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP), representing around 800 pilots from Qantas Airways budget subsidiary Jetstar, has applied for permission to hold a protected industrial action ballot. The issues in dispute in a new enterprise agreement include demands for salary increases and changes in fatigue management through improved rostering.

Jetstar claimed that the salary increase demanded by AFAP would increase labour costs by 15 percent. Pilots rejected the company's offer of 3 percent annual increases, saying they are the lowest paid in Australia. Industrial action is likely to occur during the busy Christmas holiday period.

Concrete pipe manufacturing workers in Melbourne walk out

Over 30 workers from the concrete pipe manufacturing plant of Rocla in Campbellfield, Melbourne struck on Monday and formed a picket seeking a pay increase.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) has called for 2.75 percent annual pay increases over the life of the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Rocla has offered just 2 percent. The strike followed a one hour stoppage on October 25 over the issue.

Meanwhile, close to 50 workers at Rocla's concrete pipe plant at Emu Plains in New South Wales have voted to take industrial action in their fight for a new enterprise agreement. Some 56 members of the AWU are employed at the plant. They have been offered a similar EA as their Melbourne colleagues.

New Zealand hospital laboratory workers to hold protest walkout

Five hundred medical laboratory workers employed by eight of New Zealand's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) and the NZ Blood Service struck on Wednesday and Thursday. Pickets were set up outside several hospitals.

The laboratory workers want the same pay rise as other hospital staff. The APEX union said the employers' offer for the national multi-employer contract (MECA) is thousands of dollars per person less than previous settlements in the health sector.

In fact, a deal imposed by the NZ Nurses Organisation two years ago, which set the benchmark, was a sellout. It consisted of a 3 percent annual pay increase over 3 years, effectively a wage cut. Nurses had demanded rises of over 18 percent.

The lab strike effectively delayed non-urgent tests for patients. More than 90 percent of diagnosis and treatment relies on the tests.

Auckland bus drivers strike

Go Bus drivers in Auckland held a 24-hour strike last Tuesday. The action by 60 drivers from the East Tamaki and Airport depots followed weeks of protests, which included a refusal to take fares and partial strikes. Go Bus has suspended several drivers.

The workers are calling for a 14 percent pay rise over the next two years, raising their hourly pay to \$25. Attempts by the FIRST Union to negotiate with Go Bus, as the operator, and Auckland Transport, as the service provider, have failed. An offer by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment to attend mediated bargaining was rejected by the company.

Go Bus is owned by two Maori tribal businesses, Ngai Tahu Holdings Corp and Tainui Group Holdings, who bought the operation in 2014 for \$170 million, and are determined to maintain low wages. Successive governments, including Labour, have required local councils to contract to the most exploitative, lowest paying transport companies.



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