

Indian oil workers strike against privatisation: Auto workers in Haryana protest in solidarity with striking Honda contract workers

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

7 December 2019

India: Thousands of workers from state-owned oil companies strike against privatisation

Workers from state-owned oil companies, including Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Limited, struck across India for 24 hours on November 28 in protest against privatisation. The strikers won widespread public support.

The national walkout was in response to the Modi government's plans to sell its 53.29 percent stake in BPCL, the country's second-largest state refiner and fuel retailer. Members of the All India Petroleum Workers' Federation, the National Federation of Petroleum Workers and the Petroleum and Gas Workers' Federation of India participated.

The strike followed a mass protest last month by nearly 20,000 workers from the government owned National Thermal Power Company (NTPC) over government plans to reduce its 54.5 percent stake in the company.

On November 1, workers from India's largest power generation equipment manufacturer, the state-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), struck in opposition to the planned privatisation of the company.

Auto workers in Haryana protest in solidarity with striking Honda contract workers

Workers from around ten companies participated in a protest bike rally organised by the Automobile Industry Contract Workers Union (AICWU) on November 27. The demonstration was in solidarity with 2,500 striking contract workers from Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India (HMSI) Manesar plant.

Maruti Suzuki, Shivam Auto, Munjal Showa and Satyam Auto workers involved in the protest raised issues such as contract renewal, pensions, termination pay and union rights.

The Manesar HMSI workers remain on strike after downing tools on October 5 in protest against the retrenchment of around 400 contract workers.

Over 15 Indian-based automobile manufacturers and auto component companies have drastically cut production since April 2019. According to reports, production was reduced by 11 percent in the first quarter of this fiscal year.

Fifty percent of Manesar plant employees are contract workers. While

the plant has an annual capacity of 1.5 million units, production has been cut by 50 percent.

Tamil Nadu nutrition meals workers demonstrate over wages and pensions

Hundreds of Nutrition Meals Employees staged "road obstruct" protests in at least seven Tamil Nadu cities on November 26 with several demands, including the improved pay scales for workers who have been employed for over 36 years. Around 800 workers, including 600 women, were detained by police but released after the protest.

The Tamil Nadu Nutrition Meals Employees Association is also demanding a 9,000-rupee (\$US126) pension for retired workers, the filling of vacant posts in noon meal centres and a 500,000-rupee gratuity for those retiring.

Karnataka midday meal workers demand unpaid salaries

Midday meal workers demonstrated in Dharwad, Karnataka's administration district, on November 27 to demand the state government pay four months' outstanding salaries.

The workers marched from the Kadapa Maidan Grounds to the Deputy Commissioner's office. Workers said they are only paid 2,600 rupees (\$US36) per month. They also want identity cards, two uniforms per year, a fixed minimum salary, service security and improved health benefits and pensions.

West Bengal workers begin 12-day protest march

West Bengal workers began a 12-day protest march against privatisation and other issues on November 30 at the Chittaranjan Locomotive Works in West Burdwan district. The march, which will cover over 280 km through various south Bengal districts and finish in Kolkata on December 11, is organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Workers fear that thousands of government employees in West Bengal

will lose their jobs in the Modi government's plans to privatise key public sector units, such as Burn Standard and Hindustan Cables. They are also demanding loan waivers for farmers and a government guaranteed minimum price for farmers' products.

Assam midday meal workers protest against outsourcing

Over 400 midday meal cooks and helpers from Khoirabari, Mazbat and Udalguri demonstrated in the township of Tangla, Assam on December 1. They were demanding job security and an increased honorarium. The protest was organised by the Udalguri unit of the All Assam Primary and Upper Primary Midday Meal Cook and Helpers' Association.

Protesters denounced a recent state government announcement that it planned to outsource their work to NGOs, and said that they were not paid any wages between 2005 and 2009. After 2009, they were only paid 1,000 rupees (\$US14) a month for 10 months of that year. The workers said they cannot exist on their meagre monthly remuneration and want it increased to at least 6,000 rupees.

India: Punjab teachers demand permanent jobs

Government school teachers in Punjab held a state-wide protest on December 1. Demands included permanency for teachers at meritorious schools and non-teaching staff on full salaries. The demonstration, which was coordinated by the Democratic Teachers' Front (DTF), also called for increased funding for pre-primary classes, six teachers in each middle school, an end to salary deductions for teachers, head teacher posts in all primary schools and recruitment for all vacant posts across the state.

Bangladesh waterways transport workers unions betray strike

The Bangladesh Nourjan Sramik Federation (BNSF), which covers river waterways transport workers, called off an indefinite strike Saturday night, just 24 hours after it began, following a vague assurance from the government that it would "consider" workers' demands. The strike totally crippled river transport throughout the country.

At the same time the Bangladesh Maritime Workers Sangram Parishad closed down an indefinite strike by lighterage (small) vessels workers which began on November 27 in the Outer Anchorage of Chittagong Port and at 16 jetties on the Karnaphuli River. The union told workers that the government had given an assurance that their demands would be met.

The demands of both unions were similar. These included higher pay, provision of identity cards, service books and appointment letters, as well as increased compensation for death and injuries and government measures to stop piracy and extortion at sea and in rivers.

Bangladesh jute mill workers strike over wages

Workers at state-owned jute mills held a national 24-hour strike on Tuesday as part of a seven-day program of action for 11 demands. These

include payment of unpaid wages and a pay rise. Workers from 24 of the 26 state-owned jute mills participated in the walkout. Bangladesh police attacked workers picketing and blocking roads during the walkout.

Workers from state-owned mills in the Khulna-Jashore industrial belt and the state-owned Amin Jute Mills in Chattogram (Chittagong) also held a nine-hour hunger strike on November 27. The workers are organised by the State-owned Jute Mills Collective Bargaining Association (CBA) and Non-CBA Sangram Parishad and Employees' Unions.

Hundreds of postal workers protest in Taiwan

Around 500 members of the Taiwan Postal Workers' Union protested outside the Ministry of Transportation and Communications in Taipei Sunday, demanding equal pay for all employees of Chunghwa Post Corporation. Demonstrators marched to the Executive Yuan to submit a petition.

When Chunghwa Post was reorganised into a state-owned company in 2003, employees were split into a "transferred personnel" division. Those hired after the change were deemed "hierarchical personnel." They number 11,000 and 14,000 respectively, according to the union.

Protesting workers demanded that pay not be dependent upon the financial performance of the company and that all workers receive equal pay, bonuses and paid leave. Workers also called for high quality retirement plans for transferred staff.

Queensland hospital maintenance workers walk out

Over 300 Queensland Health (QH) maintenance workers at hospitals across Queensland struck for 24 hours on Wednesday in a dispute over the government's proposed enterprise agreement. Around 150 demonstrated outside the headquarters of QH in Brisbane while rallies were held in Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns.

Members of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) have implemented bans and have held limited rolling stoppages. Workers are primarily concerned about the contracting out of jobs and declining recruitment of apprentices.

Other hospital support staff, such as kitchen staff, wards-men and cleaners, who are members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), are also taking industrial action over a new enterprise agreement. The AWU members want a pay rise, improved classification levels, reduced workload, genuine action on backfilling, closing of the casual conversion loophole and secure permanent jobs.

New Zealand bakery workers strike

Over 100 workers at George Weston Foods' Tip Top bakeries in Otahuhu and Wiri in south Auckland refused to work overtime and perform cleaning duties this week. The bans, which were imposed after workers unanimously rejected a new pay offer, followed a two-day strike last week and a previous overtime ban.

A FIRST Union spokesperson said the actions had reduced bread

production by 50 percent for the North Island.

Workers are striking over the company's refusal to offer what the union calls a "fair" pay rise and a premium on overtime and night work. The rejected offer was for a 4 percent wage increase for some staff. It would have resulted in overtime rates starting at 57 hours, down from 60, but this would only be introduced in September next year.

Most workers have to do 50 or more hours a week to make ends meet. One worker, who had been at the company for 14 years, said his hourly rate of \$22.16 did not reflect the cost of living in Auckland. The union has been in bargaining with the company since July.

Auckland bus drivers strike

More than 800 Auckland bus drivers took strike action and picketed the NZ Bus depot this week over a pay claim. Targeted services were cancelled throughout the week and half of all bus trips in the city are now free as drivers refuse to collect fares.

The FIRST Union and NZ Tramways Union have tabled a log of claims with NZ Bus. These include a pay rise of up to \$8 per hour, double-time for driving after midnight, weekend work to be paid at time-and-a-half, annual leave increased from four to five weeks and all meal breaks to be paid.

The strike follows action last month by 60 drivers employed by GoBus in south Auckland who refused to collect fares for a month. The GoBus drivers have been demanding a 14 percent pay increase over two years, raising their hourly pay to \$25.

Drivers' pay and conditions have been hit by the tendering process imposed by successive governments, including Labour, which forces local councils to favour the cheapest operators. Despite this, a FIRST Union spokesman told TV1 that the Labour government should "get involved" to determine what would be a "fair rate of pay" and "stop the disruption."

Retail workers walk out in three New Zealand cities

Over 300 workers at Cotton On retail stores struck in Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland on the afternoon of November 29 following partial strike action over the last month.

The FIRST Union is calling for workers to be paid a so-called "Living Wage," which the unions deem to be \$21.15 per hour, but which remains vastly inadequate to live on. The current legal minimum is \$17.70. Negotiations between the union and Cotton On began over six months ago, with the company seeking to attack pay and conditions.



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