West Bengal administrative workers strike; Maharashtra nurses hold state-wide protests; private sector nurses strike in New Zealand

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 September 2020

India: Maharashtra nurses hold state-wide protests

Maharashtra nurses held state-wide protests late last month until September 1 demanding permanent jobs, long leave entitlements and a risk allowance whilst on duty in COVID-19 wards. The nurses are wearing black ribbons to promote their demands. At least 450 nurses across government hospitals have contracted COVID-19 and six have died in the state.

The nurses are also demanding that they be allowed adequate quarantine periods. A month ago, the government changed duty hours for nurses in COVID-19 wards from working seven continuous days, followed by seven days in quarantine, to five days on duty and then leave for two days. Medical colleges have asked nurses to work for seven consecutive days and then a three-day quarantine.

Tamil Nadu Marketing Corporation workers protest

Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) workers closed their shops from two hours in the morning on August 25 in Chennai to push for 14 demands. The TASMAC Employees Union members want health insurance for COVID-19, compulsory virus testing of staff and that TASMAC pay medical expenses of any employee and their family if they contract COVID-19 whilst on duty. They also want five million rupees ($US68,493) compensation paid to any infected worker.

Other demands include permanent jobs and salary and incentives in line with workers at the BEVCO corporation, which is run by the Kerala state government, changes in store opening hours and regular provision of protective gloves and masks. TASMAC management responded by transferring 450 workers to different stores in, and outside, Chennai.

West Bengal government administration workers strike

Workers from the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA), an autonomous district council for the Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas of the West Bengal, began a 10-day strike on Tuesday to demand permanent jobs for more than 4,000 casual employees. The administration employees said they will report for duty at 10 a.m. and stay in their offices until 4.30 p.m., but not work.

The protest was organised by the United Employees' Union of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration which covers 90 percent of the administration's workforce.

Ola and Uber cab drivers in New Delhi strike

About 200,000 Ola and Uber cab drivers stopped work on Tuesday to demand a fare increase and extension of the moratorium on repayment of loans till December 31, and fares fixed by the government and not the company operators. They also the commission paid by the company operators to the drivers to be increased.

Auxiliary nurses and midwifes in Haryana continue protest

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) workers protested and marched in Panchkula, Haryana on August 26 demanding better health facilities and compensation for risking their lives while fighting the coronavirus pandemic. The action followed a two-day national strike by 600,000 ASHA workers across India on August 7 and 8.

The ASHA workers want full-time jobs at government employee salary levels and associated benefits and PPE (personal protection equipment). These highly-exploited, low paid workers have not been provided with PPE kits, despite regularly calling for this basic equipment since March.

ASHA workers are COVID-19 first-response teams in India's rural and urban slum areas. The Andhra Pradesh ASHA Workers Union organised a protest in Hyderabad, Telangana state with similar demands on Monday.

Vehicle components factory workers in Tamil Nadu on hunger strike

Magna International auto-parts factory workers in Oragadam, Tamil Nadu began a hunger strike on August 26 to demand the reinstatement of four workers who were suspended on March 19 for attempting to form a union. According to the strikers, the majority of workers at the factory are

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in favour of forming a union. Magna is a global automotive supplier of electronics with 348 manufacturing facilities in 28 countries.

Sri Lankan health workers strike at North Central Province hospital

Health attendants from the Vaunia General Hospital in Sri Lanka's North Central Province walked out for three hours on Wednesday morning and picketed the hospital demanding the withdrawal of finger print machines recently installed in the northern area hospitals. Protesting workers complained that the machines have only been installed in the northern hospitals. They have threatened indefinite strike action if their demand is not addressed.

Sri Lankan public sector workers protests in Colombo

Joint Development Officers' Centre workers protested opposite the Fort Railway Station in Colombo on Wednesday demanding permanent employment and a guarantee that their training period would not be extended.

On the same day, temporary workers from the National Water Supply and Drainage Board, the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment and the Department of Archaeology held separate demonstrations outside the presidential secretariat building. They were demanding permanent jobs and told media that some temporary workers have already been terminated.

Terminated Bangladeshi garment workers demand compensation

Terminated garment workers from two Dragon Group factories in Dhaka began an indefinite demonstration on Monday for unpaid wages and benefits. The Dragon Group Shramik Karmachari Sangram Committee and Garment Workers Trade Union Centre organised protests outside the factory owner's residence and at the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association office.

The workers alleged that factory authorities terminated around 1,500 workers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic without paying the lawful termination benefits, including provident fund and earned leave. Some of the workers had been at the factories for over 15 years.

Protesters said the factory is now in operation in the same building but under a different name and employing temporary workers.

Workers presented their demands two months ago to the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) but have been ignored. The DIFE is part of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and responsible for ensuring welfare, safety and health of workers.

Cambodian handbag factory workers on strike

Four hundred workers from the Pactics (Cambodia) factory in Siem Reap province in Cambodia's northwest were on strike this week after walking out the previous week. They picketed the plant demanding reinstatement of two union leaders, Met Rath and Ping Teav, and that 80 workers sacked in April because of COVID-19 fall offs in sales be paid back pay and benefits.

Australia: Workers at Sydney Water vote to strike

Workers at state-owned Sydney Water, which services over five million people in Australia' largest city Sydney, have overwhelmingly voted to strike in their dispute over management's proposed enterprise agreement. The state government wants to freeze the wages of over 1,200 Sydney Water workers, along with over 400,000 other public sector workers, claiming it is necessary to stimulate the economy due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The workers are members of the Australian Services Union, Professionals Australia and the Electrical Trades Union. The ballot result was announced on August 26 but no date has been set for when industrial action will commence.

Offshore oil field unions in Western Australia to hold strike ballot

The Offshore Alliance (OA), a coalition between the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union, has applied to the Fair Work Commission for approval to a ballot of its members on the Montara floating oil platform off the Northern Western Australia coast. The contract workers, employed by Jadestone, have rejected the company's proposed agreement which would cut wages by 10 percent.

The OA said that it is concerned that Jadestone's hostile industrial relations agenda coincides with the inclusion of the industry's employer group, the Australian Mines and Metals Association's, at the bargaining table. According to the OA there is 100 percent union membership on the Montara platform who will be banning the preparation and discharge of oil and gas offtakes if the ballot is approved and members vote "yes."

New Zealand: Over 3,000 private sector nurses strike for eight hours

Over 3,000 general practice nurses from medical centres and emergency clinics held an eight-hour strike on September 4 to demand pay equity with district health board staff who are paid on average around 10 percent more than private sector nurses. The nurses are members of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation, which imposed a sellout deal in 2017 which ensured that no meaningful concessions on staff shortages were offered to district health board nurses.

Health Minister Chris Hipkins has reassured private sector employers that the government did not support parity with public sector nurses, telling the media that, "Ultimately they are employed by private practices. The government is not their employer."

Forty workers fight for wage rise at Premier Beehive bacon plant

Workers at the Premier Beehive bacon processing factory in Carterton, a

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small town in the Wellington region, held a picket on September 1 to demand their wages be increased from $18.90 to $22.10 per hour. The workers, who are members of the E t? union, want the pay increase to be backdated to April, when contract negotiations initially stalled.

The picketing workers say that many of them have spent over a decade on the minimum wage, and that increasing economic pressures, combined with COVID-19, have seriously impacted on their living standards. Premier Beehive is the largest employer in Carterton, with over 300 staff. The employer returns to mediation with the union next week.

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