

Indian health and public sector workers strike; Chinese courier drivers protest over unpaid wages; hospital workers and nurses threaten strikes in Australia, New Zealand and Solomon Islands

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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

Asia

India: North Delhi hospital medical staff on hunger strike

More than 2,000 healthcare workers, including doctors, from three North Delhi hospitals, Hindu Rao hospital, Rajan Babu Hospital and Kasturba Gandhi Hospital, went on a joint hunger strike on October 24 to demand payment of wages overdue since July. Doctors and other medical staff from the Hindu Rao Hospital (HRH) have been on strike since October 7 over the issue.

HRH is a centre for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, and many of its healthcare workers have been infected. The doctors of the hospital had launched a series of protests in September demanding proper protection from the pandemic.

Rajasthan state ambulance workers strike

Employees of the government-run 108 and 104 ambulance service held a strike in Jaipur on October 21, taking around 850 ambulances out of service. Among their demands was a 20 percent pay rise in accordance with the ruling of the Rajasthan High Court in October 2019. Other demands were for duty hours to be fixed at eight hours and incentives for working with COVID-19 patients.

The Rajasthan Ambulance Employees Union had ended several strikes over the past year after the government assured them that their demands would be met. The union again accepted the government's promise that their grievances would be addressed and ended the strike after several hours.

Jammu and Kashmir state transport workers walk off

Close to 2,200 workers from the Jammu and Kashmir Road Transport Corporation (JKRTC), including drivers, cleaners, mechanics, technical and clerical staff, walked off the job on October 23 and held a roadblock demonstration that stopped traffic between Lakhanpur and Kupwara to demand the payment of wages pending for four months.

A large number of workers, along with their vehicles including trucks and buses, demonstrated outside the JKRTC regional headquarters, near the Jammu Railway Station. Protesters held banners and placards demanding their salaries.

Tripuri municipal sanitation workers strike over unpaid wages

Around 350 contract sanitation workers from the Tiripur Corporation in Tamil Nadu struck on October 21 to demand wages for September, and that future wages be paid before the 10th of every month. These workers were forced to walk off the job in June to demand wages for April and May.

Workers want 420 rupees (\$US5.60) per day, saying that contractors only pay 300 rupees per day, after deducting a percentage for the Employees Provident Fund and other benefits. They also demanded officials organise regular COVID-19 testing of sanitation workers and provide them with good quality safety equipment.

Himachal Pradesh government employees demand restoration of old pension scheme

A large number of Himachal Pradesh state government employees demonstrated near the entry gate of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Mandi on October 24, demanding restoration of the old pension scheme. The protest was organised by the Himachal Pradesh State Employees Union.

The new pension scheme (NPS) was implemented in 2004. It is a defined contribution scheme mandatory for all new recruits to the central government (and implemented by most state governments) from January 1, 2004. It is a contribution-based pension system in which employees are required to pay 10 percent of their wages, which is matched by the

government and is being invested in equity shares.

Workers complained that their pension payments are not secured because they are tied to the whims of the stockmarkets. In the old system, the entire pension amount was borne by the government and paid on the basis of 50 percent of the last drawn salary by the employee.

Workers formed the National Movement for Old Pension System (NMOPS) to coordinate a national campaign. According to NMOPS, six million government workers are in the new pension scheme. Retired workers in the scheme said they cannot afford to live on their NPS pensions.

Puducherry: Government-aided private school teachers demand unpaid salaries

Teachers from government-aided private schools in Puducherry state staged a sit-down protest on the streets on October 26 to demand overdue salaries. They were stopped by the police while marching to the state assembly. The teachers have not been paid for 11 months.

Bangladeshi garment workers in Gazipur protest over retrenchments

Workers from the Diganta Sweater Factory in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Tangail Highway for an hour on October 28 to protest against being retrenched after being falsely accused of damaging equipment. Workers said that when they entered the factory in the morning they noticed that some lights and machinery had been damaged, allegedly to implicate them in this incident.

Authorities of other factories declared a holiday in fear of the protest spreading and police were called in to prevent unrest.

Diganta Sweater Factory workers protested on October 22 against possible layoffs. Management pledged to pay retrenched workers a basic salary until they are called back on December 26 when a new order is expected, but workers said they had no faith that the pledge would be honoured.

Bangladeshi telecommunications workers protest against planned layoffs

Workers from Bangladesh's largest mobile phone operator Grameenphone (GP) demonstrated in front of the company's head office in Dhaka on October 28 to protest against the termination of the general secretary of the GP Employees Union. Workers alleged that the union leader was dismissed because he protested against the company's planned mass layoffs. The union announced that it will appeal to the government to intervene in the dispute.

China: Courier workers in Shanghai protest over unpaid wages

Courier workers from Best Express protested in Shanghai on October 19 to demand payment of overdue wages. The protest followed the closure of

a branch in Shanghai and precedes the online shopping bonanza of "Singles Day" on November 11.

In addition to late wages, endemic throughout China, courier workers face informal employment, no job security or social insurance and abusive management practices. Due to their informal status, it is difficult to claim wages in arrears.

There have been 25 protests by courier workers this year, compared to 27 protests for the whole of 2019. Express delivery companies have experienced large drops in revenue and are shedding jobs.

Australia , New Zealand and the Pacific

Mesh & Bar construction workers in New South Wales on strike

About 30 workers from the construction supply company Mesh & Bar in western Sydney walked out on a two-week strike on October 22 in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Mostly members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, according to the union they want a better pay rise and improved overtime provisions. Workers complained that they are paid less than other workers in their industry.

Hospital cleaners in Canberra protest against low pay offer

Close to 20 cleaners from the Calvary Bruce Private Hospital in Australia's capital Canberra picketed in front of the hospital on October 29 after rejecting the hospital's "insulting" pay increase offer of only 50 cents per hour in its proposed enterprise agreement. The United Workers Union (UWU) said the workers are paid a base rate of only \$22.02 an hour, well below the rate paid to their counterparts at Canberra Hospital.

The cleaners planned to walk off the job next Monday, but the hospital owner Compass Medirest made an application to the Fair Work Commission to prevent them from stopping work. Negotiations are continuing between the UWU and Compass Medirest.

Canberra garbage collection truck drivers plan to strike

The Transport Workers Union has given notice to waste management contractor SUEZ Recycling and Recovery that 42 truck drivers will strike for 24 hours next Monday in a push for an improved wage offer in a proposed enterprise agreement. After five months of negotiations, SUEZ offered 2 percent annual pay increases, but the drivers want 4 percent. The drivers currently are paid a base rate of \$32 an hour.

The strike will affect garbage collection in 23 Australian Capital Territory suburbs. The union has not said if industrial action will be escalated if an agreement is not reached.

NZ primary healthcare nurses vote to strike

Primary healthcare nurses in New Zealand have issued strike notices for November 9 and 24, after months of demanding pay parity with their hospital counterparts. Primary healthcare nurses, who work in community postings, are on average paid 10.6 percent less than hospital staff, which equates to around \$7,000 a year.

The workers are represented by the New Zealand Nurses Association, which oversaw a much-maligned sellout deal for public hospital nurses in 2018. Health Minister Chris Hipkins has repeatedly assured private employers that the Ardern Labour government will not intervene to help primary healthcare nurses.

Auckland Heartland Bank workers walk off

Workers at Auckland's Heartland Bank will walk off the job on October 30, after pay negotiations stalled. Contract negotiations began in June, and workers say their wages are too low given their responsibilities. The First Union, which represents the workers, has issued a statement lamenting that the workers are not currently afforded a "market rate."

Solomon Islands nurses demand COVID-19 allowances

Nurses in the Solomon Islands have announced they will strike from next Friday if the government does not pay outstanding allowances. Some 500 nurses will take part in the capital, Honiara, which is designated an emergency zone due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government promised nurses allowances for working on the front line of the pandemic, but has not honoured this pledge since June. Frontline workers told the *Solomon Star News* that some of them have no had physical contact with their families for months due to the risks associated with the virus.



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