Delhi University teachers protest over non-payment of salaries; Pakistan Lady health workers demand 25 percent pay rise; Health workers threaten strike in Papua New Guinea

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

19 March 2021

Asia

India: Delhi University teachers protest over non-payment of salaries

Thousands of Delhi University teachers hit the streets on March 15 to protest the non-payment of salaries to the staff at 12 Delhi government-funded colleges.

The demonstration was organised by the Delhi University Teachers' Association with marchers walking from Delhi University vice-chancellor's office to the Delhi chief minister's office. Teachers said they had not been paid salaries and pensions on time for the past six months.

Jawaharlal Nehru University cleaners strike

Library cleaning workers at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi went on strike on March 15 to demand outstanding salaries. All 23 cleaners at the Central Library, who are employed by contractor Max Maintenance, have not received any salary for the past four months. Most of these workers live in rented accommodation and are facing eviction because they can't pay the rent. Some of the cleaners said they have had to vacate their homes and are living on the streets with their kids.

Childcare workers protest in Karnataka

Anganwadi (childcare) workers mobilised near the Mysuru Deputy Commissioner's office on March 15 to protest the state government's failure to allocate adequate funds to improve wages and conditions in its latest budget.

The childcare workers said the Karnataka's Women and Child Development Minister had previously promised to investigate workers' demands but the latest state budget provided no additional funding.

The demonstrators demands include an increase in honorary fund payments and in line with workers' seniority; a lump sum payment for almost 7,300 volunteers who had retired after 2015; a fixed 5,000-rupee ($US69) monthly pension for retired volunteers and helpers; proper training for all volunteers and Employees' State Insurance (ESI) for all other employees.

Telangana transport workers oppose Modi government privatisation and new farm laws

Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) workers demonstrated outside various bus depots on March 15 to demand the Modi government end its privatisation of public sector enterprises, repeal three planned farm bills and electricity laws, and stop allocating public money to big business corporations.

The TSRTC employees decided to protest in solidarity with national strike action by bank employees' unions which began on the same day. TSRTC workers said that privatising state-sector enterprises will destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs and undermine essential public services.

Haryana employees hold state-wide rally

State Public Works Department (PWD) employees held a state-level protest rally in Karnal on March 14 to demand pay parity with Punjab state employees and withdrawal of the Modi government's privatisation and restoration of a previously existing pension program.

The protest was organised by the Haryana Government PWD Mechanical Workers Union. Union members tried to surround the Chief Minister's office in Prem Nagar but were stopped by the police. The following day they staged a sit-down protest over their demands. They told the media that the government is planning to privatise irrigation, PWD and public health services to various civic bodies.

Junior College lecturers in Telangana protest non-payment of salaries

Lecturers working at Sri Chaitanya and Narayana Junior Colleges

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demonstrated at the Dilsukhnagar Sri Chaitanya NEET campus in Hyderabad on March 16 over the non-payment of salaries. Protesters alleged that over 4,000 lecturers at the colleges had been paid for COVID-19 lockdown which was imposed in March last year.

The lecturers said management had collected full fees from students but not paid the lecturers, some of whom were giving online classes during lockdown. Some lecturers said they had been transferred to new college facilities, far away from their current locations.

MGM medical college and hospital sanitation staff at Jharkhand walkout indefinitely

Over 75 contract sanitation workers from state-run MGM Medical College and Hospital began an indefinite strike on March 11 over the non-payment of their regular salaries and yearly bonus. The protesters said that they received their salaries for the last three months, despite organising several protests.

Although most of the sanitation staff had been working at the facility for the past 18 years, none had been given permanent jobs. The workers were employed through Shiva Protection Force, a labour hire agency.

Pakistan: Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers demand pay rise

Lady Health Workers (LHW) program employees in Punjab are continuing a sit-down protest they began in Lahore to demand a 25 percent pay increase. Similar demonstrations were held by LHW workers in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on March 11.

Following a previous protest last October, the government agreed to introduce a service structure and resolve pay issues. The government promises have been ignored.

LHW program employees are one of the most exploited sections of the working class in Pakistan, despite providing crucial vaccination and other health services in rural and low-income urban areas of the country, where there are few, if any, health facilities. The rail workers have threatened to strike again in management refuse to withdraw its punitive measures.

Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific

Australia: Hungry Panda food delivery riders reinstated

Two Hungry Panda food delivery riders sacked for protesting against pay cuts have been reinstated after six weeks in a settlement with the company. Jun Yang and Xiangqian Li from Sydney's inner-west were notified of their dismissal on the same day that they had organised a protest over a company decision to reduce wages in their area.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) which filed unfair dismissal cases at the Fair Work Commission on behalf of the workers, proclaimed the reinstatement to be a "historic win."

The workers, however, were not given any compensation for the six weeks of lost income. In the settlement the company has agreed to obtain insurance to cover its riders in the event of injury or death, something that is standard in other industries.

Five delivery riders were killed last year in Australia as a result of the ruthless exploitation of these workers in the unregulated "gig economy." A New South Wales parliamentary inquiry is currently investigating widespread complaints from delivery drivers. The TWU is appealing for the establishment of a tribunal which would provide only a "minimum" of standards, protections, safety and wages for delivery workers.

Community Health Workers in Papua New Guinea threaten strike

MORE than 5,000 community health workers (CHWs) across Papua New Guinea have threatened to strike if the government continues to ignore their awards review submission. CHWs work in the country's health facilities from aid-posts to hospitals, mainly in rural areas. They are frontline workers in the escalating COVID-19 pandemic.

PNG CHW Association president Dec Isaac said the workers have waited for 13 years for the 2007 and successive awards to be reviewed. The awards include allowances for overtime, risk service, uniforms, housing, mental health, shift work, radiation and clinical.

The association has called on the government, Department of Personnel Management and the Health Department to fast track the review submission on the terms and conditions of employment of CHWs. This is for all CHWs working in government-run public health facilities, non-governmental organisations, churches, universities and the forces.

CHW Association branch executives from Oro, Morobe and West New Britain are currently in Port Moresby to prepare for a strike. Isaac said failure to address the issue will result in mass withdrawal of the work force after March 15.

New Zealand bus drivers preparing to strike

Bus drivers in Wellington, New Zealand's capital, are preparing to strike after reaching an "impasse" in pay negotiations with NZ Bus. The Tramways Union has cited April 19 as a "deadline day," which could trigger industrial action. A drivers' strike would impact commuters across most of Wellington city, the eastern parts of the city, where NZ Bus runs a lot of routes.

Negotiations come one week after drivers struck a deal with Greater Wellington Regional Council and NZ Transport Authority that would see the government 'top up' wages to lift the base rate for drivers from $19.40 an hour to the so-called "living wage," which is promoted by the unions as $22.10, itself totally inadequate.

NZ Bus wants to move Wellington drivers on to the same collective agreement as its Auckland drivers, which has a higher base rate but lower penal rates and one week less annual leave.

Tramways Union declined the offer, saying drivers were prepared to strike in April if the proposed agreement was not "dramatically improved." Drivers in Wellington are fiercely protective of existing conditions, including double pay after midnight, time and a half on weekends, and strict controls around hours of work without additional compensation.

The next round of negotiations is scheduled for March 31.

New Zealand care workers continue picketing

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Homecare support workers employed by Lifewise picketed the organisation's Auckland headquarters on Friday over its continual refusal to offer liveable pay and better conditions. Workers have been striking and picketing since December for increased sick and bereavement leave and fair hours of work in the collective agreement.

Lifewise has threatened workers with three separate lockout periods since February and reneged on improved leave and conditions agreed on before the first COVID-19 lockdown.

One worker said, "It's like they're not listening, they're not really taking our needs into consideration. It's the necessities we're asking for—it's not going to break the bank."

A spokesperson for the E TU union said the moves by the employer are some of the most "aggressive" she's ever seen against workers in the homecare sector. The union, however, has kept the workers isolated and sought to enter a mediation process. Lifewise is a charitable trust which is a part of the Methodist Church.

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