

India: Karnataka public transport strike continues; Andhra Pradesh municipal and civic contract workers demand unpaid wages; Auckland port workers strike over safety

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

16 April 2021

Asia

India: Karnataka public transport strike enters second week

Around 130,000 workers from four major Karnataka state government transport corporations have been on strike since April 7 over the government's refusal to increase wages in line with the 6th Pay Commission recommendations. The strikers are also demanding improved benefits, including health insurance. The industrial campaign began on December 10 with a three-day strike.

The workers are from the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation and the North Eastern Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NEKRTC).

Workers' family members joined the strike on Tuesday in defiance of government orders not to do so. About 50 families were arrested in Bengaluru, but released on the same day. Over 30 workers from the NEKRTC have been suspended for joining the strike.

Manipur: Medical college staff at state run facility resign over salary demands

Non-teaching staff and nurses at the state-run Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) in Imphal, Manipur state, submitted resignation letters on April 8 to demand pay increases in line with the Seventh Pay Commission.

The medical workers withdrew their resignations four days later after the state government agreed to fulfil the demand and signed a memorandum of understanding. JNIMS is the only medical college hospital run by the state government. It has about 190 doctors, plus nurses and non-teaching staff.

Jharkhand steel plant workers strike

Bokaro Steel Plant (BSL) workers in Jharkhand walked out on Tuesday to demand a pay rise. The strikers said that they have been due to receive a pay increase since January 2017.

Strikers denounced BSL management and the leaders of the National Joint Committee for Steel for delaying the wage increase. The strike was called by the Krantikari Ispat Mazdoor Sangh (KIMS) and Jai Jharkhand Majdoor Samaj.

A day before the strike, KIMS members held a motorcycle rally protest inside the plant, urging workers make the strike successful. Company management cancelled all employees' leave ahead of the strike.

Andhra Pradesh: Municipal and civic contract workers demand unpaid salaries

Several hundred municipal and civic contract workers demonstrated on Tuesday in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh over unpaid salaries. They said that the state government had failed to fulfil a promise of paying salaries regularly on the first day of every month.

Protesters alleged that each worker is owed 42,000 rupees (\$US560) in salaries and that it has been outstanding for the last seven months.

Auto plant workers in Tamil Nadu demand wage increase

Several hundred workers from Plant 2 of Ashok Leyland, a heavy-vehicle manufacturer in Hosur, Tamil Nadu, protested on April 8 to demand a wage rise.

The multinational Ashok Leyland, whose corporate office is located in Chennai, has manufacturing facilities across several Indian states, including Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand. The company has a workforce of nearly 11.5 million worldwide.

Sri Lankan state bank employees continue to demand pensions

About 100 members of the Ceylon Bank Employees Union protested outside the Lake House Roundabout in central Colombo on April 8 over the Rajapakse government's failure to provide a pension to bank employees who do not currently have any pensions. They are also demanding that newly-recruited employees be confirmed as permanent employees after two years' training. Bank employees at Badulla in central Sri Lanka also demonstrated that afternoon at the city's main bus stand.

This protest was jointly organised by the Protest Centre for the Protection of Public Property and Human Rights and the Ceylon Bank Employees' Union. It followed lunch-time demonstrations involving hundreds of state bank employees between March 16 and 23 and on April 1.

Indonesian fast food workers protest over wage cut

Dozens of workers demonstrated on Monday outside the headquarters of PT Fast Food Indonesia in the Gelael Building in Tebet, Jakarta. Fast Food is the Indonesian franchise of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

The restaurant workers were protesting the company's COVID-19 policy measures, which include "wage holding"—i.e., wage cuts—and delays in the payment of overtime and holiday allowances. Workers said they may hold additional protests outside the Gelael Building later this month.

Australia and New Zealand

Applus workers at Woodside LNG hub in Western Australia strike again

Australian Workers Union members working for maintenance contractor Applus on the Burrup and offshore Woodside LNG facilities in northern Western Australia are planning another two-week strike. The dispute, which involves 48 workers, is over the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

The walkout will be the fourth since workers began rolling work bans and stoppages in February. Previous actions included work stoppages of 48 hours on February 9, five days on February 27 and a two-week stoppage on March 10.

Applus workers, including non-union members, have overwhelmingly rejected two proposed EAs from the company. The AWU said Applus' marine and welding inspectors, rope access and engineering crew want the enterprise agreement to include secure rosters and the reversal of cuts in non-union employment contracts that the company imposed two years ago.

Applus wants flexible rosters and has rejected the union's key bargaining claims on pay rates and conditions. About 100 workers are affected by the EA negotiations but because of Australia's anti-democratic industrial relations laws only union members can legally strike without being fined.

Auckland port workers strike over unsafe conditions

Ports of Auckland workers walked off the job for several hours on April 13 in protest over health and safety standards and cast a unanimous vote of no confidence in the company's chief executive Tony Gibson. The strike followed a review by Construction Health & Safety NZ (CHASNZ) and commissioned by the Auckland Council, which owns the port.

The review followed three deaths at the port. In July last year, Ports of Auckland was fined \$242,000 for safety breaches after a pilot boat accidentally struck and killed a swimmer in 2017. In 2018, a 23-year-old worker died after a straddle carrier tipped over. In August last year, father-of-seven Palaamo Kalati, a stevedore, was crushed to death by a container.

Auckland mayor Phil Goff and Port of Auckland CEO Gibson have sought to wash their hands of any responsibility for the unsafe workplace culture. In fact, the conditions are the inevitable product of decades of outsourcing, casualisation, long working hours and the prioritisation of profit over safety, in which the Labour Party-led council is complicit.

Following this week's walk-out, Maritime Union national secretary Craig Harrison told Radio NZ that the union would request a meeting with the port's management to discuss CHASNZ's review. The union has not called any further industrial action over the issue.

Wellington bus drivers vote to strike

Bus drivers in Wellington, New Zealand, voted overwhelmingly on Wednesday to strike over a long-running pay dispute. Hundreds of bus services were cancelled on Wednesday during the meeting.

Employer NZ Bus wants a new collective agreement that would reduce penalty rates and remove one week of annual leave. Currently, drivers get double pay after midnight and time-and-a-half on weekends. One driver told the *Dominion Post* that the loss of penalty rates would have meant a \$7,000 reduction in her pay last year.

The union said that drivers would hold "surprise" strikes with as little as 24 hours' notice and the first one could occur on Monday. The company says it wants to introduce the same contract in Wellington that it currently has for drivers in Auckland. In September 2020, Tramways Union leaders praised the Auckland pay agreement, which included pay increases of between 2 and 3 percent and overtime rates of just 1.25 times the ordinary rate, and 1.5 times when a sixth day is worked.



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