

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

15 October 2021

Unemployed Thai garment workers protest over unpaid wages

About 100 garment workers from the Brilliant Alliance Thai Global lingerie factory in Thailand protested outside Government House in Bangkok on October 7 demanding seven months of unpaid wages. The factory had closed without giving its 1,388 employees severance pay and outstanding wages.

The workers held a larger protest in June demanding that the Thai government prosecute the factory owner under the criminal law. The CILT union confederation has called on the government to assume responsibility for the workers' pay and severance entitlements.

India: Ola and Uber drivers demonstrate in Tamil Nadu

Around 150 drivers working for car aggregators Ola and Uber demonstrated in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu on October 12 to demand increased tariffs. Tamil Nadu Call Taxi Owners' and Drivers' Association members demanded immediate revision of tariffs claiming that the tariff has not been revised since 2014.

They complained that rising fuel costs meant that the present tariff was inadequate for drivers to continue the job and support their families.

Tamil Nadu liquor retail workers protest over mistreatment

Workers from the government-owned liquor retail outlets of the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) protested outside the Secretariat in Chennai on October 11, condemning ongoing mistreatment by authorities.

The protest was in response to attacks on two employees in Kancheepuram on October 4. Workers at liquor shops in Chennai and suburbs held a spontaneous strike the following day in protest against the attack.

Although TASMAC, which employs around 25,000 people, is wholly government owned its workers are not classed as state employees and do not get any entitlements. TASMAC workers have been campaigning through strikes and protests over several years to demand permanency and to receive the same benefits as other government employees.

TASMAC has a monopoly over the wholesale and retail vending of

alcoholic beverages in Tamil Nadu and controls the Indian Made Foreign Liquor trade in the state.

Andhra Pradesh childcare workers hold sit-in

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers staged a sit-in protest at the Prakasam district collectorate in Ongole, Andhra Pradesh on October 10. Andhra Pradesh Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union members demanded a pay rise, a traveling allowance, tablet computers for online work, monthly project meetings and outstanding wages from 2017.

Punjab state government contract workers demand permanency

Contract workers from various government departments protested and marched towards the Punjab minister's residence in Patiala on October 10. They were demanding permanent jobs and implementation of minimum wages instead of the honorarium payment system.

Protesters included workers from the Forest Department, National Health Mission (NHM) staff nurses, contractual multipurpose health workers, employees from the Kasturba Gandhi Hostel, Punjab School Education Board's Adarsh schools and other staff. They were later offered a future meeting with the chief minister's principal secretary on October 18. Similar marches were held in Amritsar, Muktsar and Jalandhar on the same day.

Goa state government road commuter transport workers strike

Goa state-owned Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) workers held a one-day hunger strike on Monday to demand a wage increase as per the seventh pay commission. The protest was organised by the Indian National Trade Union Congress, which is affiliated with the opposition Congress Party.

Bangladesh garment workers demand unpaid wages

Hundreds of apparel workers from the Interlink Apparels factory in Vogra and Basan in Gazipur demonstrated on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway on Sunday to demand unpaid wages. Traffic was disrupted for five hours. The protest was suspended after their representatives reached an agreement with police and factory authorities. The agreement details were not made clear.

Workers said that when they arrived at their factories to get their pay on Sunday there were signs on the gate saying that due to the COVID-19 pandemic production would be halted until October 24. They claimed that the factory owner did not pay on time and frequently laid off workers without giving a reason.

Sydney light rail drivers impose work bans

Light rail drivers at the Pymont depot of private commuter transport operator Transdev NSW in Sydney have imposed work bans and ad-hoc two-hour stoppages after rejecting the company's latest proposed enterprise agreement. Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members have banned overtime, refused to clean up hazardous waste on the vehicles, answer management phone calls, along with other bans.

An RBTU spokesman said the Pymont depot drivers (which work on the Sydney west line) are paid around 6 percent less than drivers at Transdev's Randwick depot (Sydney's east line).

The company had offered a 3 percent pay rise, backdated to November, claiming that it will prevent the pay gap widening. The union claims, however, that Randwick workers, who are on a separate EA, are promoted more quickly to the maximum pay scale and that this further widens the pay gap.

Another issue concerns the Category One medical classification required for drivers and other "safety-critical" workers. Imposition of the classification is not consistent between the two depots and has caused a pay anomaly. Pymont workers want equal pay and conditions with their Randwick depot colleagues.

Newcastle construction workers end strike

Twenty-six Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) members ended their strike at two building sites in Newcastle, New South Wales on Wednesday after the union said it had reached an agreement with I.C. Formwork for a new enterprise agreement (EA). The workers walked out on October 6 and picketed the building sites, demanding a 15 percent pay increase in a three-year agreement.

The CFMMEU demanded 2.5 percent pay increases every six months for three years, claiming that it would compensate for the "insecure work" and the threat of redundancy if their employer had no contracts. These increases do not make up for the effective freeze on wages when the previous agreement expired in 2018, with the last pay increase for workers in March 2019.

The CFMMEU has not revealed whether workers would receive back pay for the more than two-year wage freeze. The union has not released any further details on the deal which is still to be voted on by

workers.

Queensland health workers protest over inadequate funding

Health workers from five Queensland public hospitals held a press conference outside the Ipswich Hospital on Tuesday in a protest against the ongoing Labor government's underfunding of healthcare. Present were members from the Together union, Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU), Electrical Trades Union and the United Workers Union calling for urgent action to address "critical safety issues" across the health system.

A QNMU representative said that hospitals were running at 100 percent capacity and that this could not go on forever. She claimed staff are overworked and burning out. Health workers in Cairns, in far north Queensland, demonstrated outside the Cairns Hospital on September 30 demanding the government "fix" the health system. They said the hospitals are underfunded, under-staffed and need more bed capacity.

New Zealand bus drivers' union calls off planned strike

A strike planned by New Zealand bus drivers in the Canterbury region next Monday has been called off, after a "living wage" agreement was struck by the Amalgamated Workers Union (AWUNZ).

The union, which represents about 90 percent of the South Island's public transport workers, had given notice to all bus operators contracted to Environment Canterbury (ECan) that there would be a four-hour stoppage during the morning rush on October 18. On Wednesday, AWUNZ announced it had called off the strike as a gesture of "good faith" after an agreement was reached with one of the operators.

Calls for strike action were driven by a delay in drivers being paid the "living wage," currently \$22.75 an hour, following a Labour government directive last year that it was the bottom line for urban bus drivers nationwide. The "living wage" is widely promoted by the unions as the minimum necessary to live on. The amount is woefully inadequate and only marginally above the legal minimum of \$20 an hour.

ECan said all Christchurch-based drivers employed by Ritchies Transport would now receive \$22.75 an hour as a base pay rate and backdated. ECan also expects to finalise agreements for Ritchies' Timaru-based drivers next week.



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