

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

22 October 2021

Half a million South Korean workers strike to demand labour law changes

Tens of thousands of South Korean workers walked out on Wednesday and demonstrated across the country to demand labour law changes and nationalisation of key industries. According to the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), the country's largest umbrella labour union with 1.1 million members, about 550,000 workers in cities and rural areas participated in the strike.

The main demands were for the abolition of irregular work, such as part-time, temporary and contract labour, and for the nationalisation of key industries and socialising basic services like education and housing. The union leadership demanded more collaboration with government and employers on economic-restructuring decisions.

South Korea ranks third highest in annual working hours and in 2015 had the third highest number of workplace deaths among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development member countries. Over 40 percent of all workers in South Korea are irregular employees with a growing number in the gig economy and no guaranteed income.

India: Punjab public servants on strike for permanent jobs

Striking workers from the Punjab Public Service Commission (PPSC) demonstrated in Patiala on October 19 demanding permanent jobs and pay revision as per the Sixth Pay Commission report with revised multiple increases. The workers have been on strike since October 6.

Workers complained that after several meetings with department officials their grievances had not been resolved and that they will continue their protest until October 24, then "intensify" their action.

Punjab public school teachers and nurses demand better pay

Punjab State Teachers Alliance members and nurses marched in

Chamkaur Sahib on October 17 and held a sit-down protest on the Chamkaur Sahib-Morinda Road for about an hour. Teachers and nurses were demanding implementation of the 6th Pay Commission report and removal of ambiguities in the new pay scales of 24 categories of employees.

Protesters claimed that senior government authorities in meetings on September 8 and September 28 had agreed to increase the salaries of 24 categories of employees but the Finance Department was delaying implementation of the deal.

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant workers continue protests against privatisation

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) workers in Andhra Pradesh held a 25-hour hunger protest on Tuesday against the Modi government's planned privatisation of the plant. The day marked the 250th day of VSP protests.

The government has approved a 100 percent disinvestment of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), VSP's corporate entity, and private management of the steel plant. Widely supported demonstrations against privatisation have been ongoing since February 1.

Jharkhand National Health Mission contract workers on strike

Contract workers from the National Health Mission (NHM) Jharkhand unit have been on strike since October 11 for increased wages as compensation for working during the COVID-19 peak period. They also want the reinstatement of Jwala Prasad, a senior contract worker who was harassed by senior officials, a defined employment policy for contract workers, and for Sunday to be declared a holiday.

Initially 140 contract workers from Ranchi participated in the strike but were gradually joined by other district workers. Strikers include drivers, computer operators and miscellaneous workers.

Salon and spa home service workers in Delhi strike

Workers from a salon and spa home service provider Urban Company struck for 24 hours in Delhi on October 8 in protest against exploitation. Urban Company employs workers through online app platforms, such as Swiggy, Zomato, Ola and Uber. The female workers claimed that the company was “brutally” exploiting and fleecing them.

About 100 workers were involved in the strike. They also protested by signing out of the app during the weekend. The workers said the Urban Company was using sly tactics by down rating them and frequently blocking their access to the app. Workers demanded the company provide a transparent way of showing commission deductions.

Pakistan: Hyderabad municipal workers demand unpaid salaries and permanent jobs

Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) employees and Water and Sanitation Agency workers protested in Hyderabad on October 13 to demand 11 months of unpaid salaries and pensions.

Demonstrators also called for contract workers to be made permanent and accused the Sindh provincial government of failing to transfer funds to local government agencies in Hyderabad. They have threatened to stop water supply and sewerage services if the government fails to grant their demands.

Lockout at Konecranes in Tasmania enters eleventh week

Transnational company Konecranes Demag has locked out six Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) members from its Tasmanian operations without pay since August 5. The enterprise agreement dispute is for higher pay in the company’s latest offer.

The company locked out the CEPU workers in response to low level industrial action called by the union following 12 months of failed negotiations. The company, which specialises in the installation and maintenance of heavy-lifting equipment at building construction sites and overhead gantry cranes at ports, is using outsourced labour to maintain operations.

The workers want wages and conditions brought in line with maintenance fitters and engineers doing similar work in Tasmania. They also want as access to secure income protection and severance pay.

The CEPU has made no attempt to mobilise any of the tens of thousands of its members in other states to defeat the company’s scabbing operation and win workers’ demands.

Queensland government building maintenance apprentices strike

Apprentices from Qbuild, a commercialised construction and building maintenance business unit of the Queensland government, walked off the job for three days in Brisbane on October 14. They were demanding access to proper trades training and claimed they were being treated as cheap, unskilled labour.

The apprentices voted unanimously for the strike, complaining that much of their four-year apprenticeship period is spent on menial tasks.

The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) which covers the workers, ordered the apprentices back to work after the Palaszczuk Labor state government forced the dispute into the Industrial Relations Commission. Mediation on the demands of the apprentices will commence on November 3.

New Zealand nurses’ union pushes through slightly improved pay offer

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) has announced that it accepted the latest pay offer from the country’s 20 District Health Boards (DHBs). Of its 32,000 members who work in DHBs, 83 percent voted in favour in an online ballot.

A NZNO spokesman said the DHBs had taken the advice of the Employment Relations Authority after mediation last month and presented an “acceptable offer.” The deal, however, is in line with previous offers rejected by an overwhelming majority of nurses.

Most of the headline \$5,800 increase to base pay comes in the form of “down payments” on a so-called “pay equity” settlement. This is a separate bureaucratic process to purportedly bring nurses’ pay in line with similar “male dominated” professions. Years in the pipeline, it is yet to be finalised by the Labour government. The NZNO also claims to have achieved a DHB contractual obligation to “safe staffing,” based on a vague “pathway” when “members’ concerns aren’t addressed.”

The NZNO sought to wear down nurses and overcome resistance during the unions 15 months of negotiations and then used the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown to call off strike action planned for mid-August. The final ballot was conducted as nurses were attempting to deal a crisis in the hospitals as the Delta virus continues escalated.



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