Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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South Korean bank workers hold one-day general strike

About 1,300 members of the Korean Financial Industry Union (KFIU), which is affiliated with the Federation of Korean Trade Unions, held a one-day strike and rallied at Gwanghwamun Square in Seoul on September 19. Workers were calling for a 5.2 percent wage increase and a 4.5-day workweek pilot program, among other claims.

Over 7,000 workers from state-run institutions, including the Korea Development Bank and the Industrial Bank of Korea, also took action in protest against the closure of offline branches. The top four banks have closed 25.5 percent or 1,058 offline branches from 2012 to 2021 and cut back their workforce by 9.5 percent or 6,151 jobs.

The strike was the first full day walkout in six years. The KFIU has threatened to call another strike on September 30.

India: Gujarat tuberculous health workers strike

Around 1,100 workers from Punjab state's tuberculosis-control programme held a mass casual leave protest on September 19 over 14 outstanding demands. Workers said the strike was indefinite and also included contract workers employed in the programme. Their demands included permanent employment and a salary increase.

Punjab central bank workers strike over illegal transfers

Central Bank of India workers in Punjab struck for two days on September 19 and protested outside the bank's regional office in Ludhiana. They demanded management comply with an agreement made with their unions to stop transferring clerical staff in violation of agreed rules.

Workers pointed out that under the agreement, clerical employees of banks could not be transferred from one branch to another unless there was a surplus of staff in that branch and a corresponding shortage in another. Workers alleged that bank management transferred 3,300 employees in April in violation of the agreement.

Punjab Roadways contract workers demand permanent jobs

Punjab Roadways Punbus PRTC Contract Workers' Union members demonstrated at 27 depots on September 16 to demand permanent jobs and an end to outsourcing. The union also called on the government to reverse its move towards privatisation of the state's public transport.

About 8,000 contract workers from the government-owned companies PUNBUS and Pepsu Road Transport Corporation held a three-day strike on August 14 against the government's privatisation policies. They also held sit-in demonstrations at their depots.

Workers accused senior transport department officials of supporting private transport lobby group demands by allowing more private buses to ply commuter routes.

Tamil Nadu railway workers oppose mass sackings

Southern Railway workers demonstrated in Madurai, Tamil Nadu on September 15 against the Railway Board's proposal to eliminate 10,000 loco pilot jobs. Southern Railway Mazdoor Union members organised the protest, complaining that the decision was unjust and had occurred when the Indian Railways faced a shortage of loco pilots. They said it would overburden the remaining workers and compromise passenger safety.

Southern Railway workers demonstrated in Erode, Tamil Nadu on June 14 against the state government's plan to open up 109 routes to private operators. Workers claimed that most of the routes were profit making and pointed out that privatisation of the train service between Coimbatore and Shirdi had resulted in fares doubling.

Tata Marcopolo bus assembly workers in Karnataka protest

Tata Marcopolo bus assembly workers in Dharwad demonstrated in Bangalore's Freedom Park on September 20. The workers held a hunger protest and chanted slogans in support of their demands, including for a proper inquiry into the 77-day illegal lockout by Tata management in February.

Prior to the lockout, workers were protesting the sacking of 12 co-workers and had slowed production to demand a wage rise. The low-paid workers had not had a wage increase for nearly 25 months and the company had imposed harsh production targets. Workers said the target was impossible to reach.

On August 12, in response to agitation by the assembly plant workers, the Tata Marcopolo Kranthikari Karmik Union held a 14-kilometre march

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from the factory to the deputy commissioner's office in Dharwad to oppose the mandated minimum-production level.

Unsurprisingly, the government conducted a study on production-related issues at Tata Marcopolo and sided with management, mandating a minimum production level of 12 buses per shift per assembly line. Workers opposed this, saying that the study was unscientific and could not be accepted.

Protesters at Freedom Park demanded unconditional reinstatement of all sacked workers, payment of wages withheld during the lockout, and replacement of labour commissioners, accusing them of being biased towards Tata management.

Tamil Nadu government pensioners demonstrate against new pension scheme

Tamil Nadu Government Pensioners Association members protested in Dindigul on September 20 over ten demands. These included payment of Dearness Allowance arrears, withdrawal of the new pension scheme (NEP), and reduction of subscriptions to medical insurance from 350 rupees. A similar protest was held in front of the Theni Collectors office.

Bangladeshi construction workers demand payment of wages

About 100 construction workers stopped work at the Dhaka Elevated Expressway project at Tejgaon in Dhaka on Tuesday demanding unpaid wages. The workers were supposed to be given their monthly wages on the tenth day of every month, but project contractors had delayed the payments.

Workers ended the strike after three hours when the project authorities transferred wages into their accounts following the intervention of the Tejgaon police.

The construction workers are employed on the 46.3-kilometre Dhaka Elevated Expressway project, aimed at connecting Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to the Dhaka-Chattogram highway at Kutubkhali near Jatrabari.

Pacific National train drivers in Queensland hold more strikes

Over 50 train drivers from the rail freight haulage company Pacific National Intermodal in Queensland walked off the job for 48 hours on September 17 in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The company responded by locking the workers out for a further 48 hours, after which their unions, the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Engineers (AFULE), called a 48-hour stoppage to follow the lockout.

The unions want improved family friendly rosters, a "fair" wage rise and other demands to bring them in line with New South Wales drivers doing the same job. The drivers complained that the only certainty they have is prior notice of rostered days off. They complained that they do not know when they are starting or finishing, causing difficulty organising family life.

The unions claimed that Pacific National wants to cut conditions and offered the "lowest pay increase in recent history," despite six months of negotiations.

Mayne Pharma workers in South Australia strike

About 50 workers from the Mayne Pharma manufacturing and distribution facility in Salisbury, a suburb of Adelaide, walked off the job for 24 hours on Tuesday and picketed the facility. United Workers Union (UWU) members are in dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers want a pay increase that is in line with the consumer price index (CPI) which in Adelaide was 6.4 percent in July. Mayne Pharma has offered to roll-over the existing agreement for one year with a 3 percent pay increase; in reality a 3.4 percent pay cut. The UWU said it would settle for a roll-over of the current agreement but with a CPI pay rise.

The union claims the company received $680 million additional capital last month after selling its American arm. It also alleged that outgoing chief executive Scott Richards pocketed more than $3 million for the year and held more than $20 million in shares.

Redland City Council workers walk out in Queensland

Indoor workers from the Redland City Council (RCC), part of the Brisbane metropolitan area, walked off the job on September 15 to demand a better pay offer in the council's proposed certified agreement. RCC had threatened to lock the workers out for the full day if they took action.

RCC's three-year agreement was rejected by members of The Services Union (TSU) because it only offered pay increases of 3 percent, 3.5 percent and 3.5 percent plus increased on-call allowances. The offer was well below the current 7.3 percent CPI for Brisbane.

The union has not sought an increase that keeps pace with the CPI. TSU wants to do a deal that includes marginally higher, but still below-inflation pay increases of only 5 percent, 4 percent and 4 percent, with a CPI safety net in the final year.

TSU has called for RCC to return to the negotiating table but has not indicated if further industrial action is planned.

Arnhem Region public school teachers strike against wage freeze

Public school teachers throughout the Arnhem Region, in Australia's Northern Territory (NT), walked out for four hours on September 19 in opposition to the NT government's four-year pay freeze. Members of the Australian Education Union (AEU) picketed their schools holding placards saying, "Pay freeze, snow way," "I didn't come to NT to freeze" and other slogans.

Their action followed a strike by over 1,000 public sector workers across the NT on September 1 over the same issue. Strikers included teachers, firefighters and correctional services officers, joined by nurses, power and water utility workers, aboriginal health practitioners and other public sector workers.

The widely opposed four-year wage freeze on 20,000 public sector workers was imposed in November 2020 with no real opposition from the unions, as part of the Labor government's "budget repair roadmap." The

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freeze was calculated to save the government $424 million over four years.

The CPI in the NT for the year ending in July was slightly over 6 percent, meaning public sector wages will be cut by 6 percent each year up to the end of 2024.

South32 miners' strike in New South Wales enters sixth week

Over 450 workers from South32's Appin underground coal mine, south of Sydney, are entering their sixth week of rolling strikes and work bans. They are fighting for a better pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) have been trying for several months to negotiate a deal that would suit South32.

In early August, workers near unanimously rejected the company's agreement offer, which included below-inflation pay increases of 5 percent for the first year followed by increases of 4 percent, 3 percent and 4 percent, with CPI guarantees capped at 5 percent. Workers would have also received a sign-on bonus.

The ETU last week told members they were "making gains" through their industrial action, which included working half-day shifts and overtime bans. It claimed significant gains were being made on winning better conditions with some key demands being addressed. The union did not back these claims up with any details.

Canberra water utility workers hold second strike

Over 60 members of the Electrical Trades Union from Canberra's state-owned water utility supplier Icon Water struck work for 8 hours on Friday. The action followed a four-hour stoppage on September 14, after three weeks of work bans. Electrical Trades Union members are in dispute with the government over the utility's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers rejected Icon Water's offer proposed in early August because it was below inflation.

New South Wales public school cleaners protest excessive workload

United Workers Union members who work as contract cleaners at New South Wales public schools demonstrated outside state parliament on Tuesday to protest the excessive work schedules and unsafe conditions. One protester complained, "We have seen work schedules that give one cleaner 10 minutes to clean a school's 36 toilets—or about 17 seconds to clean a toilet."

A UWU spokesperson said cleaners had met with the NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet earlier this year, but nothing was done to relieve the problem. The union has avoided taking any real concrete action and is, once again, calling on the premier to "sit down with the cleaners" and discuss their issues.

New Zealand aircraft engineers in ninth week of strike action

Aircraft engineers who work for Airbus servicing military aircraft for the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) have entered the ninth week of strike action in a pay dispute.

Over 100 engineers from the Woodbourne and Ohakea RNZF bases have filed notices for another two-week strike period to demand a pay rise to keep up with inflation. The strike involves not travelling to other work sites away from the two main bases, no shift work, overtime, or doing work that's outside their job description or that changes their current work patterns.

The industrial action has resulted in two RNZAF C-130 Hercules being grounded. The entire C-130 Hercules fleet consists of five aircraft, meaning only 60 percent are operationally ready.

One worker said wages are falling behind the rising cost of living, with many of the engineers struggling to get by on what they earn. "A lot of these guys are highly skilled with years of training and experience, and they are not being valued," he said. Airbus engineers can be paid significantly less per hour than those at other aviation companies doing the same type of work.

While many of the workers are now experiencing significant hardship and turning to foodbanks to keep going, the E Tu union has kept quiet about the strike, isolating the workers, and dragging out the dispute. A union spokesman said the pay talks needed to be resolved as soon as possible, "both for the workers and to enable New Zealand to play its part on the world stage."

Auckland Gib delivery workers strike for better pay

Workers who deliver tonnes of Gib (plasterboard) to building sites across Auckland are striking for better pay. About 40 truck drivers and labourers are picketing the Penrose base of delivery company CV Compton. They want an 11 percent pay rise, but the company has offered much less.

Truck driver Hori Potaka said the cost of living was driving them into hardship while those further up the Gib chain make big profits. "Gib's not an easy job. Everybody's wanting it at the moment and it's worth gold and I think we're worth gold because we deliver it and they can't get their Gib without us," he said. Another worker said the target is to deliver 300 tonnes a day, at which point Winstone Wallboards and CV Compton get a bonus "and none of it gets shared out to the workers."

A First Union spokesman said CV Compton was paying its drivers below the "market rate" at $26 an hour when the benchmark is $30. The strike was due to last until the end of this week unless an agreement was reached.

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