Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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The World Socialist Web Site *invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

India: Jammu and Kashmir health mission workers extend strike

More than 12,000 National Health Mission employees including doctors, paramedics, administrative staff and workers in national health programs across Jammu and Kashmir remain on strike after walking out on September 9. This week, the Jammu and Kashmir National Health Mission Employees Association announced a further 72-hour extension of the action from September 18 after talks failed to produce a concrete, time-bound settlement.

The strikers want pay parity with National Health Mission employees in other states, regularisation and job security, as well as Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' State Insurance coverage, insurance, leave salary and post-retirement benefits. The dispute follows a 48-hour stoppage in April over similar demands.

Gujarat textile workers protest 12-hour shifts in Surat

Hundreds of textile workers from Surat city and surrounding industrial areas demonstrated outside the district collector's office on September 12 to demand an eight-hour working day, a compulsory Sunday holiday and enforcement of labour laws.

The Janmabhumi Bharat Majdoor Union also demanded that wages be paid by the seventh of each month and that workers receive statutory benefits including provident fund, Employees' State Insurance and gratuity. The union says Surat's textile industry employs more than 1.8 million migrant workers. The action follows unrest that began at Vedant Eco Park in Amroli on August 16 over long hours, wages and weekly leave before spreading to other textile centres across Surat.

Punjab employees and pensioners protest outstanding pay and pension demands

Hundreds of Punjab government employees and pensioners from Hoshiarpur and Nawanshahr districts marched through Garhshankar on September 11 and demonstrated outside the residence of Deputy Speaker Jai Krishan Singh Rouri.

Organised by the joint coordination committee of the Punjab Employees and Pensioners Joint Front and Sanjha Karamchari Manch Punjab, protesters demanded payment of the outstanding 18 percent dearness allowance, restoration of the Old Pension Scheme, pension revision using a 2.59 multiplier and regularisation of contractual workers.

Other demands included payment of Sixth Pay Commission arrears, restoration of withdrawn allowances, higher medical allowances and minimum wages for honorarium and incentive-based workers.

Bengaluru sanitation workers protest minister's remarks and insecure employment

Contract sanitation workers protested outside the Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on September 10 to demand an apology from Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda over remarks concerning worker absenteeism and permanent employment.

Organised by the municipal sanitation workers' union, which is affiliated with the All-India Central Council of Trade Unions, the workers also want regularisation, timely payment of wages, provident-fund and Employees' State Insurance benefits and an end to exploitation through contractors. Police detained several protesters shortly after the demonstration began.

Uttarakhand roadways workers protest two months of unpaid wages

Around 145 Uttarakhand Roadways workers from a rural depot demonstrated outside the assistant general manager's office at the interstate bus terminal in Dehradun on September 16 over two months of unpaid wages. Organised by the Uttaranchal Roadways Karamchari Union, workers demanded immediate payment of the arrears, guaranteed payment of future salaries by the seventh of each month and a permanent policy to prevent recurring wage delays. Roadways workers at several depots have held protests this month over the wage crisis, with unions warning that the campaign will be extended across the state if management fails to resolve the outstanding issues.

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Haryana sanitation workers end 37-day state-wide strike

More than 13,000 contract sanitation workers in Haryana ended a 37-day state-wide strike on September 11 after reaching an agreement with the state government. The action began on August 6 and involved 13,091 contractual workers on municipal rolls, supported by 3,418 regular sanitation workers. Led by the Nagar Palika Karamchari Sangh, workers had demanded regularisation, an end to contract labour and implementation of previous agreements.

The settlement provides for recruitment to vacant permanent posts, with contractual workers receiving credit for their experience, as well as minimum wages for outsourced workers, risk allowances, medical and insurance benefits and reinstatement of workers dismissed or suspended during the strike. The agreement did not provide blanket automatic regularisation of all contractual workers.

Bangladesh: Chaldal workers protest months of unpaid salaries

Employees of online grocery company Chaldal have been protesting at the company's Banani headquarters in Dhaka over salaries unpaid for between three and six months. Around 75 workers, mostly women, travelled from the company's Jashore operation to Dhaka on September 12 after being called to the headquarters for discussions, with more than 30 still staying at the premises several days later.

One worker estimated that 300 to 400 employees in Jashore had not received their full salaries. Workers have submitted a written complaint to the Department of Labour and say they will remain until their outstanding wages are paid.

The dispute follows an earlier wage protest by hundreds of Chaldal employees in Jashore in March, when workers were owed three to four months of salaries. Management then promised to clear the arrears, but wage delays subsequently re-emerged. Chaldal has attributed the continuing non-payment to an acute liquidity crisis and previously sought 400 million taka ($US3.25 million) in emergency financing.

Victorian doctors' strike called off at eleventh hour

A planned 24-hour strike on September 15 by around 9,000 public sector doctors in Victoria was suddenly called off the night before by the Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF).

The union told doctors it had voluntarily withdrawn the stoppage after the state Labor government asked the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to rule that it could not proceed. At the same time, ASMOF declared it was seeking the FWC's intervention in the dispute—that is, asking the pro-business tribunal to shut down all industrial action and determine the outcome through arbitration.

However, an online meeting held by ASMOF on Monday night was attended by more than 1,100 doctors, who expressed strong opposition to the bureaucracy's liquidation of their dispute. ASMOF was compelled to declare the following day that, "The campaign is not stopping. We are already planning our next stop-work action."

Sydney Ferries slashes services after workers refuse to collect fares

After Sydney Ferries workers employed by Transdev began a fare collection ban on September 11, the company and the state transport authority, Transport NSW, responded by cancelling all services on the Parramatta River on successive weekends.

The action is part of an ongoing campaign against the company's real-wage cutting pay offer.

The workers, covered by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), are seeking a 5 percent pay rise this year, and guaranteed annual increases in line with inflation in the years that follow.

The Opal ban follows a half-day strike on September 2 and limited overtime bans, which the union says "have already disrupted several services," due to Transdev's heavy reliance on overtime.

Public sector pharmacists strike in the Australian Capital Territory

Public sector pharmacists at Canberra Hospital, North Canberra Hospital and Digital Canberra stopped work for two hours on September 15, in opposition to a real-wage cutting pay offer from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Labor government.

The government has offered nominal pay rises of just 1.5 percent every six months in a three-year agreement, well below even the understated official annual inflation rate of 3.5 percent.

Professionals Australia, which covers the workers, says pharmacists already face dire staffing shortages that are affecting patient care, and are concerned this will be exacerbated by the deepening of real wage cuts.

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