

13,000 sanitation workers strike in Ahmedabad, India; Tamil Nadu rubber workers protest

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

28 July 2018

Thousands of sanitation workers strike in Ahmedabad, India

Over 13,000 sanitation workers in Ahmedabad, Gujarat state's largest city, walked out on strike on July 23 for improved wages and conditions for daily wage workers and other demands. The walkout was called by the Ahmedabad Municipal Servant's Association.

The sanitation workers, who are some of the most oppressed sections of the Indian working class, began their industrial action by dumping garbage on the roads in Ahmedabad.

Municipal Commissioner Vijay Nehra threatened the strikers, declaring that he would not tolerate "indiscipline" and would sack those unwilling to work.

Strikers ignored these threats and said that if the government did not listen to their demands they would call on municipal hospital workers and firemen to join the industrial action.

Most sanitation workers are contract employees and have no secure employment.

India: Protesting rubber workers arrested in Tamil Nadu

Police arrested over 580 protesting Tamil Nadu Rubber Corporation workers on July 23 after hundreds tried to lay siege to the corporation office and blocked the road traffic on the road. Two Congress and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) legislators were also seized by police. All those arrested were released later that evening.

Over 1,700 contract workers are employed by the state government-owned rubber estates, including Kothaiyaru, Maruthamparai, Chittar, Mayilaar, Manalodai, Kalikesam, Keeriparai and Paraliyaru, and rubber factories in Keeriparai and Mayilar.

The contract workers are only paid 442 rupees (\$US6) per day for between 200 and 210 days a year or an average 13,950 rupees per month. The trade unions have called for an increase to 18,000 rupees.

Over 30 tripartite meetings, involving the rubber workers trade unions, the Tamil Nadu Rubber Corporation and the state government, have been held since 2016 when the talks began.

The Tamil Nadu state government has offered a miserable 23-rupee daily increase.

Chinese workers protest against sackings

Workers protested outside the gates of Jasic Technology's plant in Shenzhen last Tuesday over the dismissal of employees who tried to establish a union at the facility. Their demands included reinstatement and the right to unionise.

The protest followed a lengthy demonstration at a local police station the previous weekend demanding the release of workers charged with collecting signatures for a new union. All detained workers were released.

Those involved in the protest cited low wages, the company's underpayment of social insurance and housing fund contributions and other attacks on living standards.

Taiwan: Protest over conditions of migrant fishermen

About a dozen protesters from different environmental and labor rights groups gathered outside the Civil Service Development Institute in Taipei last Wednesday to demand greater protections for migrant fishermen. The rally coincided with a meeting of government officials and academics on human trafficking.

Protesters chanted: "Fix the legal loopholes and stop human trafficking now." A large number of migrant fishermen are reportedly not protected by labour laws, because the government considers them to be working outside of Taiwanese territories.

Sacked telephone workers locked out in the Philippines

Hundreds of workers retrenched from the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT) were denied entry to the workplace on Tuesday in Mandaluyong City.

The company dismissed 12,000 contract employees in response to an Executive Order from the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in late May. The government order—part of a stepped-up offensive against the working class—is being presented as an attempt to reduce casual

employment as a proportion of the workforce.

Labor Secretary Silvestre Bello III told retrenched workers to apply under DOLE's emergency employment program whilst negotiations with the company are still underway.

Indonesian workers protest sale of state-owned oil and gas assets

Hundreds of workers demonstrated on July 20 in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, against the gutting of publicly owned oil and gas assets.

The state-controlled Pertamina wants to sell its assets to boost portfolio performance—i.e., profits. The protesters began at Monas Square in Central Jakarta and marched to a number of other government offices

Their demands included rejection of the asset sales and the dismissal of senior directors responsible for the decision. Workers also protested outside Pertamina's fuel stations threatening to halt operations.

Coal mine safety supervisors locked out at Appin in New South Wales

Mining company South32 locked out around 60 supervisors for one week on Monday at its Appin pit, south of Sydney. The supervisors, members of the Collieries Staff and Officials Association (CSOA), oversee critical monitoring and conduct regular safety checks at the mine.

The enterprise agreement dispute lockout was imposed after workers imposed an overtime ban in response to company demands for roster changes that would require the supervisors to work an extra four hours with no additional pay.

South32 hired replacement contract workers from other mining areas during the lockout. CSOA claimed they were inexperienced and had received only "haphazard training" by the company.

The Appin underground mine is known for its high levels of methane gas and must be strictly monitored to prevent explosions. In 1979 a methane explosion claimed the lives of 14 workers. Around 1,000 production workers continued to work during the lockout.

Security guards strike for decent pay and conditions in Victoria

Last week security guards employed by Wilson Security took industrial action after negotiations stalled in a long-running dispute for a new enterprise work agreement. The action included work stoppages and bans on visitor checks, on-site patrols and bag and vehicle checks.

The United Voice union covers the guards who provide security at various locations across Victoria, including hospitals, manufacturing sites and defence facilities.

During 18 months of enterprise agreement negotiations the company has demanded a two-tier pay structure to pay new guards lower minimum wages and freeze any further pay

increase for two years. Wilson has only offered a 6 percent pay increase over three years for current employees.

New Zealand public sector workers hold second strike

On July 23, over 4,000 workers at the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) held their second, two-hour strike this month. The first strike was on July 9.

The public sector employees were protesting low pay and frustrating working conditions and are now voting for further strike action early next month. IRD are currently in the process of axing thousands of jobs.

IRD and MBIE workers are covered by the Public Services Association (PSA), which has restricted industrial action to two-hour strikes. While the union claims their members are "reluctant to take strike action" workers have voted overwhelmingly to continuing strike action.

The union, which has not openly discussed the massive job cuts at IRD during the dispute, was complicit in over a hundred job cuts at Auckland City Libraries in 2017.

New Zealand primary school teachers vote to extend strike

In early July, New Zealand primary school teachers voted overwhelmingly for three-hour strike action on August 15. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) had planned the walkout to occur from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Teachers are voting this week if the strike should be extended to a full day.

The government has offered a 2.2 to 2.6 percent pay rise per year for three years for a majority of teachers. This has been rejected by the teachers who want at least 16 percent over two years and other measures to improve staffing and workloads.

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