

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Reserve Bank of India workers to strike over pensions

Thousands of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) workers and officers will take mass casual leave on September 5 and 6 over long-outstanding demands for improved pensions. The industrial action was called by the United Forum of Reserve Bank Officers and Employees. Retired RBI employees want their pension brought into line with what Indian government employees receive.

The decision to strike was taken on August 3, after the bank regulator and officials from the ministry of finance refused to approve workers' demands. RBI employees walked out over the issue last November.

India: Panchayat workers protest in Bengaluru, Karnataka

Panchayat (village council) workers began an indefinite protest in Bengaluru on August 28 outside the Karnataka State Assembly. They were demanding regular and on time payment of salaries, full time jobs, a pension, medical facilities and other benefits. The council workers have accused the state government of cheating 18,000 workers employed in village councils and have threatened statewide action.

India: Sharda university contract labourers demand wages in New Delhi

About 250 contract workers, including painters, plumbers and carpenters, protested outside the Sharda University last Friday over the non-payment of wages and overtime by their employer for the previous 50 days. When the protesters threatened to block the road, university management gave each of them 2,000 rupees and blamed the contractor for failing to pay the workers.

The contract employees are supposed to be paid 400 rupees daily with an additional 200 rupees for overtime. "We worked in different hostels," one painter told the media. "Although we were told we would be paid Rs 600 daily, including overtime after 4 p.m., we're still waiting for our wages."

Bangladesh tea estate workers demonstrate for wage increase

Tea estate workers at Lakkatura Tea Garden in Sylhet demonstrated on Sunday to demand an increase in their daily wage from the current 85 taka (\$US1) to 300 taka. The government has offered a 17 taka daily increase. The rally and march of mainly women workers was organised by the Bangladesh Cha Shramik Federation.

Workers denounced the government's paltry pay offer and pointed out that the 17 taka daily increase would not even buy one

kilogram of rice, which costs over 45 taka. The tea estate workers protested in April over the issue.

Pakistan: Quetta contract workers demand permanent jobs and outstanding pay

Hundreds of contract workers from the government-operated Quetta Development Authority (QDA) demonstrated outside the Quetta Press Club on August 20 for the immediate payment of outstanding wages and for permanent jobs. The workers have not been paid for the last five months.

Despite ongoing employment of the workers, the authority has failed to make their jobs permanent or give them the same benefits as other government workers. The QDA Employees Union, which organised the protest, has threatened to establish a protest camp and take further action if authorities fail to meet workers' demands.

A similar protest was held on the same day by contract workers for the Khairpur municipal in Sindh province. The workers have not been paid for the past six months.

Police crackdown against Chinese students supporting Guangdong strike

Student activists were briefly detained on Tuesday after a raid targeting supporters of striking workers at Jasic Technology in Guangdong province. The employees have held a series of protracted stoppages in a bid to form an independent union.

About 50 visiting students were in an apartment in the southern Chinese city of Huizhou on Friday when police with riot gear stormed inside. After being detained, the students were released separately. Their phones and computers were seized and they were told they would be placed under surveillance.

The raid was part of a wider crackdown on political dissidents, including individuals in Beijing and Jiangsu who have voiced support for the Jasic workers.

South Korean workers demand action over police assaults on strikers in 2009

Sacked workers from SsangYong Motor protested outside South Korea's National Police Agency on Tuesday after revelations that a violent police crackdown in 2009 received final approval from former President Lee Myung-bak.

The protest is part of a campaign by the SsangYong Motor chapter of the Korean Metal Workers' Union, calling for the prosecution of Lee and former Gyeonggi Province Police Agency

Commissioner Cho Hyun-oh.

The violence inflicted on workers occurred during a protest where about 1,000 workers occupied an auto factory and held it for over two months against quasi-military assaults by the police.

According to a recent investigation, police helicopters sprayed 200,000 litres of water, mixed with tear gas made from carcinogenic chemicals, at workers. Weaponry designated as anti-terrorist equipment, including Tasers and multipurpose launchers, were also deployed against the workers.

Alcoa workers still on strike

Around 1,500 workers at Alcoa's aluminium refineries and bauxite mines in Western Australia (WA) remain on strike after walking out on August 8 amid stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

Alcoa has applied to the Fair Work Commission, the federal industrial tribunal, to allow it to terminate the existing work agreement. If the application is granted, the workers could be forced back onto the base industrial award, leading to massive reductions in pay and working conditions.

The Australian Workers Union has admitted to offering Alcoa "concessions" in a move to push through an agreement. The company has released an offer in a company organised ballot due to close on September 6.

Airservices Australia workers vote for industrial action

Workers for Airservices Australia, the federal government's air navigation agency, voted overwhelmingly late last month for a campaign of industrial action, including strikes, in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement (EA).

The ballot was held after 12 months of negotiations for a new EA stalled. The company is refusing to budge from its below inflation wage offer of just 2 percent per annum, in line with the government's public sector pay cap.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), which covers the majority of the workers, has condemned the proposed pay increase as "measly." Last year, however, it suppressed widespread opposition by its members and pushed through similar outcomes right across the public sector including at major departments such as the Australia Tax office and Human Services.

Boom Logistics crane workers strike in New South Wales

Workers at national crane operator Boom Logistics are on strike in a dispute over wages and working conditions. The workers are employed at the company's Port Kembla facility on New South Wales' South Coast and its Carrington and Singleton yards in the Hunter Valley.

The company is offering a 15 percent pay increase over three years for the Newcastle workforce and 13 percent for workers at Singleton and Port Kembla. According to the Construction, Forestry, Mining, Maritime and Energy Union, which covers the sites, the company is demanding "a big reduction in working conditions" in return. It also wants to increase the number of casuals it employs.

While the crane workers have not had a pay increase in five years, Boom Logistics executives received a 20 percent increase in

their remunerations last year. The company employs 430 permanent workers and 760 casuals across Australia.

New Zealand truck drivers strike

Around 10 concrete truck drivers struck in Auckland on Monday over low wages. The drivers, who work for Allied Concrete, are paid \$NZ27 an hour for a 40-hour week but regularly have to work more than 50 hours.

The mainly migrant drivers feel pressured to accept low wages and remain loyal to the company because they would need to apply for a new work visa if they change jobs.

First Union has been negotiating with Allied Concrete since December last year. The union, which supports the anti-immigrant Labour-NZ First government, cynically called on migrant workers to join a union so they can be properly informed of their employment rights.

New Zealand pallet workers strike

Staff at Christchurch's CHEP pallet plant walked out on Monday morning over low pay. The workers want a \$1.50 hourly increase but this has been rejected by the company. They are currently paid around \$17 an hour, only 50c more than the legal minimum.

First Union says some CHEP workers are living in their cars and makeshift houses because the pay is so low. It says wages should be at least \$20.55, the so-called "living wage" as determined by the unions.

New Zealand: Third strike by Go Bus drivers

Over 100 Go Bus drivers in Hamilton held a strike for 24 hours on Wednesday. It is the third strike by drivers in the Waikato region this year. They are paid between \$17.35 and \$19.46 an hour, slightly above the minimum wage of \$16.50. Workers have previously complained of dangerous and poorly maintained buses.

First Union, which has dragged out negotiations with the company for months, says that Go Bus has requested arbitration. The union, which has no intention of mobilising other bus drivers to back its Hamilton members, has welcomed the request, making clear that it will collaborate with employers to impose a sell-out deal.

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