

Ten thousand taxi drivers end protests in India; 1,600 rubber plantation workers strike in Bangladesh; New Zealand secondary teachers vote to strike

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 November 2018

India: Taxi drivers call off protest in Maharashtra

Drivers for APP-based taxi companies, Ola and Uber, called off two days of protests on Monday after the Maharashtra chief minister claimed he would investigate their demands. About 10,000 drivers were involved in the campaign which began on Saturday.

The drivers are demanding increased payments, minimum base fares of between 100 and 150 rupees (\$US1.40 and \$US2.10) depending on the car size, and 18 to 23 rupees per km. They also want the reinstatement of blacklisted drivers by the app-based companies.

The police blocked a march of drivers on Monday morning and arrested some of those who led it. They were released later that afternoon. According to the drivers' union leadership, the chief minister has promised to establish a joint committee of union and companies' representatives after the winter session of the state legislative assembly.

The drivers, who struck for 13 days in October, have warned that they will resume protests if authorities fail to address their demands.

India: Punjab teachers hold candlelight march

Contract and college teachers in Punjab state's Hoshiapur district held a candlelight march on Tuesday over several demands. These included payment of salary arrears and regular jobs and service agreements for contract teachers. The march was organised by Punjab and Chandhigar College Teachers Union.

Teachers chanted slogans against government cuts to education and health and the privatisation of public education. The teachers have threatened to hold further protests.

Jharkhand education authorities demand teachers end strike

Jharkhand state education department authorities have warned 2,000 striking contract teachers in East Singhbhum district to return to work. The teachers, who are members of the Contract Teachers Union, walked out a month ago. They want a wage increase and permanent jobs.

More than 3,000 students across 200 new primary schools in East Singhbhum depend on contract teachers. Jharkhand district has 80,000 contract teachers who are only paid 6,000 rupees (\$US85) per month. The teachers want a 25 percent increase in their salaries.

Indian sanitation workers protest for better working conditions

On November 16, hundreds of sanitation workers from urban local bodies, public sector undertakings and private companies from various states across India protested near parliament in New Delhi. The protest was called by All India Municipal Workers Federation and All India

Central Council of Trade Unions.

The sanitation workers, who are mainly contract employees and amongst the most oppressed sections of the Indian working class, want higher wages, permanent jobs and improved working conditions.

Bangladesh rubber workers' strike continues

About 1,600 rubber plantation workers in Bangladesh have been on strike since October 13 over various demands, including a regular 16,000 taka (\$US190) minimum monthly salary, permanent jobs and improved working conditions. They have held regular protests and marches since they walked out.

The workers are employed as rubber tappers and in rubber processing factories at rubber gardens in the Tangail, Mymensingh and Sherpur districts in the centre and the north of the country. The plantations are owned by the Madhupur Zone of Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation.

The strike has shut down all production completion at the plantations. The workers are organised by the Peergachha Piecemeal Tapping Workers Union.

Pakistan's private airline employees protest for dues

Shaheen Air International employees protested last Saturday in Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar over the non-payment of wages and benefits to the company's 4,000 employees over the past five months.

The operations of Shaheen Air International, the largest privately owned airline in Pakistan, were suspended after it failed to pay the Civil Aviation Authority an outstanding 1.4 billion rupees (\$10.5 million) and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) 1.5 billion rupees.

Company authorities falsely claimed that they could not pay the wages because FBR had frozen the airline's accounts. Suspension of its services, however, were gradual and it was allowed to operate flights to Saudi Arabia for Haj pilgrims until the end of September.

A spokesman of the airline employees told a press conference on November 14 that two brothers who owned the airline had fled to Dubai in violation of a ban preventing them from leaving the country.

Pakistan: Sindh primary teachers demand permanent jobs

Teachers at government-run primary schools in Larkana, Sindh began a protest march on November 10 to demand permanent jobs and improved conditions. They planned to demonstrate outside the chief minister's home when they reached Karachi.

The teachers want an end to forced transfers, a reversal of those which

have already occurred, and the same group insurance system that applies to government workers in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces.

Teachers also accused the government of delaying previous pledges to provide permanent jobs and other promises. The march was organised by the Primary Teachers Association.

Factory workers in China protest over mass redundancies

Thousands of workers protested outside a factory in Huizhou, southern China on November 9, in opposition to mass layoffs.

Biel Crystal, a staffing agency used by the factory, announced in a social media post that 5,000 contract workers would be laid-off. The contractor, a Hong Kong-based manufacturer, is one of the world's biggest suppliers of touchscreens for smartphone makers such as Apple and Samsung.

The owner of a nearby factory told reporters that, "The whole road was blocked...Police arrested and fined people who tried to take photos and recordings." A video posted online appeared to show Chinese police trying to marshal several thousand demonstrators.

South Korean workers strike against new labour laws

An estimated 150,000 workers protested across South Korea on November 21 over new attacks on working conditions being spearheaded by the Moon Jae-In government.

The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) called the half-day strike and rallies in Seoul and 13 other cities. Ten thousand demonstrated outside the national parliament in Seoul. Hundreds of riot police were deployed.

Workers are opposing a government move to introduce greater flexibility to the country's maximum 52-hour work week. Unions have also called for the minimum wage to be increased from 7,530 won (\$6.66) to 10,000 won (\$8.85) by 2020. There is also widespread anger over growing casualisation and contract employment.

Cambodian clothing workers strike over unpaid entitlements

Two thousand striking workers are protesting outside the Quantum Clothing factory in the Por Sen Chey district near Phnom Penh. They have stated that they will not return to the job until the plant's new owner pays outstanding entitlements due under their old contract. The protests began last week and are still continuing.

Workers are demanding payment of their seniority indemnity. Under legislation passed by the Cambodian government in July, employers are required to pay the indemnity every six months. The two payments together are equal to 15 days' wages plus some fringe benefits.

South Australian school teachers vote on industrial action

Public school teachers in South Australia are currently voting on whether to strike in their dispute over a new enterprise agreement.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) claimed that pay was not an issue but that the state government wants to remove hard-won conditions and funding safeguards. Demands by teachers for reduced class sizes, improved resources for special-needs children, greater incentives for teachers to work in rural areas and expanded permanency have been rejected by the state Liberal government. The ballot closes on November 26.

A half-day strike is planned for the morning of November 29, depending on the outcome of the vote.

Tasmanian school teachers strike

Teachers at 150 public schools across Tasmania will walk off the job next week to attend stop-work meetings in their dispute with the state Liberal government for a new enterprise agreement.

The AEU said the state government "offer" failed to address workload issues and was contingent on teachers not going ahead with strike action.

The teachers' stoppage coincides with a broader industrial campaign by Tasmanian public sector workers who are demanding the state government scrap its 2 percent wage cap. The unions have limited all actions to sporadic strikes and token work bans.

New South Wales mobile crane workers end five-week strike

The union representing crane operators at three Boom Logistics depots in New South Wales called off a five-week strike on November 16. They were demanding pay increases between 20 and 50 percent, depending on the depot, followed by 2.5 percent increases every six months to make up for a five-year pay freeze.

The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union said it made a deal with Boom Logistics for separate agreements at each depot in Singleton, Newcastle and Wollongong. Details have not been made public. Workers had rejected Boom's offer for pay increases of between 5 and 9 percent, then 4 to 5 percent for the next two years.

Queensland Baptist Church teachers maintain industrial action

Teachers and ancillary staff at three schools operated by the Queensland Baptist Church (Carinity) have been involved in limited strike action for more than nine months in a dispute over company demands for cuts to wages and working conditions.

The Independent Education Union (IEU) has been attempting to reach a deal for a new enterprise agreement covering Carinity schools in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Hervey Bay since October last year.

Teachers have twice rejected proposed agreements by Carinity management, which include major cuts to superannuation payments, long service leave and redundancy provisions, in return for a 4 percent pay increase in the first year. The union claimed that some teachers are to be reclassified in a move that could reduce annual pay or force them to work longer hours.

Western Australian bus drivers strike again over pay and conditions

About 500 bus drivers from the private bus operator Transdev walked off the job last Friday in a dispute over pay and conditions in a proposed enterprise agreement. The industrial action followed strikes on October 10, 18 and 19, and selected work-bans affecting services on routes in Fremantle, Joondalup, Rockingham and Perth.

The Transport Workers' Union (TWU) is calling for a 3 percent pay rise, extended annual leave and greater job security. Most of the drivers are employed on a casual basis. They are demanding permanent positions and to be paid shift-worker penalty rates. Drivers complained that they are forced to work split shifts. Many Perth staff are unable to return home between shifts, meaning they are waiting around for several hours for shifts to begin, increasing fatigue.

Transdev has about 2,500 drivers but only 20 percent are allowed to take legally protected industrial action.

New Zealand midwives strike

More than 1,100 New Zealand midwives began industrial action on November 22. Members of the Midwifery Employee Representation and Advisory Service (Merars) voted by a 90 percent majority to strike after year-long negotiations with the 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) failed. The action involves two-hour work stoppages every shift for the next two weeks.

A pay offer from the DHBs, which was rejected by the midwives, was the same as the sell-out 9 percent pay rise across three years accepted by the NZ Nurses Organisation for nurses in August. Midwives are seeking 3 percent above this, or a \$5,000 retention allowance.

Regional bus drivers locked out in New Zealand

Bus drivers in Hamilton, Te, Awamutu and Otorohanga employed by Go Bus were locked out indefinitely on November 18 in a pay dispute that began in March 2017.

The lock-out came as 120 drivers were due to begin industrial action, scheduled to last until December 3, during which they would refuse to collect passenger fares. The low-paid drivers have held five strikes this year seeking a “living wage,” designated by the trade unions as \$20.55 an hour. The company is offering a meagre pay increase of 1.5 percent per annum.

Go Bus, which is contracted by Waikato Regional Council, is the country’s largest operator of bus passenger services. It is owned by the multi-million dollar business arms of two Maori tribes, Tainui and Ngai Tahu. Go Bus declared it will maintain the lockout until the drivers drop their “living wage” campaign.

Secondary school teachers reject pay offer, vote to strike

The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), which covers 17,000 secondary school teachers, announced yesterday that its members have voted overwhelmingly to reject the government’s latest pay offer and to take strike action. This followed two weeks of paid stop-work meetings that began in Auckland on November 7 and ended in Wellington yesterday.

A PPTA conference last month rejected the Ministry of Education’s offer of annual pay rises of between 2 and 3 percent for three years. Teachers are demanding an immediate 15 percent wage increase and measures to reduce workloads.

PPTA leaders are already preparing a sell-out, declaring the strike will be limited to one day and will not take place until term one next year. They will use the summer months to put together a deal. Negotiations are set to resume next week.

The meetings partially coincided with regional one-day stoppages by 30,000 primary school teachers the previous week. Members of the NZ Educational Institute (NZEI), the primary teachers’ union, also rejected two government pay offers and called for a 16 percent pay increase over two years, smaller class sizes and more support for students with learning difficulties.

Negotiations on the primary teacher’s contract are continuing. The Labour government has refused to increase its latest offers to both groups of teachers, falsely stating that it has “no more money,” while describing their pay claims as “unrealistic.”

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