

Over 200,000 Uttar Pradesh government employees strike;  
Bangladesh garment workers occupy factory; New Caledonia miners  
still on strike

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 February 2019

### India: Uttar Pradesh state government workers strike for better pension

Over 200,000 Uttar Pradesh government employees struck across the north Indian state on February 6 to demand restoration of their old pension scheme. The workers oppose a new government pension which forces them to contribute an additional four percent of their income. More than 150 government employee unions are involved in the walkout.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government responded by banning all protests and invoking the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), which gives police the right to arrest anybody without a warrant for violating the Act's provisions.

The umbrella union group coordinating the industrial action told the media that workers would not be intimidated by the ESMA or threats of arrest and said the strike would continue until February 12. The unions, however, have exempted health and power sector workers from the state-wide walkout.

### Informal workers march in New Delhi for job security and better pay

Several hundred informal workers demonstrated in New Delhi on February 1 to demand higher basic wages, permanent jobs and the right to housing and social security. The workers, who were mobilised by the Working People's Charter, marched as the right-wing BJP government of Prime Minister Modi presented its annual budget to the parliament.

The protesters called on the government to implement a charter of demands, the most important being establishment of a legally binding minimum 18,000-rupee (\$253) monthly wage with an indexation provision.

### Indian transport corporation workers demonstrate

Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) workers protested outside all regional manager offices throughout the state on January 30. The demonstrations were organised by the Joint Action Committee, which includes a range of state transport unions.

Workers want a 50 percent wage increase and for the corporation to be taken over by the state government. Workers previously supported plans for an indefinite strike starting on February 6 but this was called off by the Joint Action Committee after talks with the state transport minister.

### Bangladesh garment workers occupy closed factory

About 600 Luman Fashions workers have been demonstrating since January 28 in Dhaka over the company's sudden closure of its plant without paying outstanding wages and benefits. The factory, which

produced jackets for export, employed about 800 workers.

Workers have occupied the factory's 8th floor to prevent the authorities from removing machinery. They told the media that the owner closed the plant without warning and promised talks with authorities on January 29. The talks did not occur.

The Bangladesh Garment Industrial Workers Federation claims that the owner had already reached an agreement with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and garment union leaders to pay workers in March. Workers have disputed this claim and said negotiations with the BGMEA have been fruitless.

### Pakistan: Karachi and Islamabad journalists protest

Journalists from privately owned media outlets in Islamabad and Karachi have been demonstrating this week over the non-payment of salaries, pay cuts and sackings. The protests, which were called by the Joint Workers' Action Committee, a coalition of unions, were held outside the offices of the *Jung* and *Express* newspapers on February 1 and February 2 respectively.

The journalists demanded investigations into the assets of these companies and called on the government to intervene on their behalf. They have threatened to demonstrate outside parliament if their demands issues are not resolved.

A similar protest was held on January 30 by textile mill workers in Faisalabad, who have not been paid for two months. Workers told the media that when they demanded their outstanding wages, management responded with threats of sackings. Several dozen workers blocked Sargodha Road in protest and chanted slogans against the mill owners.

### Pakistan: Sindh government doctors' union ends strike

The Pakistan Medical Association shut down a three-day strike by doctors at government hospitals in Sindh province. The industrial action forced the closure of outpatient departments and threatened other essential services. The union ended the strike after negotiations with government authorities.

The union claims that the government has agreed to grant doctors' demands, including increased salaries and allowances in line with doctors in other provinces. The government has reportedly agreed to promote between 2,000 and 2,500 doctors to higher pay grades.

### Hong Kong protest demands release of jailed activists

Around a dozen protesters marched to the Lunar New Year Fair in Hong Kong's Victoria Park last Tuesday to demand the release of detained

labour activists.

The rally, organised by the Confederation of Trade Unions, called for 53 activists who supported the Jasic workers' strike in Shenzhen to be freed by Chinese authorities.

Jasic workers and their supporters were viciously attacked by company goons and by the police after they began fighting to establish an independent union. Many were beaten and large-scale arrests were carried out.

### **Philippines apparel workers continue picket**

Workers at the Pulido Apparel factory in the San Luis municipality of Batangas province have been maintaining a picket outside the plant since January 21. The company, which employs 450 workers at three factories in the Philippines, is a subsidiary of the US-based Fownes Bros & Co. It shuttered the San Luis plant in December claiming financial problems.

The Pulido Apparel factory was reopened a month later and workers hired on two-month contracts. Workers involved in previous industrial action were blacklisted. They are demanding reinstatement. The company failed to attend the latest session of a government mediation hearing.

### **Tasmanian nurses strike against state government wage cap**

Nurses in Tasmania continued industrial action at five hospitals this week with two-hour weekly stop-work rallies of theatre nurses and one-hour rallies for all other nursing positions. It follows failed negotiations between the Australian Nurses and Midwives Federal (ANMF) and the state Liberal government.

Tasmanian nurses are the lowest paid in Australia and are demanding pay increases higher than the government's 2 percent rise cap to bring their wages into line with national pay rates. They have been taking industrial action since March 2018 over low pay, poor working conditions and increased patient waiting times and extended overtime, caused by chronic understaffing. Some nurses have reported having to work 150 hours on call per fortnight.

The nurses' industrial action varies according to its location. Stop-work rallies and bans on overtime and double shifts for two days a week have been held state-wide, whereas bans on elective surgery were held at Mersey Community Hospital. The latter ban was suspended in January 7, after six days, after the state government threatened to stand down nurses without pay, if they continued the industrial action.

### **Australia: Brisbane ferry drivers hold third strike in three months**

Around 130 workers who operate CityCat ferry services in Brisbane, the Queensland capital, walked off the job for 24 hours on Friday in a dispute over a proposed enterprise agreement.

Members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) held 48-hour and 24-hour strikes in December. The stoppages occurred after the unions and ferry operator Transdev failed to reach an agreement during a year of negotiations.

Transdev is a private transport company contracted by Brisbane City Council to operate commuter ferry services on the Brisbane River. Around 30 percent of Transdev's CityCat workers are employed on a casual basis with no job security. Many are reportedly paid below the award rate. An MUA spokesman also accused Transdev of manipulating rosters to reduce wages.

The MUA rejected Transdev's latest pay rise offer of 19.7 percent over three years for CityCat masters and 8.3 percent to 19.7 percent for other CityCat crew. The union wants wage increases of between 20 and 30 percent over three years. It said Transdev's pay offer was conditional on workers accepting a one-minute change in start times that would strip them of an early morning allowance.

### **Transdev bus drivers in Perth strike for pay parity**

Thirty-six Transdev bus drivers in Perth, the Western Australian capital, walked off the job for four hours on Thursday afternoon in a dispute over an enterprise agreement (EA). The drivers want pay parity with other drivers in Perth's Public Transport Authority network.

At least 500 drivers were previously involved in four strikes during October and November. Transdev has about 2,500 drivers but only 20 percent are allowed to take legally protected industrial action.

The TWU is calling for an annual 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 have complained that they are forced to work split shifts. Many Perth staff cannot return home between shifts. This means that they have to wait for several hours before their next shift to begin.

### **Australian dock workers threaten industrial action over new enterprise agreement**

Port workers at DP World's Sydney terminal are currently voting on a campaign of industrial action, in a protracted dispute with the stevedoring company over a new enterprise agreement.

DP World wants an employee income protection scheme, controlled by the Maritime Union of Australia, eliminated from the next enterprise agreement. The fund supposedly pays out workers 75 percent of income that they lose, if prevented from working due to injury or illness.

The company has offered to maintain the fund in a new deal if MUA agrees to drop its demands for a ban on casual labour at the terminal, expanded leave provisions and other improved conditions, along with a 2.6 percent cap on any annual wage increases.

Contrary to the MUA posturing, the union has overseen the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs across the stevedoring sector during the past two decades.

### **New Zealand: Wellington bus drivers hold stop work meetings**

Around 200 NZ Bus drivers held stop work meetings at 10.30 a.m. on February 7 and 8. The meetings followed a strike on January 16.

NZ Bus is exploiting the fact that previous employment conditions were not carried over when bus companies sought new government contracts to run services in 2018. NZ Bus is forcing more employees to work part-time, with fewer guaranteed hours. Workers will refuse to take fares from passengers starting on February 28.

### **New Zealand: Lakes District Health Board workers to strike**

Anaesthetic technicians at the Lakes District Health Board in the city of Rotorua will strike for five days to demand adequate rest breaks. Private sector wages for anaesthetic technicians are around 20 percent higher than for those in the public sector's district health boards. The action involves 11 workers represented by Apex union and will occur from February 18 to 22.

### **Auckland rail workers take strike vote**

Railway workers in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, held a vote on whether to strike on February 8. The results will not be announced for three weeks. The workers, employed by multinational company Transdev, are represented by the Rail and Maritime Transportation Union (RMTU).

The RMTU has made statements intending to dissuade workers' action, with one representative telling the media that workers "don't want to strike, but the company has left them with no other choice than to consider it."

### **Strike continues at SLN nickel mine in New Caledonia**

Workers at SLN's nickel mines remain on strike, having walked out on January 4. The company proposed a restructure which will result in

miners working fewer days with longer hours, including extended weekend shifts.

A majority of trade unions accepted the proposed changes but two unions, the CSTNC and the USTKE, amid widespread opposition from their members, felt compelled to reject the restructure.

Nickel ore stocks in Noumea are severely low, and the hurricane season is threatening to disrupt SLN smelters. The company is the largest private employer in New Caledonia, but has run at losses for the past six years.

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