

Indian aeronautic workers threaten national walkout; Pakistan power workers demand safe, permanent jobs; Taiwan union ends flight attendants' strike

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 July 2019

### Indian railcoach workers protest against privatisation

Hundreds of Integral Coach Factory (ICF) workers in Perambur, near Chennai, demonstrated on July 5 against the Modi government's plans to privatise Indian Railways' production units. The protest was organised by the ICF Joint Action Council.

The Modi government will shut down Indian Railways' printing presses by March 31, 2020. The printing units have produced railway tickets, timetables and maps for more than a century. The government also plans to invite private companies to bid in auctions for over 20 railway stations across the country.

Workers from the Modern Coach Factory in Rae Bareilly and the Diesel Locomotive Works in Varanasi are also protesting moves to corporatise these units.

### Telangana medical contract workers oppose benefit cuts

Medical contract workers demonstrated at Hyderabad's Niloufer Hospital on July 9 over the non-payment of salaries for contract, sanitation, patient care and security workers for the past two months.

The workers said the contractors had to pay the outstanding salaries within two days and have threatened indefinite strike action at 24 hospitals in Hyderabad, if the payments are not made.

### Karnataka primary teachers boycott classes

Primary school teachers boycotted classes and held a protest march in Karnataka state's Dharwad district on July 10. The major demand of the teachers was for increased pay for graduate teachers. There are 36,000 government primary schools in the state. Non-graduate teachers currently receive a starting salary of 25,800 rupees (\$US368) slightly less than graduate teachers who are paid 27,000 rupees.

Teachers also want a long-outstanding demand for the transfer of 95,000 teachers to be implemented and a previous pension scheme reintroduced. The protest was organised by the Karnataka Primary Schools Teachers' Association.

### Aeronautic workers in Karnataka threaten to strike

Protesting Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) workers have threatened indefinite strike action to begin July 17 over an outstanding wage rise. Almost 18,000 workers across nine units in seven Indian states would be involved in the walkout.

The workers, who are covered by the All India HAL Trade Unions (AIHALTU) Coordination Committee, have been holding a national "relay hunger strike" protest since June 25. The workers are demanding

an increase in their wages and no financial discrimination between executives and ordinary workers.

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is an Indian state-owned aerospace and defense company and is managed by the Indian Ministry of Defense.

### Jadavpur University teachers protest in West Bengal

Jadavpur University teachers demonstrated on July 4 to demand the immediate implementation of a 2016 University Grants Commission (UGC) pay scale. The teachers alleged that the West Bengal state government, unlike other states, has refused to implement the pay increases.

The teachers have threatened to step up their action if their demands are not met by July 18. They also want elections held for the university students' council and other statutory bodies. The teachers are members of Jadavpur University Teachers Association (JUTA) and handed out leaflets to parents and students during the protest.

### Karimnagar municipal workers hold sit-down protest

Municipal workers conducted a dharna (sit-down protest) at the Municipal Corporation office in Karimnagar on July 4 in a dispute over the non-payment of wages and the out-sourcing and contracting-out of municipal employees' work.

The workers, many of whom have not been paid for the past six months, want 24,000-rupees (\$342) per month in line with Pay Revision Commission (PRC) recommendations and improved work safety.

### Power Development Department workers begin indefinite strike in Jammu & Kashmir

Hundreds of Power Development Department (PDD) workers began an indefinite state-wide pen-down strike on July 8 in protest against "structural reforms" and other demands. The reforms will involve the corporatisation and separation of core power company tasks, such as generation, transmission and distribution. Protesting PDD workers claim this is a step towards outright privatisation.

Demonstrations were held in Baramulla, Islamabad, Sopore, Jammu, Kathua, Bemina, Ganderbal and other places across the state. The workers want permanent jobs for temporary employees, improved salaries for daily wage workers, high risk allowances, pensions and other demands.

### Tamil Nadu Agricultural Cooperative Bank workers demonstrate in Chennai

Tamil Nadu Agricultural Cooperative Bank workers protested outside

the Joint Registrar of Co-operative Societies office on July 5. The demonstration was organised by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural Cooperative Bank Employees Association.

Workers want the state government to rescind a Government Order that facilitated the forced transfer of secretaries of the Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperative Society.

Workers alleged this move would lead to corruption within the department and have called for a pension for all serving employees and ex-gratia payments to those who have retired.

### **Andhra Pradesh hospital sanitation workers demand improved wages and conditions**

Around 130 contract sanitation workers from Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences staged a sit-down protest to demand full salaries, a provident fund and benefits according to state government guidelines. Workers said they only receive 6,000–7,000 rupees (\$85–\$100) per month.

### **Bangladesh: Begum Rokeya University workers continue the strike**

Workers and employees from Begum Rokeya University in Rangpur (BRUR) remain on strike after walking out on June 23 over the non-payment of almost four years' wages, permanent jobs and other demands.

The workers, who are employees of the 3rd Grade and 4th Grade Employees Coordination Council, have held rallies and sit-down protests, impacting on academic and administrative activities. The BRUR Teachers Association, which supports the strikers, has called on university authorities to respond to the workers' demands.

The protesters were violently attacked by a group of Journalism and Mass Communication Department students, aided by some thugs from outside, and led by an assistant professor on June 25.

### **Bangladesh tea estate workers demand better conditions**

Over 250 Ayeshabagh Tea Garden workers in Moulvibazar's Barlekha sub-district walked out on strike last Sunday and Monday to demand safe drinking water, sanitary toilet facilities, schooling for their children and a festival bonus which has not been paid for years.

A worker's daily wage is just \$1.20 (99 taka) along with a half kilogram ration of rice or flour. The workers and their families, who are housed in shanties scattered all over the hilly garden area, also demanded the right to cultivate rice and vegetables on unused land in the estate, to keep goats or cattle, and plant trees around their dwellings. They have been making these demands since 2014.

### **Pakistan power workers demand safe, permanent jobs**

Hundreds of Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers demonstrated in Lahore on July 3 in protest over the rising number of accidents caused by lack of basic safety.

According to the All Pakistan Wapda Hydroelectric Workers Union, which called the protest, 11 men were killed in electrical accidents and several others were badly injured, including burns, over the past month.

Demonstrators also denounced the authority's ongoing use of temporary workers, despite years of continuous service and severe shortages of staff.

Successive governments use temporary workers to reduce costs.

### **Pakistan IT workers demand pay rise**

Information Technology (IT) workers from government departments protested outside of the Karachi Press Club on July 3 over the government's failure to increase pay scales for their positions.

The workers, who are members of the Information Technology Association Sindh, complained that although the Sindh Finance

Department had approved the pay scale upgrades for IT positions, the chief minister had appointed another committee to review the increased monthly pay and benefits.

Workers denounced the government move as a delaying tactic and said that other Pakistani provinces had recently upgraded the pay scales for IT workers.

### **Striking Zagu Foods Corporation workers assaulted in the Philippines**

Zagu Foods Corporation (ZFC) management organised a group of 50 people from its Metro Manila factory to attack a month long, 15-strong union picket at the plant gate and waiting shed.

The workers have been on strike since June 6 over the management's hiring of workers from several contract labour agencies, in violation of labour laws.

The clash occurred after ZFC obtained an injunction to bar strikers from the plant gate. Police officers assigned to the site did not intervene as the clash took place. The picket has been forced to move.

### **Indonesian food workers protest victimisation**

Food workers are continuing protests to demand the release from police custody of Reni Desmiria, union secretary at the Bumi Menara Internusa (BMI) seafood factory in Lampung.

On July 4 a large delegation of workers from across Indonesia joined the demonstration outside the factory gates including hospitality workers who travelled by bus 240 kilometres. Protesters then marched to provincial government offices.

Desmiria was arrested at her home by armed police carrying automatic weapons on May 17. She is alleged to have falsified a high school certificate when she applied for a job at the factory eight years ago. The company is demanding prosecutors secure the maximum sentence of six years' imprisonment.

The orchestration of Desmiria's arrest was part of a union busting operation at the plant that employs 1,000 workers and is a major supplier to global seafood industry. Desmiria was arrested after she returned from maternity leave and began to enrol workers into the mandatory government health insurance scheme, which the company had denied to casual workers.

BMI has reportedly offered to arrange Desmiria's release if she quits her job and union position. She has refused to do so.

### **Union ends Taiwan flight attendants' strike**

The longest strike in Taiwan's history ended on July 10, following an agreement between the Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union (TFAU) and EVA Air management on July 5.

The 17-day strike saw more than 1,200 flights cancelled and 300,000 passenger journeys disrupted. More than 2,300 cabin crew were involved, demanding better benefits and working conditions, particularly for overtime on roundtrip flights, which can stretch to more than 12 hours.

The company reportedly conceded a bonus for short flights of \$NT300, and a bonus for transoceanic flights of \$NT500. EVA flight attendants also secured the right to take overnight rests from March to June on several routes to Tokyo, and one flight route to Beijing.

Many of the flight attendants' original demands, however, were not met, including overnight rests on other routes, raising the hourly wage on international flights from \$NT90 (\$US2.90) to \$NT150 (\$US4.82), and double time for public holidays. The union agreed to a ban on strikes for the next three years.

### **Australia: DP World stevedores strike at Fremantle**

About 200 DP World Australia (DPWA) stevedores in Fremantle, Western Australia, walked off the job for 48 hours on Thursday as part of

national strike action by Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members in a protracted dispute over cuts to pay and conditions in a proposed new enterprise agreement. Strike action, involving 1,800 workers, began on Monday with 48-hour industrial action at DPWA's terminals in Brisbane, Sydney, and a four-day walkout in Melbourne.

DPWA wants a major overhaul of work practices to slash labour costs and boost shareholder profits. Management is demanding that the MUA abandon its entire log of claims. The company has rejected calls for a limit on the use of casual labour at its ports and wants to abolish a union-operated income protection arrangement, established in 2014. It has offered to maintain the fund in a new deal if the 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.

DPWA is seeking to emulate its competitors, which, with the crucial assistance of the unions, have automated large parts of their operations over the past two decades, and drastically reduced the size of their workforce. Some of its rivals, such as the Victoria International Container Terminal, are highly automated, conducting their operations with a skeleton workforce. Others, such as Hutchison Ports, have a workforce of just several hundred across the country.

### **Auckland retail workers take partial strike action**

Auckland retail staff working for fashion retailer H&M are refusing to serve customers and hang or fold disregarded clothes as part of ongoing partial strikes. About 95 H&M staff in the international retail chain's three Auckland stores—Commercial Bay, Sylvia Park and Botany—have taken three-day partial strike action following the retailer's refusal to pay a so-called "Living Wage" of \$21.15.

H&M sales staff, who are members of the First Union, currently earn \$18.70 an hour, just above the minimum wage of \$17.70. The Living Wage campaign, promoted by the trade unions, misleadingly claims that a rate of \$21.15 per hour is the minimum for workers to stay out of poverty. In fact, it does nothing to combat the deepening big business austerity offensive against the working class.

H&M stores in Auckland are reportedly in dire conditions as workers refuse to hang, fold and return clothes to the sales floor from fitting rooms and other basic tasks such as doing up the zips and buttons of garments.

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