

Indian doctors hold national 24-hour walkout; Chinese auto workers strike; Australian railway workers vote for industrial action

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 August 2019

### India: Doctors hold national 24-hour strike

Tens of thousands of doctors, medical students and Indian Medical Association members held a 24-hour national strike on July 31 in protest against the Modi government's National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill which was passed in parliament on July 29.

The NMC Bill provides for the licensing of 350,000 unqualified non-medical practitioners. This means people without any medical background can become eligible to practice modern medicine and issue independent prescriptions.

Striking doctors said the law "legalises quackery" and should never be accepted by India's medical fraternity. The Indian Medical Association has called for more demonstrations and urged medical students to boycott classes.

### Tamil Nadu government doctors demonstrate for pay rise

Government doctors across Tamil Nadu began a series of protests on July 29 to demand a pay rise. Doctors have threatened to boycott review meetings or maternal death audit meetings convened by the health department, starting on July 29.

From August 9 to 19 they will ban all work related to the chief minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme. This will be followed by marches and hunger strike protests and on August 27 they will hold a one-day state-wide strike, with only emergency services provided.

### Tamil Nadu village nurses demonstrate for outstanding government funds

Over 100 members of the Tamil Nadu Village Health Nurses' Association demonstrated on July 29 to demand the state government immediately disperse outstanding funds to the vital health service. The protest was held outside the Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services in Chennai, the state capital.

Nurses told the media that malfunctioning computer software was creating major operational and health service delivery problems. These problems, the nurses said, were ignored by management, which instead victimised nurses, imposing suspensions and forced transfers. Protestors also called on the government to fill vacant positions to reduce the workloads of current nurses.

### India: Bhagwati electronics workers fight sackings

Workers from Bhagwati Private, an electronics consumer company in India's Uttarakhand state, are maintaining protests and rallies against the sacking of over 300 workers.

Protestors claim that the company colluded with the

Hindu-fundamentalist Uttarakhand state government to illegally terminate over 300 employees who had been working with the company for five years. The seven-month campaign has been organised by the Bhagwati Workers' Union.

### Chandigarh campus contract workers hold hunger protests

Contract workers at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education & Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh, the state capital of the north Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, have been holding protest hunger strikes throughout July.

The female workers are demanding equal pay for equal work and said that administration had delayed these payments for the past nine years. They also have called for permanent employment and for management to settle Employee Provident Fund anomalies for contract sanitation workers.

### Mass protests in Andhra Pradesh against railway privatisation

A mass sit-down protest or dharna was staged at Visakhapatnam railway station on July 29 over increased fares and freight rates and the Indian government's plans to privatise large sections of the national railway service.

Organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, demonstrators said higher passenger fares and freight placed increased burdens on ordinary passengers while benefitting private investors. Indian Railways, which is the fourth largest rail transport organisation in the world, provides cheap travel services for millions of ordinary Indians.

### Day care workers and helpers march in Jammu & Kashmir state

Anganwadi (day care centre) workers and helpers marched in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir state's largest city, on July 29. The anganwadi workers, who operate under the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme, are demanding revocation of a new honorarium scheme.

Early last month the J&K state government decentralised the distribution of honorarium payments to nearly 60,000 anganwadi workers and helpers through local government bodies and councilors.

The workers oppose the measure and are demanding the honorarium payments be deposited into their bank accounts under the previous system. Demonstrations and rallies have been held in various parts of the state over the past fortnight.

### Punjab forestry workers protest for outstanding salaries

Union Range forestry workers held a sit-down demonstration and hunger protest in Samrala on July 27 for payment of three months' outstanding pay. They have threatened to step up their protests, including

blocking roads, if their salaries are not released. The forestry workers are also demanding they be given national and week holidays.

#### **Non-academic workers at Sri Lankan universities hold one-day strike**

Over 15,000 non-academic workers in Sri Lankan universities walked out on strike on July 30. They were demanding an end to salary anomalies, for increased loan limits, properly updated pension schemes and increased recruitment.

The workers, who held a 45-day strike last year, have warned the government that they are prepared to take similar action if the government doesn't respond to their demands.

#### **Pakistan: Sindh medical college staff resign**

Eighty-five workers, including doctors, assistant professors, lecturers and non-teaching staff, quit the government-run Khairpur Medical College this week. They resigned because management failed to make their jobs permanent, provide necessary facilities and have called for the institute to be recognised by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC). They have been protesting over these demands for the past year.

The PMDC will not accredit the institute because it does not have CT scanners, MRI machines and basic training machinery. This means that students who graduate are not recognised by other Pakistan medical institutes. Educational institutes are major targets of successive Pakistani government's austerity measures.

#### **Bangladesh university employees demand permanency and unpaid salaries**

Begum Rokeya University workers in Rangpur have been on strike since June 23 to demand the immediate payment of 44 months' salaries for almost 60 employees. The strikers also want gradation-promotion rules and permanent jobs and promotions for all ad hoc employees.

Their organisation, the Class III and Class IV Employees Coordination Council, threatened to lay siege to the vice chancellor's office if their demands were not met within three days. The council said that the university administration has several times breached promises that it would grant these demands.

#### **Bangladesh garment workers demonstrate over murdered worker**

Garment workers in Malibagh, Dhaka, erected barricades on the Malibagh-Kuril Road on July 25, demanding justice for Delwar Hossain, a worker from Easy Garment who was murdered. The police fired tear gas canisters and shots at the demonstrators.

Delwar Hossain was seriously injured and killed whilst in detention by factory authorities who claimed he had stolen t-shirts. He was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital but declared dead on arrival by doctors. Three factory administration officials have been arrested.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police told the media that Delwar Hossain had been tortured before he died.

#### **Chinese auto workers strike**

Chinese autoworkers have launched a series of stoppages and protests over the past weeks. On July 23, workers took action to demand payment of outstanding wages from a Cadillac dealership in Taizhou, Zhejiang, which suddenly closed down without warning.

The following day, workers at Eastone Automotive in Pudong District, Shanghai protested over around 40 million yuan in unpaid wages. The company was closing and workers appealed to the local government for help.

On July 25, Hubei Meiyang Automobile Industry employees demonstrated over "illegal dismissals, wage arrears and compensation payments." The company, based in Xiangyang, was also winding down its operations.

Car sales in China have dropped 14 percent in the first half of this year compared to the same period last year, the *Financial Times* reported. According to official statistics, 220,000 jobs, or 5 percent of the automotive sector have been lost since July last year.

#### **Cambodian garment workers strike**

Two hundred garment workers have been on strike for the past week at the Xin Jia Fashion factory in the Por Sen Chey district of Phnom Penh over management abuses.

The workers have been on strike since July 26 and have been picketing outside the factory. Negotiations aimed at ending the stoppage, between Labour Ministry officials, the company representatives and union leaders, broke down on Wednesday.

The workers have accused the company of violating 12 provisions in the country's labour laws. They say they have been forced to carry out unpaid overtime and have complained about the treatment of pregnant women and abusive language from management.

The employees are paid 1,000 riels (\$US0.25) per hour. They are demanding a 500 riel increase.

#### **Melbourne railway workers vote for strike**

Over 2,000 train drivers, guards, station hands and support staff on Melbourne's commuter rail network are set to take industrial action this month in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement.

Some 99 percent of 1,600 workers who took part in an industrial ballot approved strike action ranging from 4 hours to 48 hours, along with the imposition of various work bans.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and Melbourne's rail operator Metro have been in negotiations for a new four-year agreement for five months. The RTBU is demanding a 6 percent pay rise. The union has pointed to increasing pressure on the public transport network and an associated strain on workers. Metro wants to cap annual pay increases at 2 percent, well below increases in the cost of living.

Workers have also expressed opposition to Metro's moves to eliminate overtime pay for part-time workers and to abolish increased wage rates for drivers working on their entitled day off.

#### **New South Wales public hospital staff walk out over safety**

Thousands of workers from 50 public hospitals walked off the job across New South Wales for 4 hours on Thursday to demand increased safety and better security in their workplace. Paramedics remained on the job but refused to charge patients during the stoppage.

Strikers demonstrated outside their hospital while a delegation marched to the health minister's office in Sydney.

There are about 40 assaults against staff in the hospital system in NSW a month, causing concern for the 22,000 ancillary staff, including paramedics, catering, administration and security staff.

The Health Services Union is demanding an additional 250 security staff be employed in Sydney alone, with an additional \$50 million spent on security. The government only agreed to "trial" extra security staff at Gosford and Wyong hospitals, north of Sydney.

#### **New Zealand psychologists impose overtime ban**

More than 600 psychologists across 17 district health boards (DHBs) imposed a ban on working overtime for five weeks which began on July 31. In addition to pay, the nationwide action is in protest over long hours, not enough staff and burgeoning patient waitlists.

The Association of Professional and Executive Employees (APEX) says there are significant staff shortages around the country. The international benchmark is that health services have 20 full-time psychologists per 100,000 people. In New Zealand DHBs currently employ an average of 11.8.

The Capital & Coast DHB in Wellington has more than 40 psychology vacancies which means that existing staff are taking on increasingly complex cases with many psychologists struggling to complete their daily workload.

Industrial action was voted on by APEX members in early July after DHBs failed to present an offer in bargaining. However, the union has deliberately opted for “fairly limited” strike action in banning overtime hours rather than a full strike. An APEX spokesman said: “We work with a vulnerable group of people so any disruption is bad.”

### **Retail workers protest at Auckland mall for “living wage”**

About 800 retail workers took part in a demonstration last Wednesday inside an Auckland mall to demand a “living wage.” The protest followed a First Union meeting at a nearby park. Union members who work for retailers such as Farmers, The Warehouse and Countdown, then marched to St Luke’s Mall and protested outside the main supermarket.

Retail staff are commonly paid at or just above the minimum wage of \$17.70 an hour. Many do not get enough hours of work to live on. Workers at Farmers and H&M stores have recently taken industrial action as part of the ‘Living Wage’ campaign, which is funded and promoted by a coalition of trade unions and religious and community groups.

The campaign falsely claims that a wage of \$21.15 per hour is the minimum necessary to provide the “basic necessities of life” and for workers to “live in dignity.” In fact, this is vastly inadequate. The annually adjusted figure has been created, not through any independent demands of the working class, but by the NZ Family Centre, a registered charity.

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