

Bangladesh municipal workers still on strike; Indian telecommunication workers demand salaries; New Zealand vehicle testing workers strike

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 August 2019

### India: Contract workers in Telangana demand permanent jobs

Hundreds of contract and outsourced workers held a sit-down protest outside the Karimnagar Collectorate office in Telangana state on August 5 to demand permanent jobs for those employed in state government departments. Some contract employees have worked in the same jobs for 20 years.

Protestors said they do not receive the same pay as permanent employees even though they have the same workload. They are demanding equal pay and the same basic entitlements as permanent workers, including health cards and insurance.

The unions estimate that there are 300,000 outsourced and contract employees working for various state government departments.

### Indian telecommunication workers demand payment of delayed salaries

Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) workers protested on August 5 outside the department of telecommunications in New Delhi. The workers chanted slogans against the company and the government and demanded a meeting with the communications minister. MTNL workers have not received any salaries for the past two months.

MTNL is a state-owned telecommunications service provider in the cities of Mumbai and New Delhi and in the island-nation of Mauritius. It employs about 22,000 workers and has the monopoly in telecommunication services in those locations.

### Workers oppose closure of Tamil Nadu sugar factory

Outsourced workers from the Lakshmiapuram sugar factory in Tamil Nadu demonstrated outside the plant on August 3. They were demanding the company, which is owned by Krishna Commercial Products Group, withdraw plans to relocate sugarcane crushing to Vuyyuru in Andhra Pradesh and sack at least 150 contract employees.

Demonstrators said closure of the Tamil Nadu plant would drastically impact on thousands of small farmers in the region.

### India: Contract housekeepers at MNIT in Jaipur protest sackings

Around 120 housekeeping and sanitation workers at the Malviya National Institute of Technology (MNIT) in Jaipur held an off-campus protest late last month over the sudden termination of their contracts.

Workers were blocked from starting work by security guards on July 26, who told them that the MNIT administration had appointed a new contractor. The housekeeping workers told the media that they had been involved with the institute for eight years.

MNIT management had not followed proper procedures or warned the workers in advance. Protestors also said that the new contracting company was blacklisted by several other institutes because it did not pay the central government's minimum wage rates.

### Motherson auto component workers protest in Tamil Nadu for union rights

Permanent workers for the Motherson auto parts company held a sit down protest on July 31 and August 1 against coercive management tactics to stop workers unionising. The permanent workers formed a union with the aim of negotiating improved wages and conditions.

When workers joined the Chengai Anna Thozhilalar Sangam union, management responded by demanding all workers sign an anti-union bond.

Motherson is one of the largest auto components makers in India with a total of 11 factories. These are located in Haryana, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and in Tamil Nadu, where it has three plants in the Chennai area.

Workers with eight years' service are only paid 9,000–10,000 rupees (\$128–\$142) per month and do not receive proper benefits. There are no proper transportation and canteen facilities at the Chennai plants. Night shift workers are not provided with proper meals but only receive snacks.

The protests ended and work resumed after two days when management withdrew its anti-union employment bond. There are no reports about whether workers' demands for better conditions have been granted.

### Punjab Roadways/Punbus contract workers demonstrate

Punjab Roadways/Punbus Contract Workers' Union members protested and stopped work for an hour on August 2 to demand permanent jobs. Workers denounced management, which they said was working hand in glove with the state government to block permanency for contract staff.

Union members said that the Punjab Roadways fleet of over 2,400 buses had been reduced to just 300 and that workers were being treated like slaves. The contract workers want equal pay for equal work and higher salaries.

### Punjab State Ministerial Service workers demand pay rise

Punjab State Ministerial Service employees protested on August 2 to demand wage increases in line with the latest pay commission recommendations. The demonstration was organised by the Punjab State Ministerial Service Union (PSMSU). Other demands included permanent jobs for all those hired after 2004 and implementation of a pension

scheme.

### **Medical university hospital workers strike indefinitely in Uttar Pradesh**

King George Medical University (KGMU) workers began an indefinite strike on August 6 to demand payment of outstanding 2017 allowances. Workers alleged that they have not been paid allowances recommended by the seventh pay commission. So far the strike has had limited impact because operating theatres, trauma centres and emergency services employees are still working.

### **Municipal workers across Bangladesh remain on strike**

Workers from 327 municipalities across Bangladesh are still on strike after walking out on July 14. They are demanding years of unpaid salaries and retirement benefits and want municipal services nationalised.

According to their union, the Bangladesh Association of Paurashava Services, more than 35,000 employees of 260 municipalities have not received wages for seven years.

Two years of negotiations with the local government, rural development and cooperatives ministry have resolved none of the issues in dispute. Over 15,000 workers held a one-day national strike on July 2 over the same issue.

### **Queensland: Aurizon rail workers reject proposed work agreement**

Over 90 percent of train drivers and maintenance workers from the bulk haulage section of Aurizon voted down the company's proposed enterprise agreement last week. Aurizon attempted to push through its proposed enterprise agreement by putting it directly to its workers.

Negotiations with the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees, the Rail Tram and Bus Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union for new agreements covering over 1,000 Aurizon employees have been dragging on since September. Industrial action began in December but has been limited to short stoppages and work bans at different times over Aurizon's vast rail systems. Workers have not had a pay increase for 18 months.

The unions accuse Aurizon of serious attacks on conditions, including the removal of clauses relating to shift lengths, definition of two-man train crews, locality allowance and forcing employees to use 160 hours of annual leave for planned shutdowns. Aurizon also wants to deny some allowances for new recruits. Negotiations between Aurizon-Bulk and the unions' joint negotiating team resumed this week.

### **Victorian tram drivers approve industrial action**

This week Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members, who drive and maintain trams in Melbourne, overwhelmingly voted for industrial action in their dispute with Yarra Trams for a new enterprise agreement. Action could involve up to 24-hour stoppages and a range of other bans on wearing uniforms, making announcements and doing overtime.

The RTBU has been bargaining since March with the company but claims that the operator, owned by international company Keolis Downer, has rejected the bulk of the union's 107 claims. A union spokesman said Yarra Trams was trying to remove a minimum requirement that part-time workers do seven hours a day. He said the company wants to bring in more external part-time workers to work fewer hours, and to raise a 4 percent cap on part-time work to 22 percent across the company.

In May, Yarra Trams put out a proposed agreement for a 3 percent annual wage increase over four years, which was rejected by a large number of workers. The proposed enterprise agreement covers more than 1,500 Yarra Trams drivers, authorised officers and customer service staff.

### **Queensland timber mill workers strike**

Thirty-six workers at Hyne Timber's Tuan Forest mill in Maryborough

Queensland walked off the job for 24 hours on August 1 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Members of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union decided unanimously to strike after the company refused to back down from a proposal to introduce a two-tiered workforce.

Under the proposed agreement, existing workers would retain their benefits but lunch breaks and overtime entitlements would be cut for new employees. Negotiations with the company resumed on August 5.

### **Asbestos removal workers in New South Wales on strike**

Fourteen workers from the Sydney-based asbestos and toxic materials management company GBAR walked off the job indefinitely on July 29 in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. They are protesting outside one of their worksites at BlueScope in Port Kembla.

GBAR's workforce includes casual and permanent workers covered under an industry award agreement. Workers complained that they are on individual contracts and that hourly wage rates vary between workers and industry award entitlements are not paid. They are not paid annual holiday leave loading or a paid travel allowance.

The company sent workers a threatening message after they expressed opposition to the agreement.

### **New Zealand vehicle testing workers strike**

Vehicle Testing NZ (VTNZ) workers who conduct driving tests and vehicle inspections took strike action for 24 hours on August 5, to protest their poor pay. A picket was set up at the Sylvia Park VTNZ site in Auckland.

Mediation has failed to resolve the dispute. A spokesman for the E T union said VTNZ driver testing members are qualified professionals who do a dangerous job, but that this is not reflected in their wages. The pay is between \$21.00 and \$22.50 an hour.

VTNZ was previously a state-owned enterprise but since 2014 has been run by German company Dekra, which workers say has consistently resisted improving their pay scales. Driving examiners can be placed in hazardous and dangerous situations by poorly prepared drivers. VTNZ mechanics are qualified tradesmen whose pay rates are well below the industry standard.

### **IDEA Services employees hold stop-work meetings**

Three thousand care and support workers employed by IDEA services began a series of nationwide stop work meetings on August 6 to discuss a long-running pay dispute. The workers are seeking extra pay for senior support workers, weekend penalty rates and the protection of key health and safety rights. They are also resisting IDEA Services' demands for more flexibility over their rosters.

The dispute, which has been running for over nine months, has seen six strikes including one for 24-hours in June. The E Tu union entered three days of formal hearings at the Employment Relations Authority last month. It is now awaiting a formal recommendation of the Authority. Further strike action has not been ruled out. According to the union, no progress has been made over its claim for weekend rates and the employer is still pushing for more "flexibility."

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