

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

1 October 2021

India: Social health workers hold nationwide strike

About 10 million low-paid social healthcare workers stopped work for the day on September 24 as part of a long-running struggle for permanent jobs, better pay and life insurance cover. Strikers included Anganwadi (day care workers), midday meal workers and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers. Workers also demanded risk allowance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Major states involved were Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. Around nine trade unions were involved in the strike.

Punjab Roadways workers strike again demanding permanent jobs

Punjab Roadways contract workers blocked the Bathinda city bus stand during a two-hour demonstration on September 24. They were demanding the government honour an agreement reached with their union earlier this month.

The Punjab Roadways Punbus and PRTC Contract Workers' Union, representing around 8,000 contract and outsourced workers from the state-owned Punjab Roadways and Pepsu Road Transport Corporation (PRTC), called off a nine-day strike on September 14 after talks with the government. The workers were demanding permanent jobs, equal pay for equal work and that the bus fleet be increased from 2,500 to at least 10,000. At least 75 percent of the state-owned bus fleet was off the road.

The union claimed it had reached a deal with the government on all workers' demands but nothing was concrete. A union leader told workers that the government assured them that salaries would increase by 30 percent and then 5 percent every year. He said the government had "given its word" that the bus fleet would soon be increased by 900 buses.

But the government stalled on the issue of permanent jobs saying it needed a week to decide. The union had given the government two weeks to implement the agreement, which it has not done.

Maharashtra state bank employees protest

Bank of Maharashtra workers walked out and protested at the bank's head office in Pune on September 22 over several demands. This included recruitment to fill vacancies, withdrawal of the bank's

administrative transfer policy and provision of security at branches and ATMs. Workers claimed that the bank is not recruiting staff to fill vacant positions caused by death, resignation, retirement and promotions.

The strike involved members of the All India Bank of Maharashtra Employees Federation, Bank of Maharashtra Karmachari Mahasangh, Bank of Maharashtra Karmachari Sena and Mahabank Navnirman Sena.

Tamil Nadu short-term contract nurses demand permanent jobs

Nurses recruited for COVID-19 work protested inside the Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services (DMS) complex in Chennai on September 28 demanding permanent jobs. Around 3,000 nurses who passed the Medical Services Recruitment Board (MRB) exams were recruited in April and May last year on a temporary basis with their contracts extended every six months.

The Medical Services Recruitment Board (MRB) was constituted by the state government with the objective of making appointments to various categories of staff in the Health and Family Welfare Department by way of direct recruitment. Nurses now fear that their jobs could be at risk because they are being moved from the control of DMS to respective Deputy Directors of Health Services and Collectors in the state.

Pakistan power utility workers protest against privatisation

Workers from the Water & Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and its regional distribution companies demonstrated in Punjab provinces on September 20 in their long struggle against the Imran Khan government's plan to privatise the public utility.

Workers also condemned the severe understaffing that has led to dangerously unsafe working conditions, stagnant salaries in the face of the skyrocketing cost of living and the continued failure to pay allowances to many workers. They demanded permanent jobs for all contract and temporary workers and condemned the arbitrary transition of large numbers of workers.

The protests were called by the All Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union as part of a "day of demands," a manoeuvre by the union in the face of growing discontent among the workers. The union called off a strike and demonstration in Islamabad in September after the government gave a false commitment to comply with workers' demands.

The union has prevented nearly 200,000 permanent and many more thousands of casual workers taking a decisive struggle against the government, a struggle that would be immediately appealing to other government sector workers facing similar threats of job and income loss under the government's privatisation agenda, drafted in consultation with the International Monetary Fund.

Bangladeshi rideshare bikers hold national one-day strike

Super-exploited app-based rideshare bikers in Bangladesh staged a national strike on Tuesday and demonstrated outside the national Press Club in Dhaka pushing six demands, including against police harassment. In a protest against police harassment on Monday one rider set his bike on fire to show his anger and frustration at the "intolerable" treatment by police.

Demands were for lowering the commission extracted by ridesharing companies to 10 percent of the fare instead of the current 25 percent, exemption of advance income taxes on ridesharing vehicles and ensuring rideshare parking spaces.

Around 20,000 riders are organised by several groups under the App-Based Drivers Union of Bangladesh, a platform for the Dhaka Ridesharing Drivers Union, Sammilito Riders of Chattogram and Kothay Jaben Ridesharing Group.

Taiwan telecommunication workers protest for pay rise

Chunghwa Telecom workers demonstrated outside the company's headquarters in Taipei on Tuesday over long-pending labour grievances, the company's planned restructure and an 8 percent pay increase. A spokesperson for the Chunghwa Telecom Workers' Union complained that their pay rise proposal was not even on the agenda of the company's extraordinary board meeting the previous day.

The union also demanded that any restructuring and transformation plan be fully discussed before it is implemented. Chunghwa Telecom has a workforce of about 22,000 people. The union told the media it has not yet set a timetable for a strike.

Taiwanese fishermen demand labour rights

On Thursday, labour organisations and workers protested outside the Executive Yuan building in Taipei against the horrendous working conditions facing migrant fishermen, widely defined as forced labour.

Migrant fishermen working in coastal fishing filed 1,521 complaints to the Ministry of Labor between 2017 and 2019, which have not been properly addressed, according to the Control Yuan.

Campaign representatives delivered a petition signed by 70 fishermen to the National Cabinet, which includes demands to improve fishermen's living and working conditions, implement sound wage and brokerage systems, eliminate "debt bondage" practices, and more.

Port workers at Patrick Stevedores strike

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) workers at Patrick Stevedores terminals in Sydney (Port Botany), Melbourne, Brisbane and Fremantle are taking protected strike action following 18 months of failed negotiations to reach a deal on the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

Workers planned to strike for 48 hours at Port Botany this weekend, and for 12 hours every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Melbourne for the month of October. MUA members at Patrick's Fremantle terminal downed tools for 48 hours last weekend while Melbourne members stopped work for 24 hours at the same time.

Patrick's 900 stevedores voted in August 2020 to take protected industrial action after rejecting the company's proposed EA which the union claimed scrapped 50 pages of conditions. Workers imposed overtime bans and a series of rolling stoppages beginning in September 2020, but the union called off all industrial action at Patrick's Port Botany terminal later in the month ahead of potential stop orders from the Fair Work Commission due to an alleged threat to the economy.

Patrick has offered annual pay increases of 2.5 percent in a four-year agreement, but an MUA spokesman said that Patrick's claim that it wanted to roll over the previous agreement was false and that the stevedore was insisting on changes that will increase the number of casuals at Port Botany, threatening job security.

MUA members at Melbourne and Brisbane terminals have already accepted an in-principle agreement but are striking to support of their colleagues in Sydney and Fremantle.

Truck drivers at FedEx strike for secure jobs

About 3,000 drivers and other workers from logistics company FedEx walked off the job for 24 hours across Australia from midnight on Wednesday evening over job security, after last-minute talks over the company's proposed enterprise agreement reached deadlock.

The Transport Workers Union said workers want the company to commit to job security provisions like caps on the use of outside contracts, commitments to allocate work to existing employees before contracting, and same job, same pay conditions for labour hire as full-time employees.

The strike followed a 24-hour walkout by around 2,000 drivers from Australia Post-owned StarTrack on September 23, and a 24-hour stoppage by 4,000 workers at Toll and its subsidiaries on August 27 with the same demands as FedEx drivers.



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