

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

1 February 2020

India: Mumbai municipal workers oppose privatisation

Hundreds of workers from Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST), a public utility company administered by the Brihanmumbai (Mumbai) Municipal Corporation (BMC), demonstrated in Dadar, Mumbai on Monday. They were opposing the BMC's plan to move towards privatisation of BEST, which runs buses with a daily patronage of three million, and supplies electricity to Mumbai homes.

The demonstration was organised by a joint union action committee (BEST Sanyukta Kamgar Kruti Samiti) and with Amchi Mumbai Amchi BEST citizens group. Protest organisers want management to review its decision to cut jobs, hire private buses and conductor-less vehicles.

Management has begun advertising for 400 contract conductors on a contract basis to fill vacant permanent positions. Workers fear that their jobs are under threat.

Assam postal workers demand civil service status

About 60 Gramin Dak Sevaks (GDS) or part-time employees occupied the Guwahati city post office and held a hunger strike on January 22 over a range of demands. The protest was organised by the Assam branch of the All India Gramin Dak Sevaks Union (AIGDSU).

Workers want all GDS employees to be given civil servant status, wages and length of service promotions as recommended by the Kamlesh Chandra Committee (KCC), increased group insurance, medical facilities, and payment of termination benefits on the day workers retire.

The KCC pay review report increased the minimum working day from three to four hours for Grade 1 workers and five for Grade 2, and recommended a 3 percent pay increase.

The protest followed a strike on December 19 over the same demands. A union representative said a demonstration would be held in New Delhi on February 20, followed by an indefinite walkout if workers' demands are not resolved.

Auto parts workers in Karnataka demand union rights

Assembly line workers at Exedy Clutch India in the Narasapura

Industrial Area, Kolar, demonstrated at the factory security gate on January 25 for full recognition of their union and collective bargaining rights. Workers accused management of repeatedly victimising young workers for demanding their legitimate rights. More than 50 percent of the company's employees are contract workers.

The same workers held a protest march in November after all union office bearers, apart from the president, were suspended. Management is refusing to negotiate on the union's charter of demands. Workers allege that increases due on April 1 have not been paid and that management has illegally reduced workers' wages.

Karnataka transport workers stage a hunger strike

Hundreds of Karnataka state-government transport corporation workers held a hunger strike at Freedom Park in Thrissur on January 27. They want to be classified as government employees and on the same salary scales as other government workers. They called on the state government to legislate their demands in the Karnataka state assembly's upcoming budget session.

A representative of the Karnataka State Road Transport Employees' League, representing drivers, conductors and mechanics, said workers would "start ticket-less travel" if their demands are not granted. Workers are currently paid 30-40 percent less than other government corporation employees.

Punjab public works department employees protest

Public Works Department (PWD) workers in Bathinda city on January 27 protested to demand payment of outstanding salaries, employee state insurance and employee provident fund arrears. Protesters chanted slogans against sewage board senior officials. Punjab Field and Workshop Workers' Union representatives allege that December salaries have not been paid and that their longstanding demand to be given permanent jobs has been ignored.

Pakistan: Islamabad retired medical workers demand unpaid pension

More than 250 retired Pakistan Medical Research Council workers demonstrated outside the Islamabad National Press Club on Tuesday to demand the government immediately pay all their pension entitlements. The affected workers have not received the pension for the past 12 months. They have petitioned the Islamabad High Court seeking a resolution to the issue.

Pakistani media workers demand unpaid salaries

Media workers from Islamabad and Rawalpindi protested outside the Ministry of Information on January 23 over salary payment delays. Some media workers alleged that they have not received a salary for several months.

The protest was sparked after Capital TV, a private network, refused to distribute 10 months' unpaid salary to a deceased cameraman's family.

Hong Kong nurses call in sick over government's response to coronavirus

Over 90 nurses at three Hong Kong hospitals took sick leave on Wednesday, ahead of a potential strike planned by a health care workers' union over the government's refusal to close the borders with the mainland to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Of those that called in sick, 26 work at Pok Oi Hospital in Yuen Long, while 41 were based at the intensive care unit or operation theatres at the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital in Chai Wan. Another 23 took sick leave at Princess Margaret Hospital in Kwai Chung. On Tuesday, 15 nurses at Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital, and five nurses at Princess Margaret Hospital also called in sick.

The government has so far only closed six of the existing 15 border checkpoints. The 15,000-strong Hospital Authority Employees Alliance said it would convene a general meeting on Saturday to discuss strike action, which could begin as early as next week, if the government did not close all of the city's borders.

South Australian roadside assist workers strike

Roadside breakdown assist workers from the Royal Automobile Association (RAA)-South Australia walked off the job for four hours on Tuesday and protested in Adelaide over pay and conditions. The strike was sparked when RAA management broke off negotiations after members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) rejected a proposed enterprise agreement which included cuts to conditions and allowances.

Electrical services workers in Queensland walk out

Some 35 members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) from Energy Queensland contractor Smart Metering Services (SMS) stopped work four hours and picketed the company's office in Yatala, south of Brisbane, after overwhelmingly rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

According to the ETU, the "non-union" proposed agreement attacked working conditions and entitlements within the electrical supply industry. Fifty-one of the 64 union members of SMS union voted for strike action in a ballot on January 16.

Pipe manufacturing workers in New South Wales strike

Around 50 workers from Rocla, a concrete pipe manufacturing plant at Emu Plains, west of Sydney, resumed protected industrial action on Thursday as part of ongoing industrial action for a new enterprise agreement. Australian Workers Union (AWU) members walked off the job twice in November.

The AWU has been negotiating a pay rise with Rocla since May. The union has called for 3 percent annual pay increase. Rocla's latest offer was just 2 percent, up from its original offer of 1.5 percent.

New Zealand: Woburn Masonic Village aged-care workers demand improved conditions

The year-long dispute for better penalty rates, set-shift working hours, long-service leave and improved conditions by Woburn Masonic Village aged-care workers in Lower Hutt has entered compulsory bargaining talks. The workers, who are currently on call at all times of day and night, held three limited strikes in December.

The ETU union, which represents the workers, announced this week that the Employment Relations Act has imposed facilitated bargaining on Masonic Village Limited. While the union is casting the compulsory bargaining as a significant win, it will negotiate an agreement that waters down workers' demands and imposes the cost-cutting requirements of the company.



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