

India: 10,000 Karnataka midday-meal workers strike indefinitely;
Tahiti workers strike against Macron's pensions "reforms"

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Asia

India: Patna municipal contract workers strike

Thousands of daily wage sanitation workers from the Patna Municipal Corporation in Bihar state, have been on strike since Monday over 21 demands and to demand permanent jobs. Some 5,000 workers are demonstrating outside the municipal offices.

The strike was sparked by the government's decision to outsource workers' jobs. Workers complained that many of them had been daily-wage contract employees for over 10 years hoping to be made permanent. Garbage is piling up on the streets while door-to-door collection of garbage has ceased. Workers said they will move their protest to Delhi if the corporation continues to ignore them.

Karnataka midday-meal workers on indefinite strike

As part of an ongoing campaign, thousands of midday-meal workers in India's southern state of Karnataka walked out on indefinite strike on Monday demanding a minimum monthly wage and benefits. Some 10,000 workers, mostly women, came from throughout the state to demonstrate at Freedom Park in Bangalore while thousands of others protested in various bus stands and railway stations.

The indefinite strike, called by the Midday Meal Workers' Association with a charter of 12 demands, follows a two-day strike on January 21. The Karnataka workers only earn 2,600 rupees a month. Strikers also called for an end to the recruitment of workers from private agencies, midday-meal workers to be covered by official labour laws, their salaries paid on the fifth day of every month and that they receive the same Employee State Insurance, Provident Fund and pension benefits paid to permanent employees.

Around three million midday-meal workers feed 120 million children across India. Almost all of them are women who receive a meagre payment of 1,000 rupees (\$US14) a month. The All India Coordination Committee of Midday Meal Workers, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), is coordinating a national campaign.

Indian government life insurance workers protest privatisation

Members of three different unions representing 90 percent of workers at the government-owned Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) stopped work for one hour across India and held lunchtime protests on Monday to oppose the Modi government's plans to sell off part of the corporation. The LIC has 2,048 branches, 114 divisional offices and eight zonal offices across India.

Workers said there is no reason for the government to disinvest its stake. The LIC is currently one of the most profitable government organisations, which according to workers is known for its high standards in terms of claim settlement and policy servicing. It was founded in 1956 with a government investment of 50 million rupees (\$US 0.7 million).

The national strike was called by a joint forum of the Federation of LIC Class-I Officers' Associations, the National Federation of Insurance Field Workers of India and the All India Insurance Employees Association (AIIEA).

Pondicherry farm produce distribution workers on strike

Over 160 Pondicherry Marketing Committee workers, who facilitate sale of agricultural produce at farmers' markets (Uzhavar Santhai) throughout the state began an indefinite strike on Monday to demand 14 months' unpaid salaries.

Workers locked the market gates near the Old Bus Stand, Ariankuppam and selling centres for rice and other grains at Thattanchavady, Kunichanpet, Madagadipet, Maducarai and Kariampathoor. Protesting against the workers' decision to close the gates, farmers dumped their produce on the road near the markets.

Pakistan: Retired steel workers demand payment of overdue pensions

Hundreds of retired workers from the state-owned Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) in Karachi held a demonstration on January 31 to demand payment of pensions pending since 2013. Over 6,000 retired workers are affected.

PSM and six other state-owned enterprises are earmarked by the government for privatisation by the end of the year. As part of an

undertaking demanded by the International Monetary Fund for billions of dollars in loans the Khan government plans to privatise 33 state-owned enterprises.

Sri Lanka: Sacked government workers demand reappointment

Riot police were deployed to the presidential secretariat in Colombo on Thursday to break up a seven-day protest by a group of sacked government employees who were demanding reinstatement. The Rajapakse government claimed that these workers, from various government departments, including the central cultural fund, archaeology department and petroleum cooperation, among others, had been given politically biased appointments by the previous government.

Former workers from the archaeology department ended their protest on the second day after the department head offered to extend their employment for one month.

Hong Kong medical workers protest government inaction on coronavirus

Around 2,500 medical workers began a five-day strike Monday in opposition to the government's handling of the coronavirus. The Hospital Authority Employees Alliance, the union which was only recently created, said the industrial action would swell in size with each consecutive day if the borders were not fully closed.

Workers are struggling to deal with the coronavirus citing a lack of resources, including lack of diagnostic tests, personal protective equipment, manpower and hospital beds. Nurses and doctors in the protest chanted, "The Hong Kong government is useless. Only we can save Hong Kong."

On Tuesday, medical workers presented a petition demanding the government close the border and provide sufficient protective equipment for hospital teams. In response, the government proposed mandatory quarantine measures on travellers arriving from mainland China, but this was dismissed and workers continued the strike to Thursday.

Burmese textile workers protest over mass sackings

Over 15,000 workers from 80 workplace unions marched in Yangon, largest city in Burma (Myanmar), on February 2 to protest the Arbitration Council's decision to not fully reinstate 260 workers sacked for striking at the Thong Thai Textile factory. The sackings occurred after workers walked out on October 25 over 23 demands, including better wages, full-time jobs for temporary workers, and an end to excessive overtime.

After five sets of negotiations between the company and the Industrial Workers Federation of Myanmar and agreement on 15 of the 23 demands, an arbitration body ordered all 260 to be reinstated with compensation.

However, the company appealed to the Arbitration Council which ruled that 100 were to be re-instated without compensation, 99 being sued by the company could not be re-instated and 61 workers would be dealt with at the discretion of the company.

Vietnamese factory workers end strike following reinstatements

One thousand workers from the YG Vina electronics factory in the Gian Khau Industrial Zone, Ninh Binh province returned to work on February 1, after the company agreed to rehire five workers it dismissed on January 31. The five were among many workers who refused company demands that they work overtime and an extra day, just as they prepared to leave for the Lunar New Year holiday on January 21. When the sackings took place the entire factory workforce walked out.

Australia and the Pacific

Queensland mining sector: Bus drivers from Greyhound Resources locked out

Mining sector bus transport company Greyhound Resources has taken retaliatory action against six members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) after a 45-minute work stoppage on January 30 as part of industrial action for a new enterprise agreement (EA). Greyhound Resources, a subsidiary of Greyhound Australia, provides transport to a number of remote mining sites across Australia. The lockout applied to drivers in the Bowen Basin in Central Queensland.

In a protected action ballot sent to 66 TWU members following months of failed negotiations, 41 of the 42 who returned a ballot called for strike action. The union has not extended industrial action to include its other 60 members involved in the dispute. Instead, it has made a public appeal on Facebook for donations to cover lost wages of the locked out drivers and called on the companies at the top of the mining supply chain "to take responsibility for the conditions that these drivers are facing".

According to the union, drivers receive rates of pay that are not much better than the award. Unlike most other DIDO (drive in-drive out) or FIFO (fly in-fly out) workers in the mining industry, Greyhound Resources drivers receive little or no assistance to fund the costs of travel to and from the mining communities where they work.

Health workers at Brisbane's Mater Hospital take industrial action

About 80 members of Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) have joined around 500 allied health workers from the Mater Hospital in Queensland's capital Brisbane in industrial action over disputed enterprise agreements.

A PPA spokesman said Mater's proposed EA amounted to an 18 percent pay cut. As part of low-key action, pharmacists are putting up posters in their work areas about their concerns, and threaten to escalate to dispensing drugs to patients without charging them. The PPA spokesman said they have not ruled out striking if an agreement with Mater cannot be reached.

Allied health staff, which include pathologists, occupational therapists and medical laboratory scientists among others covered by the Together union, reject Mater's proposal to introduce an award that would spell cheaper wages for new staff. Any current staff who changed roles would also be on the new award. Mater has offered a pay rise of 1.5 percent, which the union said was a pay cut because it was less than inflation.

Other concerns are that Mater wants to remove the window of normal

work hours to reduce overtime and shift allowances, and fear for job security citing Mater's recent move to outsource medical imaging. Together members began low level action in December and have since escalated that by refusing to update patient medical records.

Melbourne council nurses impose work bans

About 30 members of the Australian Nurses and Midwives Federation from the City of Melbourne who administer maternal and child health services and immunisations began imposing bans after the council rejected nearly all their claims for improved working conditions and education entitlements in a new enterprise agreement (EA). Nurses began wearing red campaign t-shirts and stopping work to have discussions with new parents and members of the community to explain their dispute since January 2.

EA negotiations began in March 2019. The current agreement expired in June 2019. The nurses' last pay rise was 18 months ago. Nurses are seeking a four percent pay rise per annum over three years. The City of Melbourne is offering two percent per annum.

The ANMF is also seeking protection in their agreement to ensure Victoria's unique triple maternal and child health qualifications remain mandatory for all maternal and child health positions at City of Melbourne.

Tahiti workers strike against Macron's attack on pensions

Workers in the French territory of Tahiti are protesting planned pension reforms in solidarity with workers in mainland France.

State workers, particularly teachers, held a one-day strike in December, and planned to strike again on 6 February to coincide with a visit by French overseas minister Annick Girardin.

As well as opposing the French government's pension "reforms," workers are concerned about the rising cost of living and the aging state of the territory's education infrastructure.



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