Tamil Nadu public transport workers demonstrate; Sacked Sri Lankan government workers protest; Jetstar baggage handlers on strike in Australia

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

22 February 2020

India: Tamil Nadu public transport workers protest

Hundreds of workers from the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) demonstrated in Chennai on February 12 for several demands, including for higher pay and dearness allowances. Their previous wage agreement expired last September. A union coordinating committee said that another protest was planned for March 10 if there was no response from the government.

The workers are also demanding urgent construction to improve building infrastructure, and workshop and restroom facilities at depots. In 2017, a bus depot roof collapse in Nagapattinam killed eight workers and injured many others.

Thousands of TNSTC workers are employed as reserve drivers and conductors. Protesters demanded that these employees, who have worked for more than 240 days, be made permanent in line with existing standards. Other demands were for benefits for retired staff and the re-introduction of the old pension scheme for workers who joined the service before April 2003.

Pune city municipal contract workers on indefinite hunger strike

Around 30 contract workers in the sanitary and security departments of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, stopped work on Monday and began an indefinite hunger strike to demand wages in line with minimum pay laws. The skilled and unskilled contract workers are organised by the Maharashtra Kamgar Manch.

The union wants the wage of skilled labour to be increased to 14,000 rupees ($US196) per month, semi-skilled 13,000 rupees and unskilled 11,500 rupees as per the 2015 government gazette. They currently receive between 6,000 and 9,000 rupees.

Punjab unemployed teachers demonstrate for jobs

The Elementary Teacher Training (ETT)-TET Qualified Unemployed Teachers' Union demonstrated in Bathinda on February 16 to demand that all vacant posts at government schools be filled. The union claimed that there are around 30,000 vacant teaching posts in India's Punjab state.

Teachers want the authorisation of a minimum of 15,000 Bachelor of Education positions and 12,000 ETT posts. The government's decision to sanction just 2,182 B.Ed. teachers' posts and 500 ETT teachers' positions was rejected by the union.

The demonstration followed protests on February 8 by the Punjab Democratic Teachers Front in Sangrur over the same issue, and against the government's move toward privatisation.

Punjab government water and sanitation contract workers protest

The Punjab Water Supply and Sanitation Contract Workers' Union called a demonstration outside the mini-secretariat in Bathinda on February 14 over the non-payment of salaries. Protesters burnt effigies of department officials.

The union said that salary payment delays has become a norm. According to the union, the department must release salaries within the first week of every month but that salaries have not been released on time during the past eight months. On some occasions, salaries were delayed by 45 days or more, it claimed.

Workers receive below poverty wages whilst those who joined the department a few years ago only get between 7,000 rupees ($US98) and 8,000-rupees a month.

Uttarakhand government employees strike in Dehradun

Thousands of state government employees struck on February 14 and held a protest march in Dehradun demanding the unfreezing of promotions. Called by over a dozen government employee associations, workers gathered in the Parade Ground and walked to the secretariat building to demand that the departmental promotion committee be restarted in line with a Supreme Court ruling. The government froze promotions in all departments in September.

Assam child day-care workers demand pay increase

Thousands of Anganwadi (child day-care) workers and helpers staged a

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demonstration in Guwahati on February 12 to oppose the Indian government's recent budget and to demand a wage increase.

Workers protested outside the Social Welfare Directorate office in Uzanbazar, calling for a salary increase and Employee State Insurance facilities. Anganwadi workers want wages lifted from 6,500 rupees ($US92) per month to 21,000 rupees and to 18,000 rupees for helpers.

Government workers in Jammu and Kashmir protest over recruitment rules

Hundreds of government employees recruited under the restrictive SRO-202 rule have been holding regular demonstrations over several weeks across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. The new recruitment rules were applied in 2015 by the People's Democratic Party-Bharatiya Janata Party government that administered the territory for three years. The government workers are organised by the All J&K SRO-202 Employees union.

The discriminatory SRO-202 recruitment rule requires that a new employee must spend five years on probation. They do not receive a minimum basic salary and are denied access to the Dearness Allowance, House Rental Allowance and City Compensation Allowance until they have completed their probation period.

Pakistan: Punjab government workers strike

Agriculture Department workers from the low paid rank of Class IV in Bahawalnagar, Punjab struck on Tuesday and demonstrated in the city against extended work hours. Workers claimed that they are forced to perform duties that are not part of their job function due to under staffing caused by budget cuts. Workers said they are forced to work for other departments including the municipal department and carry out duties such as garbage collection.

The workers accused the government of using its Clean and Green Pakistan policy to slash public expenditure and accelerate the privatisation of public enterprises.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand wages

Garment workers from the Sark Knitwear factory at Ashuila in Savar demonstrated on the Savar-Mirpur road on Sunday morning for three hours, for unpaid wages. At least five workers were injured when police broke up the protest.

The demonstration began on Sunday morning after management announced that the factory was shutting for an indefinite period without paying outstanding wages for 500 workers.

Sri Lanka: Sacked government workers maintain protest in Colombo

Hundreds of workers from several Sri Lankan government departments are maintaining their protest opposite the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo as part of a series of demonstrations that began over two weeks ago by a group of sacked government employees demanding reinstatement.

The Rajapakse government claimed that workers from various government departments, including the central cultural fund, archaeology department, national housing development authority and petroleum cooperation, among others, were given politically-biased appointments by the previous government. Terminated workers from the Archaeological Department are maintaining a hunger protest over their dismissals.

Sri Lanka Railway workers joined the demonstrations last week demanding that more than 1,500 temporary workers with over five years' service be given permanent jobs. A group of railway bamboo gatekeepers demonstrated on Wednesday demanding a hike in their pay. The union stated that 687 gate keepers all over the country only receive a daily allowance of 250 rupees (less than $US2). They further demanded that the authorities make their positions permanent.

Wildlife guides have also joined the protests demanding their daily wages be increased to 700 rupees ($US9.8).

Burmese footwear factory workers walk out

Hundreds of workers at the Li Kyan Footwear factory in Shwe Lin Pan industrial zone, in Yangon, Burma's largest city, went on strike on Thursday to demand a wage increase.

Members of the 1,900-strong workforce want their daily wage increased from 5,000 Kyat to 8,000 ($US2.80 to $3.50). Other demands are for payment of the annual bonus, which the company has withheld, and leave without pay for student workers who are attending education courses.

Tram and rail network workers in Victoria strike

Thousands of members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) employed in Victoria's rail and tram commuter networks resumed ongoing industrial action this week opposing employers' demands that workers accept concessions to wages and conditions and increase productivity.

Some 1,500 drivers and customer-support workers from Melbourne's privatised tram network struck for four hours on Monday and Thursday between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and are planning to strike again six more times in the first two weeks of March in opposition to the employer's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

Yarra trams is owned by Keolis Downer, a joint corporate venture between Downer Group (annual revenue $12.6 billion) and French transport giant Keolis (annual revenue $9.7 billion). Management want full-time workers to concede an estimated $7,000 per annum in overtime and roster penalties via increases in the current cap on part-time workers from 4 percent to 15 percent and restrict future wage increases to 3 percent annually over four years. Estimations are that Yarra trams would pocket an extra $9.69 million per annum in profits under its proposed EA.

Over 600 RTBU members from the state-owned rural commuter rail network V/line, including drivers, station staff and train controllers resumed strike action this week in opposition to the government's proposed EA changes that would limit wage increases to 2 percent per annum, make changes to training provisions and an end to public holiday loadings. The RTBU is demanding annual 6 percent pay increases with no loss in conditions.

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Striking train drivers, station staff, bookings clerks and train conductors shut down services on the Ballarat Maryborough and Ararat lines on Wednesday and on the Traralgon and Bairnsdale lines for 24 hours. The action followed 24-hour stoppages in late January and December.

Jetstar baggage handlers across Australia strike again

Some 250 baggage handlers from Jetstar, a Qantas Airways budget subsidiary, walked off the job for 24 hours at six airports across Australia on Wednesday in their dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Jetstar was forced to cancel 48 domestic flights at Sydney, Melbourne, Avalon, Brisbane, Cairns, and Adelaide airports.

The strike followed limited two-hour strikes on December 14 and 15. To protect the company's profits during the summer holiday period, the Transport Workers Union (TWU) suspended further industrial action until now.

Rates of pay for Jetstar baggage handlers are the lowest in the Qantas group. Their current agreement guarantees some Jetstar baggage handlers no more than 20 hours work a week on irregular rosters. Jetstar wants to further restrict leave provisions and demote staff without notice. In an attempt to blackmail workers, management is refusing to back-pay wage increases since the current EA expired in March 2019. Jetstar closed off any further negotiations on February 10 after tabling their "final" offer.

Airport baggage handlers want equal rates of pay for equal jobs, improved secure work with a minimum of 30 hours a week, more rest breaks, a guaranteed 12-hour break between shifts and compliance with safety and security. In a recent survey 80 percent of baggage handlers reported they have suffered injury due to high workload and understaffing, while 90 percent said they want to work more hours.

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