

Indian railway and Sri Lankan port workers oppose privatisation;
Australian supermarket warehouse employees stop work over
COVID-19 infection

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

8 August 2020

India: Migrant construction workers in Kerala protest over death of colleagues

About 100 migrant contract construction workers in Palakkad, Kerala gathered where three migrant colleagues were found badly beaten beside the railway tracks on Monday evening, near the Indian Institute of Technology, where they worked. Two of the workers were found alive but died of their injuries on the way to hospital.

The workers who rushed to the site refused to hand over the deceased worker to the police, demanding compensation for the three victims who were all from Jharkhand state. The workers allowed the body to be shifted to hospital on Tuesday morning after holding talks with the district labour officer, police and other officials. Police initially claimed the victims had been hit by a locomotive but this was later rejected by railway officials.

Destitute Tamil Nadu fishermen demand government support

Traditional fishermen in Tamil Nadu demonstrated on Tuesday in Chennai, the state capital, to demand the government protect their fishing rights and for income assistance during the coronavirus lockdown. Fishing, the only source of income for the traditional fishermen, was banned for the majority of India's COVID-19 lockdown. Many fishermen have not received the meagre monetary compensation promised by the state.

The protest was organised by the Coordination Committee of All Tamil Nadu Fishermen Association

(CCTFA), an umbrella group of at least 15 fishing groups. The association wants new members admitted to the fishermen welfare board and fishermen cooperative societies. The CCTFA alleges that no new fishermen have been added to the welfare board in the past three years and called for all traditional fishermen over 18 years old to be admitted immediately.

App-based transport delivery workers protest in Delhi

Hundreds of app-based transport and delivery workers protested in Delhi, Hyderabad and other parts of the country on Wednesday over the government's failure to provide financial compensation for income loss during the coronavirus lockdown. They have not been given any relief from the government or app-based employers.

The All India Coordination Committee of Road Transport Workers Organisations, which organised the protest, has a long list of outstanding demands. This list includes the government forcing app-companies to reduce the commission rates to 5 percent, minimum wages for delivery workers as per the state labour laws and the waiving of road, vehicle and border taxes and tolls.

The union is also demanding social security coverage and health insurance, withdrawal of enhanced excise duty on diesel/petrol and a roll back of oil company price increases since June.

Indian Railway workers continue campaign against privatisation

Hundreds of railway workers protested outside the City Railway Station in Mysuru, Karnataka state on August 2 against the Indian government's move to corporatise production units of Indian Railways and the privatisation of passenger trains.

The demonstration was part of the All India United Trade Union Centre (AIUTUC) national campaign for an end to all railway privatisation in any form, including the introduction of private trains, sale or closure of railway stations, hospitals, workshops and other railway property, including land.

The All India Railwaymen's Federation and its affiliate, the National Railway Mazdoor Union, held a protest in Mumbai on July 16 threatening to strike over the issue of privatisation.

Sri Lanka: Colombo Port workers end strike against privatisation

Unions representing striking workers at Colombo Port ended a three-day walkout on Sunday following a meeting with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse. Thousands of workers, including engineers, technicians and administrators, struck on July 31 over the planned sale of the port's eastern terminal to an Indian-Japanese consortium.

Work stopped at all terminals as workers blocked access to Colombo Port and held rallies and sit-down protests. The port unions are demanding the Eastern Container Terminal to be taken over by the Sri Lanka Ports Authority. The port privatisation plans were first initiated by the previous Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government. Current President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has insisted that the plan will go ahead.

According to media reports, the unions suspended the strike claiming talks with the prime minister were successful. No details, however, have been provided.

Cambodia: Hotel workers protest in Siem Reap

About 70 workers from the Le Meridien Angkor Hotel in Siem Reap city, a popular tourist destination, demonstrated outside the hotel on Thursday to oppose a

wage cut and for reinstatement of three union leaders. One worker told the media that hotel management suspended operations in April but reopened last month, declaring it was cutting 35 percent from staff salaries from July to September. Protesters demanded that the cut be reduced to 20 percent.

The workers also demanded reinstatement of three union leaders fired in early July for allegedly "persuading others to protest."

Woolworths workers in Victoria refuse to enter infected warehouse

About 240 workers at a Woolworths distribution centre in Laverton, a south-western Melbourne suburb, refused to work on Monday morning after hearing that a co-worker had tested positive to COVID-19 three days earlier. Their action followed the infection of 35 workers at Woolworths Mulgrave distribution centre and the infection of up to 60 employees at other Woolworths facilities.

The United Workers Union (UWU) demanded intensified anti-coronavirus measures at Laverton, including a deep clean overseen by health representatives, a 72-hour shut down with paid pandemic leave, and the testing of all current and new staff. Woolworths claimed that it had conducted contract tracing when the COVID-19 positive worker was detected and cleaned the site in line with Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recommendations.

Despite possible further infections the DHHS did not order for the site to close or for staff members to isolate. Worksafe Victoria ordered the workers back to work after 11 hours on Monday evening, after doing a site inspection and after Woolworths agreed to appoint an on-site hygienist. The UWU complied with the demand and has not organised any future industrial action over Woolworths unsafe work practises or the company's increased productivity demands.



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