

India: Karnataka college staff strike over unpaid salaries; Tamil Nadu tea plantation workers protest; Australian supermarket warehouse workers locked out

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

20 November 2020

Asia

India: Karnataka engineering college staff strike over unpaid salaries

Academic and non-academic staff at the Sri Jayachamarajendra College of Engineering in Mysore, Karnataka state walked out of online classes and related work on November 12 to demand three months' outstanding salaries. Strikers held a sit-down protest outside the college. Their action followed a series of protests that began on November 6.

The workers said the college had paid its salary commitment of 15 percent but the state government has not paid its 85 percent portion. They called on the government to immediately release the pending salaries.

Tea plantation workers in Tamil Nadu demand increased bonus

Nearly 500 Tamil Nadu Tea Plantation Corporation (Tantea) workers at Pandalur in Nilgiris district held a hunger strike on November 11 to demand their bonuses be increased from 10 percent to 20 percent. The protest followed a one-day strike on November 6.

Striking workers pointed to the 100 million rupees (\$US1.34 million) surplus revenue earned by Tantea in the last four months. A group of workers submitted a memorandum to Tantea's managing director at the company's head office in Coonoor.

State-owned Tantea is India's largest producer of black tea. It employs 5,000 workers, including 250 office staff, and owns 4,100 hectares of tea gardens, including 900 hectares in Coimbatore district.

Telangana garment workers demand minimum wage

About 4,000 garment workers from India Designs Garment Company and Nisha Designs Garment plants have been on strike since November 12 demanding payment of the minimum wage. The current average salary of workers in the Telangana state is around 5,000-rupees (\$US67) a month.

The Joint Commissioner of Labour held talks with the representatives of workers and management on November 14. The talks broke up after the garment companies said they would not increase salaries for the next three months.

Hospital sanitation workers in Chandigarh demand festival bonus

Contract sanitation workers from the Government Medical College and Hospital in Chandigarh, Haryana state, demonstrated on the hospital campus on Monday over the non-payment of an annual festival bonus. Workers said they had been paid the bonuses every year for more than a decade.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers protest

Retrenched jute mill workers held an hour-long march in the jute industrial areas of Khulna and Jashore on Wednesday afternoon to demand the reopening of government-owned jute mills. The government closed down 25 state-owned jute mills in July, claiming that they were running at a loss. About 50,000 workers lost their jobs overnight while thousands of jute farmers were left with no income.

At a press briefing on Wednesday the Pat Suta Bastrokal Sramik Karmochari Songram Parishad said the plants should be modernised, production costs cut and all workers paid the minimum wage in accordance with the Bangladesh Constitution, National Labour Policy and ILO Conventions.

Jute workers and farmers have been holding regular demonstrations since the closures. On October 19, hundreds of jute workers and family members were seriously injured when police used batons and fired tear gas shells to break up their protest on the Khulna-Jashore Highway. The workers have vowed to keep protesting until the mills are opened.

Bangladeshi health workers threaten to strike

The Bangladesh Health Assistants' Association at a press conference held at the Rajshahi Press Club on Tuesday announced that its members at the Rajshahi unit will begin an indefinite strike on November 26 if their long pending demands are not granted.

Their demands include upgrading their wage board status from 16 to 11, recognition of health assistants' work as a technical post, an additional 30 percent of their basic salary paid as risk or travel allowance, appointment of at least one health assistant for every 6,500 people and introduction of a 10 percent ward quota in the recruitment of health assistants.

Association officials claimed that Health Visitors, Assistant Health Visitors and Health Assistants have been neglected and that, even though Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina pledged to solve their issues in 1998, nothing has happened.

Australia

Supermarket giant Coles imposes three-month lockout on Sydney warehouse workers

About 350 workers at the supermarket giant Coles warehouse in Smeaton Grange, in Sydney's south were locked out this week for three months until February 11. The lockout is management's response to 24-hour rolling strike action by members of the United Workers Union (UWU) that began on Thursday morning.

The workers are in dispute with Coles over the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). Workers are concerned about job security following the company's announcement that it is building a new automated warehouse and intends to eventually close the Smeaton Grange facility. They want the new EA to provide job protection and adequate compensation.

Workers are demanding that all those forced to take redundancy be paid at five weeks for every year of service, capped at 104 weeks, and be given the right to transfer to the new Coles warehouse with no loss of pay, job security in the form of a permanent to casual ratio. According to the UWU, Coles has refused to give workers an opportunity to be redeployed to the new facility. Some workers have been at the Smeaton Grange warehouse for 30 years.

The union has alleged that Coles will be able to supply its stores from other distribution centres during the three-month lockout.

Union calls off planned strike at Kellogg's plant in Sydney

Over 130 UWU members from Kellogg Australia's food processing plant at Botany in south Sydney planned to walk out for 24 hours on Wednesday after long-running negotiations for a new enterprise agreement reached deadlock. The union called off the action at the last minute claiming it had reached a deal with the company.

The UWU says workers are concerned about Kellogg's two-tier workforce, with one tier paid \$15 an hour less than the other tier, despite the lower tier doing an extra four hours of work per week. The union claimed that Kellogg's had resisted demands to close the gap, only offering small pay rises to both tiers and insisting the two tier system should continue.

Casuals who have been on-site for up to nine years are paid even less than the lower-tier workers and never had the opportunity to become full-time workers. Details of the deal reached between Kellogg's and the UWU have not been made public.

UWU calls off industrial action at Calvary Bruce Private Hospital

The United Workers Union, following two weeks of limited bans and

two strikes by cleaners at the Calvary Bruce Private Hospital in Canberra called off a planned third strike on Wednesday after hospital management offered a revised "fairer" enterprise agreement (EA).

Twenty members of the UWU began industrial action on October 29 after rejecting the hospital's "insulting" pay increase offer of just 50 cents per hour. The UWU said workers were paid a base rate of only \$22.02 an hour, well below the rate received by their counterparts at Canberra Hospital. The union claims the hospital offered "significant" pay increases putting cleaners' pay rates in line with the Canberra Hospital colleagues. No details of the offer have been released, however.

Canberra garbage collection truck drivers strike again

Following two 24-hour strikes in two weeks garbage truck drivers from SUEZ Waste Management and Recycling in Canberra stepped up their industrial action with a five-day strike on November 16 and impacting garbage collection in 40 Canberra suburbs.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), which represents the 42 drivers, is calling for 4 percent annual wage increases in a new enterprise agreement. After five months of negotiations SUEZ has offered only 2 percent in 2021, 3 percent in 2022 and 3 percent in 2023. The drivers are currently paid a base rate of \$32 an hour.

Moreton Bay garbage truck drivers strike

Some 35 members of the TWU who drive garbage collection trucks for Cleanaway, contracted by the Moreton Bay Regional Council, a northern suburb of Queensland's capital Brisbane, stopped work for 24 hours on Monday over Cleanaway's proposed new enterprise agreement. Workers demanded a better pay offer pointing to the company's record profits this year and increased shareholder dividends by 15 percent.

Nurses at major Sydney hospital strike over critical staffing levels

Over 130 nurses and midwives at Blacktown Hospital, in western Sydney, suddenly walked off the job on Thursday afternoon over serious staffing and safety concerns in the hospital's maternity services.

The traumatised and overworked nurses held a meeting that day and decided to strike for 24 hours demanding that staffing be increased to safe levels. They were ordered back to work at 10.30 p.m. by the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission.

According to the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) births at Blacktown Hospital since 2015 have increased 52 percent but staffing has only risen by 11 percent.

Due to obstetrician shortages, midwives are being trained to take on more roles, increasing their workloads each shift. At least 20 senior obstetricians at the hospital threatened to resign in the first week of February 2021 if their concerns about understaffing, lack of experienced staff and access to birthing facilities are not addressed.

The crisis of staffing levels in NSW public hospitals is state wide. Earlier this month, the NSWNMF reported that nurses at the Port Macquarie Base Hospital, 400 km north of Sydney were "battling excessive workloads and chronic understaffing" across multiple wards

and theatres. At a meeting nurses opposed the opening of a new ward at the hospital and demanded management stop opening beds across multiple wards until adequate permanent staff were available.



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