

Sri Lankan nurses and educators protest; Auto-parts workers strike for union rights in Tamil Nadu: Garbage truck drivers resume walkout in Queensland

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

4 December 2020

Asia

Sri Lankan health workers hold nation-wide protests to demand permanent jobs

Hundreds of health workers in junior positions protested outside seven major government hospitals on December 2, demanding that all substitute employees be made permanent and that accident allowance and transport facilities be given to junior staff in line with other hospital employees.

The Joint Health Workers' Union claimed that the government had not taken any decision to make these workers permanent although they have completed nine months as substitute workers.

The protests followed demonstrations on November 25–26 by hundreds of health workers who picketed the country's major hospitals, including the National Hospital in Colombo, Kandy Hospital and Jayawardanapura Hospital, for required budget allocations for a decent coronavirus containment program, standard personal protective gear and a COVID-19 hazard allowance for all workers involved in treatment of the virus.

Sri Lankan teachers protest over salary anomalies

About 100 teachers and principals from schools across the island held a silent protest near parliament in Colombo on December 1. Members of the Teacher-Principal Trade Union Confederation held slogans denouncing the government for failing to address the decade-long issue of salary anomalies in the latest budget. The educators also raised slogans opposing unsafe school openings in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

India: Magna Cosma in Tamil Nadu strike in fourth month

Over 50 permanent workers from the Magna Cosma International auto-parts factory in the Sriperumbudur and Oragadam industrial hub have been on strike since September 17 demanding the reinstatement of 18 victimised workers and recognition of their newly-formed union. Workers from other factories supported a protest rally to mark the 75th day of the strike on Monday.

Magna maintains a multi-tier work force to facilitate super exploitation,

with just 75 permanent workers alongside 350 contract workers and 200 trainees.

Early this year a group of workers established a new union in opposition to the existing pro-company union affiliated to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). Management responded by unleashing a witch-hunt against the militant workers who set up the new union. It suspended six workers and ordered the arbitrary transfer of another 12 to its plant in Pune, Maharashtra. When these workers refused to accept the forced transfers, they were also suspended.

Magna Cosma is a part of Magna International, a Canadian global automotive supplier with 316 manufacturing operations and 84 product development, engineering and sales centres in 29 countries. The conglomerate employs over 125,000 workers globally.

Andhra Pradesh contract nurses demand permanent jobs

Contract nurses hired for COVID-19 duties at government and private hospitals in Visakhapatnam protested near the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation office on November 30 to demand permanent jobs.

The nurses said authorities claimed that the COVID-19 cases had reduced and dismissed them after their contracts ended. The nurses allege that they were not paid an honorarium promised by the state government.

Pakistan: Protests erupt against sacking of steel mill workers

Hundreds of workers protested in Karachi this week after the government laid off 4,544 of the 9,000 workers at the state-run Steel Mills as part of a cost-cutting exercise. The sacked workers blocked a main rail track for more than 10 hours on Tuesday, forcing the rescheduling of long-distance trains.

The demonstration followed two days of protests on the National Highway on November 27–28 which blocked traffic in both directions. Protesters displayed the body of a worker they claimed died after seeing his son's layoff announcement.

Workers criticised the government for renegeing on previous promises to revive the Steel Mills and not to lay off workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pakistan is currently experiencing another upsurge of coronavirus infections.

The layoffs are in line with government plan to privatise the Steel Mills,

a top item in the list drawn up by the government and the International Monetary Fund. The All Employees Association Committee called off the demonstrations after meeting with the Sindh province government. They claimed it would take legal action to fight the government's decision.

Islamabad Metro Bus Service workers strike

Metro Bus Service workers struck on November 26, stopping services between Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore, to demand immediate payment of three months outstanding salaries. Over 135,000 passengers travel each day between Islamabad and Rawalpindi on the government-run buses.

The drivers also demanded their salaries be paid on a fixed date on a monthly basis, reimbursement of a 15 percent pay cut imposed during the COVID-19 lockdown and a 20 percent salary increase. They also want an assurance that striking workers would not be victimised by management.

Workers called off their strike on the second day after authorities agreed to pay one-month's salary on Friday, another month's on the following week, and the third two weeks after that.

Mass sackings at Hong Kong cable TV news network

About 100 workers were suddenly laid off at i-Cable, one of Hong Kong's biggest TV news stations, on Tuesday. Security officers forced the laid-off journalists to immediately exit the premises. The sackings prompted the resignation of editors and senior editorial staff in protest.

While management claimed the lay-offs were part of a restructure, the Hong Kong Journalist's Association claimed that the firing of the entire "News Lancel" team was taken for political reasons. Inside sources at i-Cable told the media that news department heads were not consulted beforehand about the sackings. Tense confrontations between remaining staff and senior management ensued.

The privately-owned i-Cable, which changed hands in 2017, is highly regarded for its news division, and has historically been more politically outspoken and critical than its TV competitors.

Australia

Moreton Bay garbage truck drivers resume strike action

Some 35 members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) who drive garbage collection trucks for Cleanaway, contracted by the Moreton Bay Regional Council, a northern suburb of Queensland's capital Brisbane, held a third 24-hour strike on Wednesday.

The drivers previously walked out on November 16 and 23 over Cleanaway's proposed new enterprise agreement. Disputed issues include a pay increase, medical expenses and rostered-days-off (RDOs).

Cleanaway has mobilised crews from outside the council area to clean up the backlog of unemptied garbage bins and break the strike.

The workers want a decent pay increase to make up for agreeing to accept a reduced pay offer in the current expired enterprise agreement. In 2017, the TWU and the Council pressured workers to accept a low pay

offer to ensure that Cleanaway retained the contract. Workers pointed to the company's record profits this year and increased shareholder dividends by 15 percent.

Plumbing supply distribution workers on strike in southwestern Sydney

Some 34 workers from the distribution depot of toilet fittings manufacturer GWA Caroma walked out on an indefinite strike on Monday in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). According to the United Workers Union (UWU), the proposed EA strips away long-held conditions and leaves workers with a zero percent pay rise.

The GWA Caroma distribution depot is in south-western Sydney, a few kilometres from the Coles supermarket distribution centre in Smeaton Grange, where 350 workers opposing a company EA have been locked out until February. The UWU opposes any joint action by distribution workers.

Brisbane airport security workers protest mass layoffs

Security workers from Brisbane Airport employed by security firm ISS Australia held a 100-vehicle motorcade encircling the airport on Tuesday morning to protest plans by ISS to cut 30 percent of its workforce across Australia.

The protest followed ISS's move to sack more than 350 ISS Aviation Protection Officers (APO), who were told they would be given redundancy notices this week. The United Workers Union (UWU) secured a federal court injunction on Sunday that temporarily halts the sackings during the COVID-19 pandemic. The injunction stops ISS from issuing notices or terminating the employment of APOs for reason of redundancy until such time as the court orders otherwise.

Job losses across Australian airports total more than 600, with about 370 of these involuntary redundancies that were the subject of the injunction.

Virgin airline unions endorse wage freeze on ground and cabin crew

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), Flight Attendants' Association of Australia (FAAA), Australian Services Union (ASU) and Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers' Association (ALAEA) have organised a sell-out enterprise agreement deal with Virgin that imposes 6,000 Virgin employees to accept a two-year wage freeze.

The unions claim that Virgin's CEO Jayne Hrdlicka has promised that no more jobs will be outsourced in the future.

TWU national secretary Michael Kaine immediately began campaigning to sell the retrogressive deal, cynically claiming workers had job security and still have "decent pay and conditions." Union members at Virgin have not yet voted on the deal.

Airline management said that voting will begin this week on the Virgin Australia Regional Airlines Agreements with the other enterprise agreements voted on in the coming weeks.



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