Hyundai steel workers in South Korea strike; Tamil Nadu primary school teachers protest; Australia: Svitzer tugboat workers walk out

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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The World Socialist Web Site *invites workers and other readers to* contribute *to this regular feature.*

Asia

South Korea: Hyundai steel workers strike for wage rise and bonus

After 15 rounds of wage negotiations, thousands of unionised workers from five South Korean plants of Hyundai Steel struck for 48 hours on Wednesday to demand higher wages and bonuses. Apart from 2,000 essential workers who operate three blast furnaces in Dangjin, about 120 kilometres south of Seoul, who did not join the strike, up to 6,400 union members participated in the strike.

The union wants a 120,000 won ($US109) per person increase in basic monthly pay, a bonus of three months' salary and a 5 million won special allowance. The company proposed a freeze on basic pay, a bonus amounting to one month's salary and a 1 million won special allowance.

India: Garbage collection workers in Maharashtra strike over sackings

AG Enviro garbage collection workers in Nagpur region, Maharashtra state, began an indefinite strike on January 12 and held a sit-down demonstration at Vidhan Bhavan Square over several long outstanding demands. The strike erupted after the termination of 140 colleagues without prior notice. BVG garbage collection company workers joined the protest.

The strikers want immediate reinstatement of the sacked workers, payment of the state government minimum wage, provident fund, employee state insurance, leave and other conditions required by law.

The strike, which impacts on door-to-door garbage collected in five zones, was called by the Nagpur Zilla NMC Contractual Workers Association. An association spokesman claimed that repeated hearings with the labour commissioner had failed to resolve their grievances.

Punjab education workers oppose transfers to remote locations

Punjab state education department contract workers employed in the Sarva Shiksh Abhiyan (SSA—Education for All Movement) demonstrated near the chief minister's residence in Patiala on January 10 against the transfer of employees to remote locations.

The protesters, who also mobilised their children, allege that the transfers, which were around 250 to 300 km away from their homes, were part of the state government's rationalisation policy. They have been working for over 10 years on contract basis without being offered permanent positions.

On January 1, non-teaching school workers involved in Punjab's SSA scheme demonstrated outside the finance minister's office in Bathinda to demand permanent jobs. Protesters said 8,886 SSA teachers were made permanent in 2018 by the state government. One thousand non-teaching employees involved in the scheme, however, were not given permanent jobs even though they had completed written exams in the merit list to get a job.

Tamil Nadu primary school teachers protest in Madurai

Tamil Nadu Primary School Teachers Federation members demonstrated outside the district chief educational office in Madurai on January 9 over several demands. They want the government to revoke 17B (disciplinary) orders issued against government employees and teachers involved in the JACTO-GEO protests in 2019.

They have also called for the government to grant previous promises it made on pensions and salaries, increase the quota for government school students in medical positions from 7.5 percent to 10 percent, and introduce a separate quota of 5 percent for students from government-aided schools.

In January 2019, strikes by JACTO-GEO (Joint Action Council of Teachers Organisations—Government Employees Organisations) members closed nearly all schools in Tamil Nadu for over three days. Teachers, supported by other government employees, had nine demands, including amendment of the old pension scheme, pension contributions to be made more transparent and the payment of almost two years of 7th pay commission increases.

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Puducherry power distribution workers hold second strike against privatisation

Puducherry Electricity Department workers began an indefinite strike on Tuesday and demonstrated outside the department's headquarters in opposition to the Indian government's move to privatise the power sector in the Union Territory. The department has about 3,000 employees. The strike was coordinated by the Joint Action Committee of Engineers and other staff representatives.

The unions previously shut down a week-long anti-privatisation strike in December after claiming they had a verbal promise from the chief minister that he would arrange a meeting with India's power minister to discuss their grievance. The state government plans to hand over maintenance of five power stations to private operators for two years. Workers fear the move is the first step towards full privatisation.

Public sector workers across India have been protesting for several months, including two national one-day strikes, against the Indian government's plan to privatise railway, power, petroleum, finance and other public sector companies.

Tamil Nadu government contract nurses demand permanent jobs

Contract nurses demonstrated in Erode on January 12 to demand permanent jobs and a time-scale base wage. The protest was organised by members of the Tamil Nadu MRB Nurses' Empowerment Association.

On November 23, more than 3,000 government contract nurses struck work and gathered at the office of the Directorate of Medical and Rural Health Services in Chennai demanding permanent jobs, increased salary and more work. Services in several government hospitals, including primary health clinics, were affected.

In 2012, the Tamil Nadu government hired more than 11,000 contract nurses for a monthly salary of 7,000 rupees ($US96.6).

Bangladeshi garment workers demand outstanding wages

Around 700 workers from the Sonargaon Textile factory in Barishal city, in southern central Bangladesh, demonstrated and marched on Tuesday demanding eight months' unpaid salaries and other arrears.

In an attempt to end the demonstration, a meeting was held involving the police, district administrators, factory authorities and the workers during which the factory owner promised to reopen the plant and to pay the arrears by January 31.

One worker told the media that the factory has been shuttered since March last year. The worker said that factory management had previously promised, after a demonstration in November, to reopen two units that month and the other in December, and pay outstanding salaries.

Gazipur police attack protesting Bangladeshi garment workers

Police used batons to attack protesting garment workers from Radisson Fashions during a demonstration to demand dismissal of a factory-line chief at Tongi Industrial Area in Gazipur on Monday. Three workers were injured in the police attack.

Protesters claimed that a factory-line chief hired thugs to beat workers and accused him of harassing women workers at various times outside the factory. The workers ended Monday's protest when police said they would take action against the line chief.

The demonstration was sparked after repeated complaints to management over the line chief failed to get a response. Workers walked out on Sunday and held a sit-down protest at the factory gate. Management responded by locking them out for an indefinite period.

Pakistan: Unions call off protest by government workers in Islamabad

The All Government Employees Grand Alliance called off a mass protest of workers demanding higher pay and improved conditions outside parliament in Islamabad on Tuesday. Union leaders announced a March deadline for the government to agree to their demands and then called off the protest.

Government workers from across the country were demanding the immediate end to the government imposed pay freeze, 100 percent pay rise and significant increases in allowances and pensions. The protest was joined by health workers from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS). Doctors at the hospital are on strike against privatisation.

Prior to the protest the government said that it would not grant workers' demands, declaring that it was against the budget deficit reduction targets set by the International Monetary Fund. It deployed over 3,500 security personnel of the police and paramilitary units to the protest site.

All Government Employees Grand Alliance is an umbrella union consisting of the All Pakistan Clerks Association, All Pakistan Secretariat Employees Coordination Council and other unions.

Australia

Australia: Svitzer tugboat workers' strike

Some 240 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), a division of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), employed by tugboat operator Svitzer Australia are in their third month of limited national industrial action. The workers are opposing Svitzer's proposed new enterprise agreement.

MUA members on all Svitzer's vessels held a three-day strike on Tuesday and will hold two three-day stoppages on January 19 and January 26. The strikes will affect towage in 19 Australian ports, including Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

The MUA has accused the global company, which operates 100 vessels in Australia and Papua New Guinea, of attempting to strip away workers' rights and conditions. It claimed that despite being close to finalising a new workplace agreement earlier last year, Svitzer management decided to use the COVID-19 crisis to introduce 30 new claims that would slash workers' rights, conditions and job security. Initially Svitzer wanted to roll over its 2016 agreement for the next two years without a pay increase.

Svitzer is part of the Maersk international shipping group.

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New South Wales paramedics impose work bans

New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) paramedics who are members of the Ambulance Division of the Health Services union (ADHSU) have implemented so-called “nuisance” work bans in a dispute over NSWA’s decision to implement a part-time structure for newly-recruited university graduates. Members will delay transferring patients from stretchers until all medical records are completed and non-urgent hospital transfers and discharges will not be done between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m.

The NSWA wants to hire new paramedics on a take-it or leave-it permanent part-time arrangement with no right to a full-time contract. Paramedics fear that the new recruits could only be guaranteed 12 hours work per week—i.e., one shift on average a week. They could then be asked to fill holes in rosters anywhere as if they were casual employees.

At a meeting with the ADHSU and NSWA on Monday, management confirmed that there would be no trial, new recruits could be sent anywhere in NSW on the same 0.5 part-time hours as their internship. Paramedics said that new recruits accepted employment without being told that they will be kept in underemployment for years. They had pointed out that it would be extremely difficult for them to find secondary employment (especially in regional towns).

The union has not mounted a campaign to oppose the new employment scheme. It has threatened that the bans will remain until their request further negotiations and consultation with members are met.

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