

Korea: Renault Samsung workers to strike for better pay; Migrant construction workers protest in China; Dock workers to strike in Melbourne, Australia

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

12 February 2021

Chinese construction workers arrested for demanding overdue wages

On the morning of January 20, more than 20 migrant construction workers in Shantou, Guangdong province marched from the Guorui Hospital construction site holding flags and wooden placards with slogans demanding their wages. They were employed by the Guangdong Nanhua Construction Company.

Police sent to end the protest detained six workers for 15 days who allegedly led the protest, and detained another six workers for five days for “participating in an illegal protest.” In negotiations between the construction company and police the company agreed to pay over 1.1 million RMB (\$US158,000) for wages in arrears.

The police issued a warning to migrant workers, which urged them to defend their own interests only through legal means. This is a threat of retaliations to suppress opposition among workers against frequent wage arrears and exploitative working conditions.

Withholding workers’ wages in the construction industry is common throughout China. On February 6, a construction worker in Gannan, Gansu Province, climbed onto the arm of a 50-metre high tower crane. He threatened to jump unless the site manager payed the outstanding wages to him and a team of construction workers he led. Local police persuaded him to climb down the tower and detained him for 10 days over “disrupting social order.”

In a statement issued by the local police, they vilified this worker for demanding wages in a “vicious way,” claimed that they will have “zero tolerance” for migrant workers demanding wages with “radical means,” and threatened to severely crack down on any similar future attempts.

Korean workers protest for migrant workers’ rights

A group of migrant workers and human rights activists demonstrated in Seoul on Tuesday calling for better living conditions for migrant workers. The protest followed the death in December of a Cambodian woman in a vinyl tent where she and other workers had been living, at a farm in Pocheon, Gyeonggi Province.

The 30-year-old worker was sleeping alone with little protection in minus 20 degrees Celsius temperatures. She shared the tent with four co-workers who moved to other accommodation for the night because the heating system in the tent had failed.

The woman had been working at the farm since 2018 and was due to return home to Cambodia on January 10 when her visa expired. An e-

ticket for her flight was reported to be found inside the vinyl house.

Renault Samsung workers in Korea vote to strike

Unionised workers at the Renault Samsung Motors plant in Busan, South Korea on February 2 voted to strike for a wage increase after the company demanded job cuts. It claimed the cuts were necessary because of the impact of COVID-19 on profits. Workers are demanding a revised wage offer and are opposing the company’s restructuring plan.

The union has demanded a 70,000 won increase in basic pay. The company did not accept it and announced the voluntary retirement plan citing last year’s losses. The union is stalling and has not yet called a strike saying it will wait to see if the company presents a revised offer.

Although Renault Samsung Korean unit sales fell 35 percent last year, it was the first time in eight years that it reported an operating loss. The recent drop in revenue is being used to restructure and put pressure on workers to cut wages and conditions and jobs.

India: Andhra Pradesh steel workers protest privatisation

Thousands of workers participated in a sit-down protest at Andhra Pradesh’s Vijayawada city on Monday opposing the BJP government’s approval for 100 percent disinvestment of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL) along with management control by way of privatisation.

The demonstration was part of five days of protests involving workers from across the state. The workers are affiliated to several trade unions mainly led by the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

RINL, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, under the Ministry of Steel, currently has a capacity of 7.3 million tons per annum and employs almost 18,000 workers.

Goa municipal workers strike over overdue wages

Mormugao Municipal Council (MMC) workers in Goa state began an indefinite strike on Monday demanding regular payment of wages and

unpaid arrears. Strikers said they had lost confidence in municipal management and would not return to work until systematic solutions are worked out.

Workers complained that their salaries are irregular, which means they become bank defaulters because their loan instalment payments are delayed. They said that they are not provided with proper working equipment, such as brooms and baskets.

Tamil Nadu construction workers hold state-wide protest

More than 5,000 construction workers demonstrated in ten Tamil Nadu districts on February 4 against the abnormal rise in the price of construction materials, such as cement and steel. The demonstrations were called by the workers' unions, the Thamizhaga Kattida Thozhilalargal Mathiya Sangam (TKTMS) and the Construction and Real Estate Coalition (CRIC).

Protesters complained that the increase in the prices of construction materials forced many construction sites to stop operations and lay off workers.

Karnataka public transport workers protest salary delays

Workers from the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) protested on Wednesday over a range of issues, including salary payment delays. Workers said that 300 to 400 off-duty employees participated in the protests.

Protesters alleged that they are being overworked and are not being paid full salaries. They demanded timely payment of salaries and a reduction of working hours for women. In December, bus services across Karnataka were impacted after thousands of drivers and conductors at state-run road transport corporations struck demanding that they be made government employees with full benefits.

Andhra Pradesh: Maharaja Autonomous College staff demand overdue wages

About 50 lecturers and non-teaching staff from the Maharaja Autonomous College in Vizianagaram protested at the office of the Maharaja Alak Narayana Society of Arts and Science Trust on Monday demanding payment of eight months of overdue salaries. They alleged that the management has refused to meet with them on the issue and accused the college of diverting fee reimbursement funds released by the state government instead of paying salaries.

Tamil Nadu government school teachers protest on multiple issues

Government school teachers in Tamil Nadu protested in Chennai on Monday and began a 72-hour hunger strike. The protest was organised by the Joint Action Council of Teachers' Organisations-Government

Employees' Organisations (JACTO-GEO). Some teachers were arrested after they began the hunger strike at Chepauk.

Teachers want restoration of the old pension scheme, payment of pay commission arrears for 21 months, rectification of pay anomalies in various categories, abolition of special time-scale pay, consolidated pay, honorarium pay and a regular time scale and other demands.

The strike was announced even after the chief minister recently dropped disciplinary action initiated against 5,068 members of JACTO-GEO for staging protests in 2019.

Tamil Nadu sanitary workers protest unpaid salaries

Sanitary workers from the Salem Municipal Corporation stopped work for the day and demonstrated outside the corporation's office on Monday demanding outstanding pending salaries. They rallied at the Kondalampatti Corporation zonal office and then marched to the corporation office.

Workers from Kondalampatti and Hasthampatti alleged that they have not received salaries since November. They accused the corporation of deducting provident fund from their salaries but not paying these amounts into the fund.

Himachal Pradesh power workers demand protective clothing

Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (HPSEB) workers in the Himalayas protested on Monday demanding snow kits. The protest was organised by the HPSEB Technical Staff union. Protesters said they are being forced to work in snow-affected areas without proper snow kits.

Protesters said recent snowfalls disrupted power supply in many areas, forcing the field staff to work day and night in the extreme cold wave conditions to restore power. They alleged that despite standing instructions to all the superintending HPSEB engineers in December to distribute snow kits, none were provided to field staff.

Protesting West Bengal school teachers clash with police in Kolkata

Protesting para-teachers (contract teachers) were attacked by police in Kolkata on February 5 during a march to the West Bengal secretariat to submit a list of grievances, including a salary increase and permanent jobs.

Para-teachers are being hired in increasing numbers in many Indian states. Hiring conditions, tenure, remuneration, and qualifications, however, vary considerably across states.

Bangladesh: Dhaka municipal waste collection workers demand regular jobs

Hundreds of waste collection workers demonstrated in Dhaka on Tuesday to defend their jobs and threatened to stop collecting waste from households in Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC). The workers fear

that they will lose their jobs if the corporation goes ahead with its current tender process. The workers want the corporation to grant approval for waste management to their current employers who held the contracts.

There are about 19,000 workers employed in the service, which consists of door-to-door collection of kitchen waste which is then transported to landfill. According to reports, DNCC contracts for waste collection are renewed every year but last year's deadline expired in December and the renewal process has not begun yet.

Bangladeshi pharmaceutical employees threaten to strike

Workers from the French-based pharmaceuticals company Sanofi Bangladesh threatened on February 6 to hold a hunger strike if the company continued to ignore their demands for a provident fund, gratuity payments, a pension and compensation if the company is taken over.

The Sanofi Bangladesh Limited Workers-Employees Association alleges that the company plans to leave the business without paying any compensation to its employees. The company has a workforce of around 1,000.

Beximco Pharmaceuticals, a Bangladeshi manufacturer and medicine exporter, has recently announced that it would acquire a 54.6 percent stake in Sanofi Bangladesh, which has operated for over 60 years. The Bangladesh government owns 45.36 percent of the company's shares and operates under Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation.

The union president said management is yet to respond to their demands and have not shown any interest in discussing the issue.

Pakistani police attack protesting government workers in Islamabad

The Pakistani government ordered a police crackdown on multiple protests of hundreds of government employees in Islamabad on Wednesday. Police fired tear gas and arrested at least 24 people when the protesters attempted to march toward the parliament building and begin a sit-down demonstration.

Employees from government departments and ministries are demanding a 40 percent rise in salaries, rejecting the government's 24 percent increase offer.

Teachers and other contract workers from the public education sector want permanent jobs and the removal of wage disparities. The All Pakistan Clerks Association, All Pakistan Government Employees Association and All Pakistan Teachers Association coordinated the protests. Workers from several provinces joined protest.

Dock workers at VICT container terminal in Melbourne to strike

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at the Victoria International Container Terminal (VICT) at Webb Dock in Melbourne have announced that they will be taking industrial action on Tuesday next week. They plan to stop work between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

The MUA, which is a division of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, wants major changes to the original agreement negotiated by the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU), which

covers crane operators at the fully-automated dock.

The MUA, which covers 128 workers at the dock, wants 3.5 percent annual pay increases on top of new classifications that would lift the annual minimum salary by \$20,000, the most senior classification by \$10,000 and a reduction in the standard working week to 37 hours from 42 hours. The MUA is also demanding a week off every 10 weeks so that VICT's four-day-on, four-day-off roster at 12-hour shifts averages out to 37 hours a week.

The union says there is a severe shortage of staff at the facility, requiring employees to work huge amounts of overtime, in many cases between 50 and 70 additional 12-hour shifts during the last year.

VICT has offered its low-paid 65 casual workers, who tie up and fasten containers, a 20 percent wage rise in the first year, 2.5 percent for the second and 3 percent for the third and fourth years. It has also offered to lift pay for the permanent workforce, mostly operating cranes from a control tower, by 11 percent over four years. Ninety percent of workers rejected the company's offer.

Applus LNG platform workers in Western Australia strike

Forty eight Australian Workers Union (AWU) members, employed by Applus on the Burrup and offshore Woodside LNG facilities in northern Western Australia, struck for 48 hours on Tuesday in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

The AWU is part of the Offshore Alliance, which includes the Maritime Union of Australia. The union said that 93 percent of the Applus Woodside workforce voted down the company's non-union EA and 100 percent voted for protected industrial action. The union claimed that Applus' marine and welding inspectors, rope access and engineering crew want the EA to include secure rosters and reverse the cuts in the employment contracts which Applus unilaterally carried out two years ago.

Peters Ice Cream factory workers in Melbourne reject latest pay offer

Production-line workers at the Peters Ice Cream factory in Mulgrave, south-east Melbourne, rejected the company's latest enterprise agreement (EA) at a meeting outside the factory on February 5.

About 150 members of the United Workers Union (UWU) imposed an indefinite ban on overtime on January 15 after rejecting the company's first offer which cut casual employees hourly wage by more than \$9. About 30 percent of the plant's workforce is casual, many workers having been at the company for years without an offer of a secure permanent job.

In the latest offer, unanimously rejected by workers, the company still insisted on cutting the casual hourly base rate to \$26.95 with 25 percent loading. Casuals are currently paid \$31.70 an hour. The offer included a 5 percent pay rise over three years. The union is demanding a slightly higher increase of 7.5 percent over three years—less than the increase in the cost of living for a worker living in Melbourne.

Hungry Panda delivery riders in Sydney protest over pay cut

A group of Hungry Panda food delivery riders stopped work and

demonstrated in Sydney on Monday to protest a 20 percent pay cut and to demand the reinstatement of a fellow rider who was sacked for organising a small strike when the cut was announced.

Riders received a message on January 27 that their pay would be reduced and were given no opportunity to negotiate the cut. A group of riders took strike action over the slashed pay which resulted in rider James Yang being sacked. According to the Transport Workers Union (TWU), company management claimed that the 20 percent pay cut would be used to provide an insurance policy for riders but the offer would be withdrawn if riders did not call off Monday's strike.

A Hungry Panda rider, Xiaojun Chen, was killed in Sydney while working on September 29, two days after Uber Eats rider Dede Fredy died in an accident. Chen's wife, children and elderly parents were left with nothing because Hungry Panda had no insurance.

Weeks after Xiaojun Chen was killed, Hungry Panda failed to show up for its slot at the NSW Government inquiry into the gig economy. Hungry Panda has its headquarters in the UK and targets Chinese communities around the world.



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