

Andhra Pradesh steel workers and youth rally against privatisation; Pakistani transit workers strike for unpaid salaries; Australia: McCormick food production workers strike in Melbourne

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

26 February 2021

Asia

Andhra Pradesh steel workers and youth rally against privatisation

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) workers and supporters held a 24-kilometre protest on February 20 against the Modi government's plan to privatise the company. The marches went through Dondaparthi, Thatichetlapalem, Kancharapalem, Urvashi, Marripalem, the airport and ended at the steel plant's main gate at Kurmannapalem. A public meeting, which attracted a huge crowd of supporters holding placards, was held outside the facility.

The march followed a sit-down protest by thousands of workers in Vijayawada on February 8 opposing the Indian government's approval for 100 percent disinvestment of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), VSP's corporate entity.

VSP, under the Ministry of Steel, currently has a capacity of 7.3 million tons per annum and employs almost 18,000 workers.

India: Kerala public transport workers strike for pay rise

Hundreds of Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers struck for 24 hours on February 22 over delays in the implementation of a salary increase. The strike was organised by the Indian National Trade Union Congress-affiliated Transport Democratic Federation and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh-affiliated Kerala State Transport Employees Sangh.

The unions said the strike notice was issued well in advance but the government refused to hold talks. KSRTC members said that workers have not had a pay increase since 2012.

Tamil Nadu childcare workers and helpers protest in Tirunelveli

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers demonstrated near the Collectorate in Tirunelveli on February 22 over several demands with similar protests by anganwadi workers near Tenkasi and Kanniyakumari Collectorates. The demonstrations followed action by anganwadi and midday meal workers in Chennai on February 9.

The workers want recognition as government employees with time-scale pay and retirement pensions that continue for the family of a deceased worker. They also want a 500,000-rupee (\$US13,812) gratuity on retirement and 50,000 rupees gratuity for assistants. Chennai demonstrators also demanded 450,000 vacancies be filled with permanent jobs and time-scale pay for 350,000 employees.

Tamil Nadu state government employees arrested during protest

A group of government employees were arrested on February 19 while demonstrating outside the state secretariat. Administration officials met with the protesters but the meeting ended in a scuffle. Police detained all the protesters after they removed some barricades and moved closer to the secretariat building. They were held until late evening.

Workers want administrative reform and withdrawal of a new pension scheme (NPS) and its replacement with the 1995 scheme. The NPS, a defined contribution scheme that does not guarantee a fixed or minimum pension on retirement, was introduced by the Indian government in 2004 and implemented by most state governments.

Workers are required to pay 10 percent of their wages into the scheme, which is matched by the government, and currently invested in equity shares. Public sector workers across India say the pension is too low and not secured because it is tied to the stock markets.

Under the previous system, the entire pension amount was covered by the government and paid on the basis of 50 percent of the last drawn salary by the employee.

Government bank employees hold national protest

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) workers held a full-day sit down protest at all centres on Monday over the disparity in benefits paid to NABARD employees and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) workers. NABARD employees want their benefits to be on a par with RBI employees.

The workers said they plan to hold a full-day strike on March 30 and will be holding other protests leading up to the strike.

Pakistan: Lahore transit workers strike for unpaid salaries

Speedo Bus workers in Lahore struck and held a demonstration on Monday to demand Inbox, the company operating the service, pay their last four months' salaries. The company is a private contractor for the government's Mass Transit Authority. More than 80,000 passengers use the bus services each day.

Inbox claimed it was unable to pay workers' salaries because the transit authority was behind in subsidy payments. The transit authority in turn blamed the government for its delay in funding. The company later promised to pay two months salaries within two days. The outsourcing of services to private firms has increased steadily as successive governments continue the privatisation of state-run enterprises.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government workers demand overdue salaries

Bannu Development Authority workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demonstrated on February 18 to demand outstanding salaries. Over 100 employees have not been paid for four months. The protesters warned authorities that they will suspend cleaning services in towns throughout the area and cut off the water supply if their salaries are not paid immediately.

Bangladeshi private sector jute workers threaten to strike

Workers from privately-owned jute mills in Khulna have threatened to strike over six demands, including the payment of outstanding wages. They warned the authorities if their demands were not met by February 25 they would block roads and rail tracks.

The workers, who have been protesting for the past three months, also want closed jute mills reopened and retrenched workers reemployed. The Private Jute Mill Workers and Employees Federation president said any assurances from the mill owners must be in writing.

Australia

Applus LNG platform workers in Western Australia ramp up strike action

Forty-eight Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by Applus on the Burrup and offshore Woodside LNG facilities in northern Western Australia plan to begin a five-day stoppage on Saturday February 27. The strike follows a 48-hour walkout on February 9 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The AWU said Applus' marine and welding inspectors, rope access and engineering crew want the enterprise agreement to include secure rosters and the reversal of cuts in employment contracts that Applus unilaterally carried out two years ago. The company wants flexible rosters and has rejected the union's key bargaining claims. Applus responded to the February 9 stoppage by threatening to reduce pay rates for new starters.

Shell's Prelude offshore workers still striking

Over 60 construction and maintenance workers on Shell's Prelude offshore LNG platform off the north coast of Western Australia are continuing four-hour rolling stoppages three days a week and work bans. Their action began on October 9 in a dispute over their first union-negotiated enterprise agreement.

The dispute is between the Offshore Alliance and the Electrical Trades Union, and their employer Monadelphous (Monos), which is contracted by Shell to maintain the infrastructure.

The highly-skilled workforce is 100 percent casual and not covered by a negotiated agreement. The unions claim that Monos wants to impose a four-year enterprise agreement that will put workers on wages 30 percent below the industry standard.

The unions want to standardise wages and conditions and have all workers in the offshore oil and gas industry covered by union-negotiated agreements. This would include job security and permanent positions, regular rosters and industry standard pay rates, shift allowances, superannuation, travel pay and other benefits.

Visa Global truck drivers in Sydney strike for better pay

Over 50 workers from Visa Global Logistics at Erskine Park and Banksmeadow in Sydney, New South Wales, walked off the job on February 18 in a dispute over a pay cut and to demand a union-negotiated enterprise agreement.

According to the Transport Workers Union (TWU), Visa reduced drivers' pay rates and cut an allowance in March. Workers joined the union and started negotiating previously existing conditions. Some drivers claim they are now over \$10,000 worse off per annum. The union claimed that Visa is not negotiating and wants its drivers to sign a "substandard" agreement.

Fair Work Commission orders industrial action to cease at VICT terminal in Port Melbourne

On February 19, the Fair Work Commission (FWC) ordered the suspension of all industrial action by 128 Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at the Webb Dock in Port Melbourne. The order was in response to an application from Victoria International Container Terminal (VICT). The suspension will remain in force until the FWC decides to review the case.

MUA members held a four-hour stoppage on February 16, followed by a 24-hour strike on February 19. They planned to walk out for 36-hours on February 21. Other planned action included bans on overtime, use of personal phones for work purposes and other work-related tasks.

The MUA wants 3.5 percent annual pay increases on top of new classifications that would lift the annual minimum salary by \$20,000 and a reduction in the standard working week to 37 hours, down from 42 hours. It 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.

VICT has offered its low-paid 65 casual workers 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 increase 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.

McCormick food production workers strike in Melbourne

Eighty-eight United Worker Union members (UWU) at McCormick Foods Australia in Clayton, Melbourne stopped work on Thursday to oppose the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Action could range from selected work bans, work stoppages of 4 hours or 24 hours and unlimited stoppages of indefinite duration.

McCormick workers have not had a wage rise since the 2014–2016 enterprise agreement with the company. In 2017, when workers took industrial action for a new deal, the company refused their demands.

The company's current proposed agreement will cut penalty rates, paid meal breaks and overtime with no increase in pay rates. The UWU wants an annual 3 percent pay rise which does not compensate for inflation increases and almost five years in lost real wages.

Remondis waste management truck drivers in Newcastle strike

Twenty-six members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) employed by Remondis to transport commercial and industrial waste in Newcastle, New South Wales, stopped work on February 18 in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The TWU claimed that Remondis was trying to convince workers to sign up to a "dodgy" agreement.

Drivers also complained that Remondis had stripped them, without notice, of a paid overtime rest break that sees some drivers losing up to \$150 per week.



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