

Workers Struggles: Asia and New Zealand

7 January 2022

Asia

India: Tamil Nadu sanitation workers protest outsourcing of jobs

Around 1,700 sanitation workers from the Erode City Municipal Corporation in Tamil Nadu protested outside the corporation office on January 5 to demand withdrawal of an order issued on October 2 that facilitated the outsourcing of their jobs. The workers demanded permanent jobs for contract and daily wage workers.

Among other duties, the workers collect garbage, clean residential areas, markets and bazaar streets, remove obstructions in drainage channels and sort municipal solid waste and send it for recycling.

The protest was coordinated by the Stalinist Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Workers said they will strike on January 24 if their demands are not met.

Tamil Nadu textile workers protest

Workers from the government-owned National Textile Corporation (NTC) mills in Tamil Nadu demonstrated in Coimbatore, the state capital, on January 5 over several demands. These included the payment of two months' outstanding wages and a bonus and reopening of the NTC's 23 textile mills.

Almost 25,000 workers, including almost 15,000 permanents, are employed at the mills. The mills have remained closed since they were locked down in March 2021 with workers only paid half of their wages. As many as 23 trade unions have united to demand the central government reopen the mills. Workers said they will demonstrate in Kerala next month and organise protests later in Ahmedabad.

Emergency medical services workers in Meghalaya on strike

About 250 ambulance emergency medical services workers from the GVK Emergency Management and Research Institute (GVK EMRI) at Shillong, in Meghalaya state, began a one-week strike on January 3 to demand a pay increase and job security. The workers (drivers and medical technicians) are members of the Meghalaya EMRI Workers Union (MEMRIWU).

MEMRIWU told the media that in 2018 the workers initially advanced 36 demands but the union reduced them to eight and now just two. The union is also calling for the government to end the private-public partnership with GVK EMRI and demanding the government take over the service.

The state government and the National Health Mission quickly

attempted to schedule a meeting with the workers declaring that the healthcare service should not be disrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Punjab government health workers strike over pay and allowances

Government health department workers, organised by six health unions, stopped work on January 1 and demonstrated outside their respective healthcare centres. They alleged that the state government is planning to withdraw 40 long-established allowances that have been paid during the past 25 years. Workers want special facilities and entitlements outlined in the long-awaited Sixth Pay Commission.

The strike was organised by the Government Paramedical Health Employees Union, Punjab State Pharmacy Officers Union, PGMC Association, Medical Lab Technicians Union, Multipurpose Health Workers Union and the Punjab and National Health Mission Union.

Chhattisgarh police attack protesting power plant workers in Madwa

Chhattisgarh police used water canon to violently disperse a protest in Madwa by contract workers from the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Thermal Power Plant. Media claimed that 20 police were injured and police cars damaged during the intervention.

Contract workers from the plant operated by the Chhattisgarh State Power Company had been protesting at the plant since December 6 demanding to be made permanent.

Indian Telephone Industries workers protest in Bengaluru against sackings

Terminated workers from the government-owned telecommunications equipment manufacturer Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) have been protesting for over a month outside the company's facility in Bengaluru, Karnataka state.

ITI laid off more than 80 workers after they formed a union. The workers were notified that they had been terminated when they arrived for work on December 1 and have since been refused entry. On January 2, Gangavathi city civil workers held a demonstration in support of the ITI workers.

Kerala government doctors protest pay anomalies

Government doctors have been protesting outside the Kerala Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram since December 8 about pay anomalies for doctors in the eleventh pay revision. They have established a medical camp on the roadside and are providing free check-ups for the public.

A spokesperson from the Kerala Medical Officers Association said that when their salaries were last revised doctors had a salary cut of 8,000 rupees and the removal of some allowances and entitlements.

Doctors said they are planning a protest march from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram from January 6 to 17 and mass leave on January 18 if the government continues to ignore their grievance.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government employees protest removal of allowances

Government sector workers protested in Balambat, Lower Dir, on Tuesday against the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government over cuts to firewood and charcoal allowances. The protest included a march through the city to the deputy commissioner's office. Protesters threatened that they would boycott the second phase of the local government elections to be held in March if the allowances are not reinstated.

The All Government Employees Grand Alliance, an umbrella union consisting of multiple government sector unions, called off the protests on the same day when the local authorities promised to write to the provincial government on the issue. These sorts of promises are regularly repudiated by local, state and federal government authorities.

Sri Lanka: Southern Province government health workers walk out

Southern Province health workers in nine base hospitals and 47 government medical health services offices walked out for 24 hours on Wednesday in protest over several demands, including for higher allowances and for promotions. Nurses, paramedics, medical and intermediate professionals marched towards Galle city, the provincial capital and demonstrated outside the main bus stand.

The walkout was part of nationwide health workers' province-by-province protests, which began in December and are coordinated by the Government Health Professionals' Federation.

Cambodian police arrest protesting NagaWorld casino union leaders

About 1,000 striking workers from the NagaWorld casino complex in Phnom Penh have been holding daily protests since mid-December outside the casino and hotel complex. They are demanding reinstatement of 365 terminated union members and an end to alleged discrimination against the union. Police alleged that the strike and protest are illegal and have arrested 12 union leaders on a charge of "incitement to commit a felony" and are holding 17 other protesters "for questioning."

In April, the Hong Kong-owned complex used the COVID-19 pandemic as the excuse to restructure its operations and target the union organisation. It laid off 1,329 of its 8,000-strong work force. Only 85 workers accepted a severance payout which the union claimed was less than what is required by law.

Protesting workers want reinstatement of the 365 union members and review of termination packages to bring them in line with Cambodia's Labor Law.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the NagaWorld casino complex recorded gross gaming revenue of just above \$US869 million in 2020, delivering a profit of \$102 million. There are over 100 casinos in Cambodia catering for foreign tourists only.

New Zealand

New Zealand casino workers strike on New Year's Eve

About 40 food and beverage workers from the SkyCity casino walked off the job at midnight on December 31 over a pay dispute. The Unite Union, representing the mainly young workers, is calling for a "living wage," and pay rates to be raised to the same level as SkyCity Auckland.

Unite trumpeted the strike, which lasted into early New Year's Day, as "the world's first workplace strike of the year." Union organiser Joe Carolan said the COVID pandemic had led to huge changes in how people worked, and hospitality employees were no longer willing to work long hours without living wages. "We are going to strike hard in hospitality this year. This is an industry that is well overdue," he said.

Unite, in fact, is simply calling for a "pathway to a living wage" in the current dispute. The official Living Wage campaign is a fraud. It contends that \$22.75 per hour, marginally above the legal minimum of \$20 an hour, is enough to live on. With the average house price skyrocketing to over \$NZ1 million nationwide, and the NZ Reserve Bank forecasting inflation to hit 5.7 percent this year, it is manifestly inadequate.

A SkyCity spokeswoman said the company had recently reached an agreement with both Unite and E t? unions at SkyCity Auckland and with E t? at SkyCity Hamilton.



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