Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

14 January 2022

Asia

India: Dongsong and Foxconn workers in Tamil Nadu demand jobs

Former employees of electronics manufacturers Dongsong Electronics and Foxconn in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, have been protesting since January 6 to demand re-employment. More than 1,300 workers lost their jobs at Dongsong and Foxconn when the factories closed in 2016 and 2018 respectively. Both companies, however, have resumed production.

The protest was joined by workers from the Kishkinta amusement park after management refused to re-employ 70 workers after the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were relaxed in May 2020.

Delhi University staff strike over unpaid wages and allowances

Teaching and non-teaching staff at the Delhi University (DU) struck for 24 hours on January 6. The strike was called by the DU Teachers' Association (DUTA) in protest against funding cuts to 12 colleges by the Delhi city government. DUTA alleged this resulted in non-payment of salaries to thousands of employees over the past six months and the non-reimbursement of medical bills, allowances and other arrears during the past two years.

Jammu and Kashmir retired government transport workers demonstrate

Retired State Road Transport Corporation workers protested in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, on January 11 to demand unpaid benefits. Workers said they retired in mid-2019 and are still waiting for leave salary and other retirement benefits. The retired workers alleged that for the past three years they have been going from one government office to another, with no results. Nearly 200 workers are affected.

Andhra Pradesh village secretariat workers demand pay rise

Striking village secretariat staff in Anantapur district held a sit-down protest inside the Bukkarayasamudram Mandal Parishad Development Officers (MPDO) premises on January 10. The protest was part of a 72-hour strike to demand implementation of the approved pay scale. The District Collector had warned the secretariat employees not to take any action and ordered them to continue vaccinations and implementation of the One-Time Settlement scheme.

Workers ignored the Collector's warnings and chanted slogans while holding protest placards. Demonstrators said some workers who had completed the two-year probation period are only being paid 15,000 rupees ($US202) per month.

Jharkhand fertilizer factory workers strike over safety

Hindustan Fertilizers factory workers went on strike on January 11 in Danbad over an incident that led to the injury of two casual workers.

The strikers demanded that the cost of medical treatment be borne by the company. They demanded that the injured workers be given permanent jobs and that if their injuries prevented them from working, the company should offer jobs to their kin. The Centre for Indian Trade Unions organised the strike.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers oppose privatisation

Public sector health workers, paramedics, nurses and other support staff, in Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, held an anti-privatisation demonstration on January 6 against the Medical Teaching Institutions reform act of 2019. The government is pressing ahead with its plan to force the state-backed health facilities to fund these institutions themselves.

Out-patient departments in hospitals across the district were closed during the protest. Despite massive popular support, the unions restricted the action to just one day.

The government, which has already appointed Boards of Governors, a key component of the restructuring plan, to carry out the so-called reforms, has been able to do this because the unions have blocked and isolated the health workers, who have also taken action in other provinces. The unions have also prevented health workers joining hands with other public sector workers who are fighting against privatisation in their respective areas. Privatisation of the public sector is a major demand of the International Monetary Fund.

Karachi hospital health workers strike for COVID-19 risk allowance

National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) workers in Karachi continued strike action for a second day on Wednesday, forcing the hospital to shut down all services except emergency care. Paramedical and other support staff in the hospital led the campaign. Protesters closed the hospital gates, only allowing ambulances to enter.

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Workers are protesting the continued failure of the authorities to pay COVID-19 risk and professional health allowances. They are also demanding all contract employees to be made permanent and for the immediate implementation of all outstanding promotions.

The public hospital is the largest tertiary cardiac care facility in Pakistan with patients traveling from far-flung parts of the country for treatment at the facility. Despite the critical services provided by the hospital and its staff, workers have been repeatedly ignored by management. According to press reports, shortages of supplies and equipment at the facility are forcing staff to adopt non-recommended procedures.

Health workers in Sri Lanka's North Central Province walk out

More than 4,000 paramedics from hospitals and health centres in Sri Lanka's North Central Province walked out for 24 hours on Wednesday over several demands, including for higher salaries and allowances, and for promotions. The Government Health Professionals' Federation, consisting of 15 trade unions, held a protest march and rally outside the Anuradhapura Teaching hospital in the provincial capital.

The health workers' strike followed similar walkouts across five provinces in December as part of a series of island-wide protests. The Federation has threatened to call a general strike until its demands are granted.

Sri Lankan school principals strike and protest

Thousands of Teachers' Principals Union members struck on Wednesday over several grievances. These included illegal recruitment of principals, unjustifiable principal grades in the new salary circular and forced terminations. Union members marched to the education ministry office in Battaramulla, on the outskirts of Colombo, where they held a demonstration.

Taiwan telecommunications workers protest

Several hundred workers from Chunghwa Telecom, Taiwan's largest telecommunications company, demonstrated outside the Ministry of Transport and Communications in Taipei on Tuesday. They demanded the company begin negotiations for improved pay. Workers claimed the company had failed to deliver on its promise to give a pay rise above 4 percent for this year.

Chunghwa Telecom, which is 35 percent government owned, made the promise after Premier Su Tseng-chang last year announced a 4 percent pay increase for all civil servants, teachers and military personnel. Company management later announced the average salary increase this year would just be about 4 percent with a one-time incentive bonus of $NT5,000 ($US183.50) for each employee.

The Chunghwa Telecom Workers' Union has also demanded a rise in contributions to employee's pension fund to more than 15 percent of salary.

Australia

Australia: Patrick Terminals to terminate enterprise agreement

Patrick Terminals, which has port terminals around Australia, has applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to have its current enterprise agreement (EA) covering 1,800 dock workers terminated. The application will be heard in the FWC on Monday.

If the application is successful workers will be forced onto the industry award. Wages would be slashed by more than 50 percent and Patrick could do away with multi-week rosters and move to a system where workers are notified of shift times at 4 p.m. on the preceding day.

Patrick and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) have been in dispute since 2019 over the company's proposed EA. The MUA in October 2020 agreed to forgo its original claim for annual 6 percent pay increases over four years and attempted to strike a "peace deal" comprising a two-year ban on strikes, a 2.5 percent pay increase (below inflation of 3 percent) and the retention of existing EA conditions, which was rejected by Patricks.

Workers are opposing Patrick's use of casual labour, its current rostering regime and recruitment plans. The union wants a proportion of new hires to be selected from current employees' friends and family in consultation with the union. This is similar to a deal the union negotiated with Melbourne's fully automated VICT container operator and included a 10-year no-strike agreement.

The MUA has not called for resumption of industrial action but instead appealed to the Australian government to intervene "to force" Patrick back to the negotiating table. It warns that cancellation of the EA would have a "catastrophic impact" on shifts and productivity and put an end to 24-hour operations at Patrick's Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth terminals.

Rheem hot water systems factory workers in Sydney strike

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members at the Rheem factory in Rydalmere, Sydney stopped work for one hour on Thursday after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a one-hour strike on December 9 over Rheem's low wage offer and its plans to offshore some of their work. The union covers over 140 workers at the factory.

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