

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

18 March 2022

Asia

Air India maintenance technicians strike

Around 1,700 aircraft maintenance technicians at Air India (AI) began an indefinite strike in Mumbai on March 15. The technicians are employed on fixed-term contracts with Air India Engineering Services Limited (AIESL), a government-owned company. The workers want a salary increase, employment contract renewal and a dearness allowance.

On the same day, AI engineers across India held a one-day protest by working without using tools. They were protesting low salaries and the lack of medical facilities. It was the first national strike by AI workers since the national carrier was sold to Tata in October 2021.

Doctors at Maharashtra's state-run colleges intensify industrial action

Teaching doctors at state-run medical colleges in Maharashtra extended strike action on March 14 to include a boycott of clinical work. Permanent and temporary medical teachers, who are also doctors, have not held classes for more than a month. They are demanding implementation of the seventh pay commission, payment of arrears, no transfers to new colleges and improved promotions.

The doctors stepped up their action because there had been no response from the government over their demands, despite a month and a half of demonstrations and hunger protests.

Haryana Roadways workers protest privatisation

Haryana Roadways workers demonstrated in Chandigarh on March 13 against the privatisation of public transport. Roadways workers from across the state assembled at Karan Park and marched toward the chief minister's residence but were stopped by a heavy contingent of police.

They handed a memorandum of their demands to a government representative, which included equal grade pay, restoration of the old pension scheme, permanency of services for contract workers and the filling of vacant posts.

Life Insurance Corporation workers in Tamil Nadu oppose privatisation

Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India workers demonstrated in Madurai, Tamil Nadu on March 10 in opposition to the Modi government's move to sell shares in the state-owned enterprise. They held a candlelight march and demonstrated outside all the LIC offices in Madurai district after regular office hours. Similar demonstrations were held in nearby districts, including Theni, Dindigul, Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga and Virudhunagar.

Insurance Corporation Employees' Union members and other organisations are opposing the selling of profit-making Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). They said the LIC was a huge contributor to the national economy and that its shares should not be sold to private players.

LIC workers have warned that nationwide protests would be held on the day LIC shares are listed in the stock exchange.

Rajasthan government computer operators demand permanency

Contract computer operators working under the Rajasthan state government's free medicine and investigation scheme have been protesting for more than two weeks in Jaipur over several demands. Protesters include clinical record assistants, medical information assistants and lower division clerks. Several have been on a hunger strike for nine days.

There are 4,041 computer operators under the free medicine scheme and 713 in the free investigation scheme. They want an increase in monthly salaries from 8,500 rupees (\$US111) to 18,000, permanent positions for workers with ten years' service and to be officially classified as "computer operators."

Tamil Nadu road tollgate workers strike over pay

Sixty-seven tollgate workers in Kallakurichi, on the Chennai to Salem highway, walked out on March 15 over unpaid wages. The workers claimed that the contractor has not paid their full wage for the past eight months and accused the contractor of trying to downsize the workforce to 40.

Bangladeshi temporary railway gatekeepers demand permanent jobs

Hundreds of Bangladesh Railway level-crossing gatekeepers have been protesting since February 27 outside the Bangladesh Railway Building in Dhaka to demand permanency. They suspended their protest for three months on Tuesday after meeting with the railway minister.

Over 1,800 gatekeepers were recruited on a temporary basis in 2016 to

rehabilitate and develop level-crossings at Bangladesh Railway's west and east zones. They are paid only 14,450 taka (\$US168) per month.

According to Bangladesh Railway, there are no gatekeepers at about 900 authorised level-crossings and none of the unauthorised level crossings are manned. About 65 percent of the level crossings, both authorised and unauthorised, do not have gatekeepers.

Sri Lankan fishing-net workers strike over non-payment of wages

Hundreds of employees from the government-owned North Sea Company at Lunuwila and Wennappuwa, on the outskirts of Colombo, struck on Monday over a range of grievances. The North Sea Company is the largest government factory and an affiliate of the ministry of fisheries. It has a 300-strong workforce.

Workers accused management of non-payment of wages on the due date, not paying into employees' provident fund for 20 months, only supplying 50 percent of the raw material to make nets for required quota and other complaints. The workers have threatened an indefinite strike if their grievances continue to be ignored.

Sri Lankan government development officers strike over pay

Thousands of development officers held a sick note strike on Monday demanding resolution of ongoing pay anomalies. Colombo district workers marched to the education ministry to demand immediate action over salary anomalies and management's non-implementation of promotions affecting 100,000 development officers in the public and provincial public service.

The Development Services Association and the Employed Graduates Association organised a similar protest at Badulla, the Uva provincial capital. Badulla workers were joined by workers from Moneragala districts and marched from the Badulla Senanayake grounds to the Badulla central bus stand where they held a protest.

Sri Lankan government health workers protest over long pending demands

Federation of Health Professionals, Joint Council of Professions Supplementary to Medicine, Public Health Inspectors and Government Nurses Association members protested outside the Colombo National Hospital on Monday demanding resolution of outstanding demands. Demonstrations were also held at the Sri Lanka National Hospital in Western province and Batticaloa Hospital in Eastern province.

The hundreds of demonstrating workers were demanding elimination of salary anomalies, the granting of second-class promotions by five years and first-class promotions by seven years, the elimination of allowance inequality and improved recruitment procedures. The nurses' union and the Federation of Health Professionals, which consists of 18 health unions, held a nine-day strike in early February and a two-day strike on March 2 over these issues.

On Thursday, junior health workers from North-Central province walked out in protest over the non-payment of the COVID-19 special allowance of 7,500 rupees (\$US30). They were joined by workers from

Ayurveda and Kegalle hospitals (85 km from Colombo), affecting services at all hospitals in the North-Central province.

Filipino small passenger vehicle drivers and operators announce two-day strike

Drivers and operators of public utility vehicles (PUVs) in several major cities in the Philippines have called a two-day strike for March 21 to demand relief from the soaring rise of fuel prices. The workers are organised by several transport groups such as PISTON, UNDOC, SSTONE and FEBACDA.

Transport groups covering small passenger vehicles, such as jeepneys and other PUVs, are demanding deferment of the 12 percent value added tax (VAT) on fuel, immediate distribution of the 6,500-peso (\$US124.80) subsidy to drivers of tricycles, taxis, jeepneys, mini-buses, and other public utility vehicles and the 7,200-peso assistance for operators.

Other demands include the scrapping of the 12-percent VAT on water, electricity, and basic commodities, removal of an excise tax on public utility vehicles, abolition of the Oil Deregulation Law and an end to the government's so-called modernisation program. The "modernisation program" forces jeepney owners to modernise their vehicles at great expense to comply with strict emission controls. Drivers have accused the government of using the law to reduce the number of driver/owner jeepneys plying the streets.

A Department of Energy spokesman said that this week is the 11th consecutive week of increases in oil prices recorded this year. Fuels affected are diesel, gasoline and kerosene. Jeepney drivers operating in metro areas said that with fuel prices so high they are not able to earn enough to buy food after paying expenses. PISTON said many PUV drivers are returning to their home towns in order to survive.

Australia

Western Australian child protection and family support workers walk out

About 160 child protection workers employed by Western Australia's Department of Communities held a snap strike on Tuesday after an almost unanimous lunchtime vote at a stop work meeting in Perth. Members of the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Services Association (CPUE/CSA) at department offices in Fremantle and Joondalup joined the strike.

Western Australia's child protection and family support workers are opposing the state Labor government's decades-long underfunding, understaffing, mismanagement and disregard for the welfare of vulnerable children and families that has intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the CPSU/CSA, staff shortages and workloads mean that there are currently at least 900 vulnerable children, 2- to 5-years-old, and their families without a caseworker. The union said the walkout was in frustration that repeated requests to the government for an additional 200 full-time case workers has been ignored.

One striking worker told media that people were crying at work while others were not coming in at all. Another long-term child protection staffer said they had never seen such poor working conditions during their time with the agency.

engage other helicopter contractors to act as strike breakers.

PHI transfers workers between offshore LNG platforms and land facilities at Broom in northern Western Australia. The 15 Australia Licenced Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA) members want protection of jobs against outsourcing to low-wage labour hire contractors, an end to fixed-term employment contracts and for all engineers to be employed on a permanent basis, and the locking in of even-time rosters and paid annual leave.

The ALAEA is represented in negotiations by the Offshore Alliance (OA), (made up of the Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia). OA claims that PHI want an EA which gives the company an ability to sack highly skilled helicopter engineers at the end of their fixed term contracts and displace them with low wage labour hire contractors.

Queensland: Ipswich City Council workers strike

About 50 outdoor workers from the Ipswich City Council, in southeast Queensland, stopped work on March 11 and demonstrated in front of the council building to demand a better pay offer in the council's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The workers are members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU).

The TWU claimed that negotiations for a new EA have been ongoing for nine months with the council refusing to give pay increases that other employees have received, effectively offering a pay cut. The council has rejected the combined unions' demand for increased superannuation contributions.

Queensland coal freight train workers take industrial action

Train drivers from Pacific National (PN) Coal, which transports coal from mines across Queensland, imposed work bans on March 11 in their dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The drivers are members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE). They want an allowance for living in a camp during the working week, additional time off while in barracks, job share, improved redundancy and retirement clause and increased parental leave. This has been rejected by PN Coals which wants to relay working using a crew van across Queensland depots and cuts to productivity-based bonuses.

Vocational education teachers in South Australia strike

Vocational education teachers at South Australia's TAFE (TAFE SA) colleges walked off the job for the day on Thursday in a dispute over the government's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The Australian Education Union (AEU) claimed TAFE SA backed out on an agreement that would see updates made to the terms and conditions of the 2016 agreement.

The union said workers are opposed to TAFE SA plans to make changes to the redeployment, retraining and redundancy clause along with the minimum qualification requirements for the new lecturer classification. Teachers are also opposed to a proposal in the EA that changed the employer from TAFE SA to TAFE's chief executive.

PHI helicopter engineers' strike in Western Australia delayed by industrial court

The planned three-week strike by helicopter maintenance engineers at Petroleum Helicopters International (PHI) in Western Australia has been pushed back from commencing on March 16 to April 6 by the Fair Work Commission. The commission accepted the company's argument for a 20-day delay on a vague safety issue. The delay has given time for PHI to



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