

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

Our reporters
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Asia

Around 700,000 Gujarat state government employees held a day-long demonstration in Gandhinagar on Monday over several demands. They called for reinstatement of the old pension scheme (OPS), abolition of fixed pay arrangements and implementation of the Seventh Pay Commission recommendations which have been pending since 2015.

Protesters came from 72 different state departments including revenue, panchayat, health industrial training institutes, regional transport, and education. The protest was organised by the National Old Pension Restoration United Front and the Gujarat State United Front.

School teachers held protests across Gujarat in April demanding reinstatement of the OPS which was withdrawn in December 2003. The old scheme did not require a 10 percent contribution from employees' salaries and the pension was determined by the employees' final salary. Under the new scheme the pension is reduced and there is no death benefit.

Ford auto plant workers in Maraimalai Nagar, near Chennai, held a sit-down protest at the factory on May 7 to demand permanent jobs. Ford has decided to wind up its operations in India. Ford's auto plant in Gujarat state was taken over by Tata Motors with all workers retaining their jobs.

Maraimalai Nagar plant management recently held so-called settlement talks with workers who have been demanding the same job security as workers at the Gujarat plant.

Maraimalai Nagar plant workers stopped work for two days in February in a desperate attempt to keep their jobs. The Chennai Ford Employees Union has restricted all industrial action to limited protests, mainly confining workers to toothless appeals to the Tamil Nadu government and Ford.

At least 10 protesting workers were injured at a stainless-steel factory at Palghar in Maharashtra on May 7 after being attacked by police using canes. At least 19 police and factory officials were injured when the workers refused to end the protest.

The workers were opposing a previous assault by management staff and the victimisation of union members after they announced that they would strike on May 16. Workers were determined to maintain their actions after management said that they would be replaced by contract workers if they went through with the industrial action.

Contract workers from Punjab Roadways and Punbus protested outside the depot workshop at Tarn Taran on Tuesday. They were demanding permanent jobs for all contract workers and equal pay for equal work. The Punjab Roadways/Punbus Contract Workers' Union organised the protest which involved conductors, drivers and clerical staff. The workers have also demanded reinstatement of terminated employees.

Former noon-meal workers and anganwadi (childcare) workers demonstrated outside the Panchayat Union Office in Reddiarchatram on Monday to demand an increase in the pension.

Tamil Nadu Noon Meal and Anganwadi Pensioner's Association members shouted slogans condemning the state government for paying a monthly pension of just 2,000-rupees (\$US26) to workers after many years of service. Protesters demanded a minimum pension of 7,850 rupees per month and a dearness allowance. Tamil Nadu Government Employees Association members also participated in the demonstration.

Thousands of contract sanitation workers from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) demonstrated at the corporation's head office in Hyderabad on Monday demanding permanent jobs and increased wages.

Workers want a minimum wage of 26,000 rupees

(\$US337). They denounced the municipal administration and Urban Development Minister. Around 28,000 sanitation workers are currently working on a contract and outsourcing basis in the GHMC.

Struggling teachers employed at East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) schools protested outside the civic body's headquarters in Delhi on Monday to demand salaries due from last December. The EDMC claimed it had no money for wages.

Protests over the issue of non-payment of salaries are regular events. In November, EDMC teachers held a protest march through New Delhi to EDMC headquarters threatening to go on indefinite strike. They had not been paid two months. It followed action by sanitation workers over the non-payment of wages. Authorities said they could not pay all overdue salaries and only paid one month's wages.

Madurai Kamaraj University teachers demonstrated in Madurai on May 8 to demand full implementation of the Career Advancement Scheme for college teachers as per the Government Order in January 2021. The Madurai Kamaraj University Teachers' Association said PhD teachers should be provided with this incentive. They also demanded abolition of the socially regressive Contributory Pension Scheme.

Australia

Twenty-eight maintenance workers at the AMPOL oil refinery in Brisbane walked off on Friday morning in their dispute for a pay increase. The Electrical Trades Union members are employed by multinational maintenance contractor Wood Australia. Workers rejected the company's sub inflation 2.5 percent pay increase offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. The official CPI increase for Brisbane is currently 6 percent and increasing.

Region 6 bus drivers operating out of four depots in Sydney's CBD, inner west and southern suburbs turned off their vehicle's fare-collecting machines for the day on May 6 in their dispute with Transit Services over wages. Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members are calling for an end to Transit Services' two-tiered wages

system which sees pay and conditions differ amongst workers doing the same job, on the same routes.

The action followed a 24-hour strike by members of the RTBU and Transport Workers Union (TWU) on April 11 in which 2,000 drivers in Sydney, Newcastle, Queanbeyan and the New South Wales (NSW) Central Coast opposed unsafe working conditions, including being forced to drive for more than five hours without a break, lack of meal and bathroom facilities, driver shortages and pressure to meet impossible timetables.

Since 2013, when the unions allowed the government bus network to be progressively privatised and split into 15 regions and handed over to multitude private operators under contract, wages and conditions have varied considerably. Both unions have signed off on successive individual enterprise agreements which led to the current situation.

The unions are calling for "same job, same pay" but have not advanced any concrete demands that would include annual pay increases in line with the rapidly increasing consumer price index (CPI), which is currently above 5 percent. The RTBU claimed that the latest region 6 token industrial action was causing a headache for Transit Services and the government while at the same time thanking commuters for their ongoing support in their fight for "fair" pay and conditions. "That's a win-win in our books," a union representative falsely claimed.

Nine Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members employed by maintenance contractor UGL Solutions at the University of Queensland St Lucia campus in Brisbane, Queensland's capital, walked off the job on May 6 in opposition to UGL's proposed enterprise agreement. The workers have not had a pay increase for three years.



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