Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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India: Puducherry workers oppose closure of state-run textile mills

All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) members and others trade union members joined workers in Puducherry on Tuesday to protest the government's plan to close the state-run the Swadeshi and Bharathi textile mills. Protesters demanded that the mills be restructured and revived to provide much needed jobs to hundreds of people. The unemployment rate in Puducherry in June 2021 was 47.1 percent, the highest in India.

The mills were closed on September 2020 but around 300 workers stayed on and did some renovations to keep them operating. The government claimed that the mills were running at a loss and had to be closed. Workers claimed the losses were due to mismanagement and the lack of modernisation.

Telangana college teachers hold state-wide protest

Teachers from district colleges across Telangana stopped work on Wednesday to protest delays in releasing the schedule for teacher's transfers and promotions.

The Upadhyaya Sanghala Porata Committee (USPC) called for the chief minister to intervene and direct the education department to resolve the issue. They also demanded resolution of problems relating to Government Order 317, including spousal and mutual transfers. Other calls were for an end to delays in salary payments and the clearing of supplementary bills.

Tamil Nadu water and sewerage workers strike

Hundreds of contract sanitation workers from the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) struck on Monday and demonstrated at the utility's office in Chennai to demand permanent jobs. Nearly 1,900 sanitation workers are employed by the board in various categories.

Protesters said several workers had been serving on contract basis for up to 20 years on poverty daily wages of between 499 rupees ($US6.5) and 867 rupees, depending on their job category. They demanded the CMWSSB to phase in permanent employment based on seniority. They also complained about lack of job security and that their family were not compensated if the employee died at work.

Tamil Nadu textile workers hold two-day strike

Textile units, including manufacturers, exporters, yarn traders, dyeing, printing and other ancillary units, in Karur, Tamil Nadu, closed down operations for two days on Monday and Tuesday to demand the Modi government control the rising prices of cotton and cotton yarn. They demanded that these products be brought under the essential commodities list so that production and sales be monitored to avoid artificial demand and called for a temporary ban on cotton and cotton yarn exports.

There are 20,000 textile manufacturing and allied working units providing direct and indirect employment to one million workers in Tamil Nadu's textile city Tiruppur.

Brick kiln workers in Punjab strike

Brick kiln workers in Fazilka, Punjab state have been on strike since May 13 to demand higher pay. Their action is disrupting traffic on the highway near Lamochar Kalan village.

Workers alleged that brick-kiln owners were only paying 500 rupees ($US6.5) per 1,000 bricks in contravention of the official fixed price of 820 rupees. They complained that the union had submitted a complaint to the local magistrate two months ago but that union officials were not taking action and accused them of being "pro-owner."

One media report claimed that a local government official said that brick kiln owners have an agreement with the government to pay about 25–30 percent less than the fixed wage, claiming that automation had reduced labour content.

Punjabi University non-teaching staff protest

Non-teaching employees at the Punjabi University in Patiala demonstrated on May 12, accusing the administration of violating promotion rules. Members of the A Class Officers' Association (non-teaching) alleged that promotions ignored existing seniority lists.

The association demanded that university administration hire non-teaching officials for non-teaching posts rather than allocating them to faculty members. They met a state government official and demanded his intervention into the matter.

Terminated Barapukuria Coal Mine workers in Bangladesh win their jobs back

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Hundreds of protesting terminated workers from the Barapukuria Coal Mine suspended their two month demonstration last week with "partial acceptance" from the authority to resolve their demands. They were demanding reinstatement and payment of eight months' back wages. About 700 workers were terminated at the mine two years ago when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country.

The Barapukuria Coal Mine Miners' and Workers' Union said on May 13 that mine authorities agreed to let employees return to work in phases and that a decision on outstanding wages will be discussed at a meeting with the workers' representative in Petrobangla in Dhaka.

Sri Lankan health workers protest

Hundreds of public sector health workers protested on Wednesday over patient safety and the critical shortage of medical supplies. Government hospitals are running out of medicines, oxygen and other chemicals, jeopardising the activities of intensive care units and laboratories.

Health workers displaying placards protested outside the Kandy and Badulla general hospitals over the issues. They accused the government of putting the entire health system in jeopardy and endangering patients' health.

Taiwan commuter rail workers to hold second strike against corporatisation

More than 90 percent of Taiwan Railways Administration (TRA) train drivers have supported a Taiwan Railway Labour Union (TRLU) motion to strike on June 3 [the Dragon Boat Festival holiday] to protest the government's plan to transform the TRA into a public corporation. About 1,200 drivers struck on May 1 over the issue.

The TRLU accused the government of drafting a statute establishing the Taiwan Railway Corporation (TRC) before reaching an agreement with the unions. Other unions involved in the dispute are the National Train Drivers' Union and the Taiwan Railway Union (TRU).

The unions claimed that the draft statute fails to address safety issues and does not guarantee that the civil servants salary adjustment procedures would continue after the corporation is established. Workers also fear that they will be forced to vacate TRA dormitories when the corporation is set up and not receive any improvement in salary or benefits.

The TRLU threatened to call strikes during the mid-autumn festival in September, the Double Ten National Day in October. and the nine-in-one elections in November. Over 16,000 employees will be affected when the TRA is corporatised.

Bosch auto parts and tools factory workers in Victoria stop work

About 100 workers from the Robert Bosch auto parts and tools factory at Clayton, Melbourne walked off the job for the day on Wednesday in a pay dispute. The United Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union have been in negotiations with Bosch for over ten months over a new enterprise agreement. The unions have accused Bosch of stalling negotiations and making a pay offer that is well below the increasing cost of living.

Townsville aged care nurses protest cuts to pay and conditions

Close to 20 members of the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) walked out for an hour on Tuesday and protested outside the Regis Kirwan aged care facility in Townsville after rejecting management's proposed enterprise agreement. Protesters held placards stating, "We can't live on praise, we need a raise" and "Told we're heroes, paid like zeros."

A union spokesperson accused Regis of attempting to remove existing working conditions including paid overtime, penalty rates and allowances, along with very low wage increases which would cause a cut in real wages of 4 or 5 percent for most nursing staff in the first year alone. The spokesperson said Regis wants to force nursing staff to work up to 10 additional hours without overtime.

The proposed enterprise agreement offers wage increases of just 1 percent each year, or roughly 25 cents an hour, for the next three years for experienced nurses, and 2 percent for most other nursing staff. The union claimed the proposed "increases" would leave nurses well behind not only the consumer price index (CPI) of 5.1 percent, but wages at other comparable nursing homes.

Last month, QNMU members at the Regis Whitfield aged care facility in Cairns, North Queensland, walked out in opposition to management's proposed EA which would enforce the same cuts to wages and conditions as those proposed at Regis Kirwan. The QNMU claimed that private aged care nurses earn up to 48 percent less than their colleagues at state government facilities.

Aged care workers in Adelaide walk out over low pay and excessive workload

About 25 aged care workers and residents from the Anglicare facility at Elizabeth East, in South Australia's capital Adelaide, walked off the premises on Thursday calling on Anglicare for better pay, better conditions and increased staffing levels. The action by members of the United Workers Union (UWU) followed strikes by thousands of UWU aged care workers in Western Australia and Queensland on May 10 over poor wages, chronic understaffing and lack of care for residents.

Industrial action this month in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia has hit eight major providers employing more than 12,000 aged care workers in 160 aged care facilities, caring for about 12,700 residents.

Aged care workers are also questioning why COVID-19 had disappeared from the public debate, when 350 older Australians had died during the federal election campaign alone. A union spokesperson told media that the public are being led to believe that the Omicron wave has passed but for aged care workers working double shifts in full PPE there has been no let up and the aged care crisis is in full swing.

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