Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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Ground crew at Taiwan's Taoyuan International Airport strike

Close to 200 ground crew from Evergreen Airline Services at Taiwan's Taoyuan International Airport stopped work for two days from January 1 in a dispute over year-end bonus pay. At least 35 inbound flights were impacted, along with 44 outbound flights.

Workers from Evergreen Airline Services and Evergreen Sky Catering Corp, two of seven subsidiaries of the Evergreen Group, are demanding that their year-end bonus of one month's salary be increased to be on par with workers at EVA Airways and Evergreen Aviation Technologies Corp, whose year-end bonus equalled three months' salary. Workers at Evergreen Marine Corp received between 10 and 52 months of salary as year-end bonus.

Meanwhile, the union members at Taoyuan International Airport Services Ltd, a ground service company owned by China Airlines, have threatened to strike during the Lunar New Year holiday or the 228 Memorial Day long weekend if their demands for a 4 percent wage increase and other benefits are not met.

India: Tamil Nadu secondary grade teachers protest

About 3,500 secondary grade teachers began an indefinite hunger protest outside the Director of School Education's office in Chennai on December 27. At least 170 hunger strikers required medical attention on December 31 and were hospitalised. Teachers from various districts, including Ramanathapuram, Trichy, Salem, Viluppuram and Cuddalore, are demanding equal pay for equal work.

According to the Secondary Grade Seniority Teachers' Association (SSTA), around 20,000 teachers were waiting for issues with their wages to be resolved, an election promise of the current DMK government. One teacher told the media that a major issue was that teachers appointed after May 31, 2009 are paid only 8,000 rupees a month ($US96.8), while those who were appointed on or before that date are paid 11,170 rupees.

Of the 20,000 teachers involved in the dispute, about 12,000 are part time teachers who are demanding the Pongal celebrations bonus and permanent jobs. The latest strike followed a similar protest in 2018 over the same issues.

Tamil Nadu petrochemical workers occupy factory

Contract workers from the state owned Chennai Petrochemical Corporation Limited's (CPCL) Nagappattinam Refinery in Panangudi stopped work on January 4 and occupied the plant. They were demanding proper compensation for when they are removed from their jobs, a day off on each Sunday, leave on government holidays, payment of wages and bonuses as per the industry standard and other demands.

Tamil Nadu temple workers in Madurai strike

Head shaving workers at the Pazhani Murugan Temple, in Palani, Madurai, stopped work on January 2 and held a sit-in protest demanding a wage and bonus increase. There are close to 300 workers involved in tonsuring (head shaving) work at the temple which is visited by more than seven million pilgrims each year. The workers were paid a meagre bonus of 5,000 rupees ($US60) per year and 13,000 rupees per month.

Tamil Nadu power loom workers strike for new contract

About 2,000 power-loom workers in Andipatti, in Theni district, Tamil Nadu, stopped work for a second consecutive day on January 4 to demand a 50 percent wage increase. There are 30 power-looms in the village of Subbalapuram, in Andipatti, mass producing cotton sarees and fancy sarees for the textile industry.

Tamil Nadu government hospital contract nurses demand permanent jobs

The Tamil Nadu MRB Nurses Empowerment Association called a state-wide demonstration of contract nurses. It was demanding withdrawal of the government's order terminating the services of 2,400 nurses recruited on an ad hoc basis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 300 nurses demonstrated at the collector's office in Chennai.

The nurses were recruited through the Medical Services Recruitment Board (MRB) and worked for two-and-a-half years. A spokesperson from the nurses association said the government had promised the nurses they would be posted to vacant posts in primary health centres through the district health societies, but these were only temporary posts. Nurses are demanding permanent jobs.

Maharashtra state electricity workers call off anti-privatisation strike

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Unions representing over 86,000 workers from three distribution companies of the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB) ended a planned 72-hour strike on Wednesday after several hours, following a meeting with the government and 32 union leaders. The strike by workers from power companies MahaGenco, MahaTransco, and MSEDCL caused power blackouts from midnight across 50 percent of the state.

Workers were protesting the extension of Adani group's Adani Transmission Ltd (ATL) into the power distribution business in Mumbai and other parts of the state. Other demands were permanent jobs for 40,000 contract workers through a special recruitment drive, no to privatisation of hydro and thermal power plants and stopping private players from laying transmission lines and setting up new sub-stations.

Union representatives told striking workers that during their meeting with the state's deputy chief minister he assured them that the government was not interested in privatising the distribution companies and committed to increasing investment in the MSEB over the next three years. There was no formal agreement.

Odisha anganwadi workers demand government employee status

Thousands of anganwadi (childcare) workers have been protesting in Bhubaneswar, Odisha's capital, since mid-November over 12 demands, including government employee status. On January 2 they attempted to march towards Naveen Niwas (state parliament) but police blocked them and forced them back to their protest site.

Their demands include a wage increase, gratuity payments and pension funds such as provident fund and employee state insurance. The anganwadi workers association said it will continue the protest and threatened to escalate their action if the government continued to ignore their demands.

Hyderabad metro railway workers demand pay increase

More than 100 Hyderabad Metro Rail Ltd (HMRL) workers held a sit-down protest in Hyderabad on Tuesday to demand a pay rise. The outsourced workers, who work at ticketing counters at 27 metro stations, said their wages have remained the same for five years and demanded they be increased to 18,000 rupees ($US217) a month.

Workers also want improved conditions, complaining that staff shortages meant that they are often forced to work double shifts without meal breaks. They said payment of wages are frequently delayed, causing hardships.

Hundreds of South Australian bus drivers to strike for better wages and safety

The Transport workers Union (TWU), representing over 560 Adelaide Metro bus drivers, has given notice that its members will strike for 24 hours on January 9. The strike will affect almost 80 percent of Adelaide's bus network.

The TWU and Torrens Transport, which is contracted by the South Australian government to run the city's bus network, have been in negotiations over a new enterprise agreement since October. Drivers want wages increased from $27.70 an hour to $32 an hour. Torrens Transport has offered a pay increase of only 5.75 percent (around $1.48 an hour) which drivers rejected.

A major demand of drivers is that improved safety measures be put in place. They want these to include secure cabins for drivers, more security guards on buses and in transport hot spots. In December, six drivers were punched, spat on and attacked with weapons, according to the union.

Over 75 percent of drivers who voted in a ballot on December 20 approved industrial action, which included periodic strikes ranging from 1 hour to 24 hours, bans affecting overtime, revenue collection and wearing of uniforms. Drivers have demanded that industrial action be expanded to include locking revenue collection machines. The company and TWU are to resume negotiations on Tuesday.

Contract security and safety workers at Victoria's largest power station impose work bans

Emergency services workers at Victoria's largest power station, AGL Loy Yang A in the Latrobe Valley, 160 kilometres south east of Melbourne, began protected industrial action on December 17 to oppose individual work contracts. The highly skilled workers are employed by MSS Strategic Medical and Rescue (MSS SMR) which is contracted by AGL to provide security and manage health and safety at the power plant.

The workers, members of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), were moved off their union negotiated enterprise agreement and put on individual agreements in early December when MSS SMR secured the contract from AGL.

The CFMMEU is attempting to regain its position at the bargaining table. It said that the contracts strip away wages and conditions and removed workers' ability to have a say in work arrangements. Concerned that it has been shut out of deal making with the employer, the union complained that workers' conditions are now covered by company policy which can be changed at the company's whim, and basic clauses, such as consultation and dispute resolution, have been removed.

The CFMMEU has threatened to maintain industrial action until MSS SMR are forced into bargaining for a collective enterprise agreement.

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