

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Asia

Bangladeshi pharmaceutical worker killed in police attack

On January 23, temporary worker Enamul Haque, 25, died of injuries after police stormed a sit-in protest by over 400 Advanced Chemical Industries (ACI) factory workers in Siddhirganj, near Dhaka. Witnesses said that police fired over 30 teargas canisters and 100 rubber bullets hospitalising over 100 employees.

The strike was part of a long-running dispute over wages and permanency. The factory employs 167 full-time workers and 240 temporary workers on the minimum wage. Temporary workers, many who have been at the factory for over 20 years, are not paid bonuses or other entitlements. One worker told the media that management “hired or fired workers at whim”.

ACI is a major Asian manufacturer and distributor of drugs, agricultural chemical and pesticide products, and basic health products.

India: Andhra Pradesh government employees return to work

The Joint Action Committee (JAC) representing over one million state government employees, including teachers, office workers and pensioners, called off a three-day strike commenced on January 19, following an agreement with the government on implementation of pay commission recommendations. The government agreed to implement six of JAC’s 12 demands immediately with further negotiations on the rest.

Demands accepted by the government included a 20 percent pay increase, 20 percent increase in rent allowances, filling of all vacancies, improved medical facilities, abolition of the teachers’ apprentice system, improved promotional arrangements and regularisation of village officials in temporary posts.

Andhra Pradesh police fire at protesting cement workers

Jindal cement factory management at Gadivemula, Kurnool called police on January 23 to intervene against a rally at the factory by employees demanding compensation for the family of a construction worker who fell to his death at the plant. Police fired bullets over the

heads of the protesting employees. Workers ended the protest after the manager agreed to pay the compensation demanded.

Tamil Nadu stainless steel utensil workers remain on strike

Over 1,000 workers in the stainless steel utensil manufacturing zone at Anuppapalayam, Tirupur have been on strike since December 29, after 11 rounds of talks for a new pay agreement failed. The negotiations began in October, after the previous 30-month agreement expired.

In an attempt to wind up the dispute and appease the employers the eight registered unions, including the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, All India Trade Union Congress and Labour Progressive Front, reduced their original pay demand from 70 percent to 30 percent while employers have increased their offer from 17 percent to 25 percent.

Utensil workers have not had a pay increase for three years. The average inflation rate over the past decade is over 8 percent and food prices are projected to rise by over 15 percent in 2011.

Tamil Nadu noon-meal workers arrested

At least 79 members of the Tamil Nadu Noon Meal Employees Association were arrested on January 21 while protesting in Udhamandalam to demand payment of salaries on a time scale basis and their inclusion in the list of government employees. The protest was part of a state-wide struggle by the state school midday meal workers for regularisation of service, wage increases and a pension and general provident fund.

In August, Tamil Nadu’s Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government ordered the arrest of almost 10,000 protesting noon-meal workers, most of them women, as they travelled to the state capital Chennai to demonstrate for their demands. Over 2,000 demonstrators at 18 separate locations in Chennai were arrested and held in community halls.

Karnataka tyre workers’ strike in third month

Over 300 temporary employees of Falcon Tyres in Mysore have been on strike since November 4 to demand benefits on par with regular and contract employees. Falcon employs over 1,680 personnel, including 550 regular employees, 800 contract workers and 334 temporary workers.

A Falcon Tyres Badali Karmikara Sangha union official has alleged that

management is refusing to implement decisions agreed to at a meeting witnessed by the labour minister and workers' representatives. The deal included a provision to employ temporary workers in place of retired regular employees.

The company manufactures tyres for the local and export markets under the brand names of Dunlop, Donin and Falcon.

Uttar Pradesh public servants strike

Hundreds of UP Ministerial Collectorate Karmchhari Sangh members stopped work and demonstrated at district headquarters in Varanasi last week in support of 14 demands. Workers want improved pay scales and other facilities on par with secretariat employees. One speaker claimed that village level government employees were drawing better salaries than collectorate employees. The public servants also want more senior officers at district offices.

The protesters threatened to strike from February 8 to 10 and hold a sit-in demonstration in Lucknow from March 9 to 11 if their demands are not met.

Kerala resident doctors walk out

Up to 430 resident doctors at the Kozhikode Medical College Hospital walked off the job for an indefinite period on January 25 as part of a state-wide campaign called by the Kerala Medical Postgraduates Association (KMPA) over conditions and allowances.

KMPA members want the recent fee increases revoked, accommodation on campus for all resident doctors, 24-hour access to laboratory facilities, adequate supply of medicines in operation theatres and payment of festival allowances. The resident doctors are postgraduate and diploma students who are paid a fixed stipend for their work at the hospital.

Gujarat power-loom workers end strike

Tens of thousands of migrant textile workers who operate over 450,000 power-loom in Surat, Gujarat ended their five-day strike on January 21 after employers agreed to increase wages. They were demanding a 10 paise (0.1 rupee) increase per metre of cloth produced. No detail of the employers' offer has been released to the media.

Many factories, however, remained closed last weekend because many of the striking employees were reluctant to return to work fearing employer reprisals. Many protesting workers were injured during the strike after police intervened in demonstrations and arrested 80 strikers and several union delegates.

The Surat weaving sector manufactures 30 million metres of fabric per day and employs about 700,000 migrant workers from Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Sri Lankan postal workers lift work bans

Up to 15,000 postal workers across the island have lifted an over-time ban which paralysed 600 post offices, nine mail sorting centres and delaying delivery of hundreds of thousands of postal items, including postal voting leaflets for the forthcoming Provincial Elections. The bans were lifted after the postal minister agreed to fulfil some of the demands.

Postal Trade Union Front members imposed bans between January 21 and 24 to demand the immediate filling of 7,000 vacancies, payment of salaries and overtime before the tenth day of the month, and resolution of various promotion anomalies.

Pakistan power company reinstates thousands of sacked workers

At least 4,300 Karachi Electric Supply Company (KESC) employees made redundant on January 19 have been reinstated, following pressure from the government. KESC, in line with cost-cutting measures following its privatisation, offered termination packages to 4,500 non-technical and non-core employees. Only 400 workers accepted the offer.

Sacked workers began picketing KESC's head office in Gizri on January 20 but were attacked by police and hired thugs. The KESC accused the provincial government of having "aided, abetted and even instigated" the violence.

The former state-owned KESC sold more than 70 percent of its shares to a Middle Eastern consortium in 2005. The government has been critical of the utility's failure to increase power generation, which it says was one of the conditions of the sell-off.

Australian truck drivers begin rolling stoppages

TWU members employed by the logistics company TNT Australia began four-hour rolling stoppages on Friday and imposed an indefinite ban on the loading and unloading of vehicles operated by outside hire companies at all TNT sites.

The 2,500 workers, including drivers and dockhands, voted for action after TNT cancelled a fresh round of negotiations scheduled for Tuesday in a dispute for a new work agreement.

While TNT and the union have agreed to an 8 percent pay rise over two years, the company has rejected claims for an extra 2 percent employer contribution to superannuation and site rate increases for 3,000 casual or labour hire employees.

The union claims to have already negotiated a 12 percent pay rise over three years for logistics workers at Linfox, including an agreement from the operator to lift superannuation to 15 percent.

New South Wales power workers continue strike action

Over 60 casual contract workers manning a picket at the Eraring Power Station on Lake Macquarie have voted unanimously to continue their dispute for a second week over wages and conditions. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) members are employed by contract company Power Projects International to do a \$600 million upgrade on one of the power station's four boilers.

An AWU official said their members were doing construction type work but paid under a maintenance agreement. According to the official, the

construction pay rate was \$10 an hour above the maintenance rate with additional allowances. Fair Work Australia was due to begin hearing the case on January 21.

wsws.org/contact

New South Wales community nurses demonstrate

Community and mental health nurses in the Hunter Area held a lunch time rally on January 24 outside the Charlestown electoral office of state Labor member of parliament Matthew Morris to demand they be included in the new work agreement currently being negotiated with the NSW Nurses Association.

On January 12, the Nurses Association shut down statewide industrial action by its members after the government offered to enter talks. The nurses, who had shutdown 600 beds across the state, want a one-to-four nurse-to-patient ratio and improved wages. The government's offer did not include community and mental health nurses.

Western Australian waterside workers strike

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members employed by stevedoring company Patrick at the Western Australian southern ports of Fremantle and Albany have voted unanimously to strike for up to five days beginning this Saturday. Workers want a 30 percent pay rise over three years, improved safety and an end to casual employment. At least 200 MUA members in Western Australia walked off the job in December after Patrick refused to negotiate. Two weeks ago colleagues at the Geelong and Webb docks in Melbourne struck for 24 hours and 72 hours respectively over the issue.

Three port workers have been killed in fatal accidents in 2010 and 60 percent of the Patrick workforce are employed as casuals, with some having remained casuals for up to 9 years.

Queensland bus drivers locked out

Sunbus drivers on Queensland's Sunshine Coast were locked out by management on Tuesday after attending a stop work meeting outside their depot. This is the fifth time in seven weeks that the company's buses have been off the road over a new work agreement. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) called off planned strike action in early January after the owner and operator of Sunbus, Transit Australia Group (TAG), agreed to resume talks. TAG failed to attend the meetings, however, and instead demanded that the dispute be referred to the national workplace relations tribunal Fair Work Australia.

According to the TWU, TAG wants to force its 200 drivers back onto award pay rates and conditions. This means wage cuts of up to \$4 an hour and the elimination of allowances won over the last 10 years. The TWU wants a 4 percent pay rise and current entitlements maintained.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit: