

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 November 2012

India: Kerala private hospital nurses continue strike

Strike action by United Nurses Association (UNA) members at the Mother Hospital in Trissur, Kerala has entered its 12th week. Fifteen nurses have been suspended and 35 nurses arrested since walking out of the hospital on September 5.

The industrial action is part of a wider campaign by the UNA and the Indian Nurses Association at 63 private hospitals in the Thrissur district. Nurses are demanding implementation of the Balram Report, which recommends a 10 percent annual increment for senior nurses and a three-shift duty system, which is already being followed at government hospitals and many private firms.

Karnataka childcare centre workers strike over privatisation

Over 2,000 government childcare centre (anganwadi) employees in Bangalore district struck on November 19 to demand the repeal of an agreement between the state government and the Vedanta Foundation which they fear will lead to privatisation of their centres. The strike followed the arrest of anganwadi workers protesting in Chickballapur over the issue. Anganwadi workers also protested in May over the issue.

The Vedanta Foundation, a corporate arm of global mining company Vedanta Resources, took over administration of over 2,600 Karnataka anganwadi centres in April. Vedanta Resources has been under investigation for alleged violation of human rights in various parts of India. The industrial action was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Bangladeshi transport workers in Chittagong strike

On November 18, the Arakan Road Transport Shramik Union called a one-day strike of buses, minibuses, microbuses and tempos in Chittagong, Bangladesh's second largest city, over the murder of a driver, 50-year-old Jashim Uddin, on November 16. Workers' demands included compensation for Uddin's family, arrest of the alleged killers, and security of drivers and passengers. Uddin was killed and passengers injured when thieves seized the bus and began looting passengers. The union has threatened to call an indefinite strike if the government fails to meet its demands in seven days.

Transport workers strike in northern Sri Lanka

About 140 public transport workers, including drivers and conductors, at the Point Pedro bus depot in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, walked out on November 16 to demand dues.

Strikers parked a bus across the main entrance preventing Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) buses leaving. Transport workers told the *World Socialist Web Site* that their wages have been overdue for the second consecutive month.

Pakistan: Balochistan doctors' continue strike

Police brutally attacked a demonstration in Quetta by striking doctors in Pakistan's south-western province of Balochistan. Over 70 doctors were arrested and are still being held in various police stations. Eye-witnesses said police fired teargas and "manhandled" doctors, causing many injuries with some left unconscious. The doctors have been on strike for five weeks.

Following the arrests the Pakistan Medical Association extended the strike to include private hospitals. Emergency services are being provided by 40 army doctors in the Civil and Bolan Medical College hospitals.

The Balochistan government has issued "show cause" notices to 250 doctors after they refused to end the industrial action. The Young Doctors' Association and Paramedical Alliance threatened to join the strike if the issue is not resolved soon.

Government doctors walked off the job in October to protest the abduction of a senior ophthalmologist Saeed Ahmed Khan on October 16, who is still missing. Kidnapping of doctors is an ongoing problem in Balochistan, with at least 27 killed and 12 more kidnapped for ransom in the province during the past five years.

Port Kembla marine pilots strike

Eight marine pilots at the state-owned port in Port Kembla, 70km south of Sydney, New South Wales stopped guiding ships into the port for four nights from November 20 in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement with the Port Kembla Port Corporation. The pilots have also banned working outside of officially rostered hours.

The Australian Maritime Officers Union wants a 4 percent pay rise,

in line with employees at other state-owned ports in Sydney and Newcastle. Other demands include conditions relating to fatigue management, income protection and insurance, and a limit of three ship movements per pilot per shift, normally 12 hours.

NSW teachers protest against education cuts

On November 18, over 3,000 teachers, parents and students gathered in Sydney's Darling Harbour to protest the O'Farrell state government's plan to slash \$1.7 billion from education, which will affect the state's public and private schools as well as TAFE colleges. Similar protests were staged in towns around the state.

The plan includes cutting 600 support positions in state and regional education offices, phasing out 400 school administration positions and cutting 800 TAFE positions. Cleaners' hours at most schools will be cut by 30 percent.

The NSW Teachers Federation has not called for any concrete industrial action to defend jobs and cuts to working hours.

Queensland rural water utility workers locked out

About 20 electricians employed at the state-owned bulk water supply company SunWater were locked out at depots in Bundaberg, Clare, Collinsville, Moranbah, Emerald and Biloela for 24 hours on November 20 in a dispute for a pay increase. Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members had planned to strike for four hours in the afternoon but were told by SunWater not to report for work for the day.

ETU members walked out for four hours on November 9, after rejecting the company's 3 percent pay offer. Workers said the offer failed to cover increased living costs in the high growth areas where they work. ETU members also oppose the company's attempt to remove job security and the consultation process, and attacks on working conditions being imposed on other state public sector employees by the Liberal-National Party government.

In June, the Queensland government amended state industrial relations laws. The state government can now order striking public servants back to work if it believes it impacts on the state economy.

Childcare workers across Australia protest low wages

Thousands of childcare workers and parents protested in capital cities and regional centres throughout Australia on November 17 in an attempt to pressure the Gillard federal government to increase funding for wages in the childcare industry. Qualified childcare workers with Certificate III earn just \$18.5 an hour, about \$10 less than the average Australian wage.

United Voice (UV) officials told a rally of 3,000 in Sydney that low wages were forcing about 180 workers out of the industry each week. UV officials have not called for any unified national industrial action. Last week's protest was held on Saturday and had no industrial

impact.

New Zealand government statistics workers oppose pay scheme

Around 450 workers at Statistics New Zealand, the country's statistics ministry, have begun industrial action in response to a proposed pay scheme that staff claim is not consistent with their collective agreement. The Public Services Association claims that certain staff will benefit disproportionately while others will receive no benefit. Workers are also concerned that redundancy and long-service leave entitlements for some groups of workers will be undermined. The low-level industrial action includes work to rule, withholding survey information, and a ban on overtime.

New Zealand Interislander ferry workers to strike

Two unions representing 120 ferry workers of KiwiRail's Interislander service, the main ocean passenger service between New Zealand's two major islands, has issued notice for a one-week strike beginning on December 1 in a dispute over a new collective agreement. According to the Merchant Service Guild and the Aviation and Marine Engineers Association, the proposal would cut service increments, potentially reducing all future pay increases for employees that have worked for five or more years.

In February, KiwiRail proposed a 30 percent pay cut for its 4,100 employees nationwide. The company is looking to shave \$200 million from its books over the next three years, including \$14 million per annum in wages.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact