

Thousands of Sri Lankan teachers protest for higher pay; Pakistan sanitary workers strike over non-payment of wages; Telstra workers to strike in Australia

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 March 2019

Asia

Thousands of Sri Lankan teachers demand higher wages

Around 2,000 teachers from Sri Lankan government schools demonstrated outside the ministry of education on February 28 to call for higher salaries, restoration of a pre-2016 pension scheme, reduced workloads for teachers and other demands. The protest was organised by the Ceylon Teaching Service Association.

Police brutally attacked the protesting teachers with water cannons and tear gas when they attempted to enter the ministry building. The teachers' unions and other education sector unions have announced a national strike on March 13. Sri Lankan teachers are only paid 35,000 rupees (\$US195) per month, which is considerably lower than other government workers.

Sri Lanka: State management assistants protest for higher pay

Around 6,000 state management assistants rallied in central Colombo this week to call for wage increases, reestablishment of exams for promotion and the pre-2016 pension scheme and other demands. The government employs about 72,000 management assistants. The protests were called by the joint trade union alliance of management assistant services. Many workers took one-day's sick leave as part of the protest.

India: Pharmaceutical employees demand reinstatement of sacked workers

Workers from Alembic Pharmaceutical, an Indian multinational company in Samardung, South Sikkim, protested outside the company plant on March 4 and took limited one-day action to demand the reinstatement of 15 contractual workers terminated earlier last month. Alembic employs 8,000 workers.

In recent protests workers have raised slogans denouncing the company and the state labour department. Nine workers are currently staging a

hunger strike.

Indian brewery workers maintain one year protest over dismissal of union officials

Hundreds of workers from the Indian brewing company, AB InBev Sonipat, demonstrated outside the company's plant in the north Indian state of Haryana on February 27. The workers have been protesting for over 12 months over the termination of two union leaders early last year. The protests are being organised by the Haryana Breweries Limited Mazdoor Union.

Bangladesh garment workers demand unpaid wages

Around 250 garment workers from Signature in Stitch Apparels in Savar, outside the capital Dhaka, staged a human chain protest last Monday outside a local government office to demand the reopening of the factory and payment of outstanding wages.

The owner closed the factory on February 20 without any prior notice and owing workers four months' outstanding salaries. Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation President Rafiqul Islam Sujon told the media that the owner of the factory refuses to discuss the issues. Workers warned there would be further action if their demands are not granted.

Pakistan sanitation workers strike and demonstrate over non-payment of wages

Sanitation workers employed by the Lahore Waste Management Company, the Water and Sanitation Agency in Hyderabad and the Shikarpur Municipal Committee in Sindh protested last week over the non-payment of months of outstanding wages.

Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) contract employees

struck for five days over six months' outstanding wages. The strike was called off after LWMC paid the sub-contractor.

In Hyderabad, workers at the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) have not received wages for six months. On Wednesday workers shut down the sewerage lines in multiple parts of the city. They threatened to expand the strike if the authorities failed to resolve the issue within 48 hours.

WASA workers shut down water lines in mid-February but the union called off the industrial action for 15 days after entering negotiations with authorities.

A similar situation is faced by 240 Shikarpur Municipal Committee sanitary workers and sanitary inspectors. They have not been paid for four months. They held a demonstration outside the Shikarpur Press Club on Tuesday.

Australia and the Pacific

Australia: Sydney ferry staff stop work

Workers employed by the NRMA to operate the My Fast Ferry and Manly Fast Ferry on Sydney Harbour stopped work for two hours during the morning peak period on Wednesday. They were protesting stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement (EA) and the failure of the company to repay "stolen wages."

Police were called to ferry terminals when members of the Construction Forestry Mining Maritime and Energy Union (CFMMEU) blocked commuter access to ferry services between Manly and the Sydney CBD in response to management's attempt to use scab labour.

Workers voted for strike action on February 27 following the NRMA's refusal to follow a Fair Work Commission (FWC) finding last December that deckhands could be owed as much as \$1 million in wages due to underpayment since 2015. The FWC concluded that full-time shift workers were being paid \$136.37 less than they were owed per week and that part-timers were being paid \$36.32 below the Award for a 12-hour week.

The union complained that ferry skippers, all of whom are casual, are still yet to receive a complete wage offer from the NRMA in EA negotiations that began in September last year.

Telstra technicians announce strike date

The Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU), which covers ten percent of the workforce at Telstra, Australia's largest telecommunications company, announced last week that its 3,270 technical members will strike on March 12 across Australia.

Some 88 percent of Telstra technicians who participated in a protected action ballot in February voted to strike for a wage increase. The CEPU first suggested a ban on undertaking specific duties during unpaid time, however it said Telstra expressed intentions to deduct a day's pay for every day in the protected action.

The CEPU has been in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement since early 2018. Members rejected Telstra's proposed pay rise of 4.5 percent over the next three years, an increase of just 1.5 percent per year. The union wants a 12 percent pay increase over three years.

The latest attack on Telstra technicians follows its announcement last

year that it would eliminate 9,500 jobs over the next three years. At least 3,200 jobs have already been axed without any opposition from any of the unions covering the workforce.

Victorian prison nurses protest over wages

Around 30 nurses at the Fulham Correctional Centre in east Victoria held a stop work protest on Thursday as part of their campaign for a pay increase and improved conditions. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has been in enterprise bargaining negotiations with the private prison operator GEO Group Australia since December 2017. The nurses, who provide primary health care for 945 inmates, have not had a pay rise since February 2017.

The ANMF wants a 12.5 percent wage rise over four years, a \$1,500 sign-on payment in lieu of a 2018 pay rise and improvements to leave on par with other Victorian nurses. GEO has offered a 9.9 percent pay rise over four years from February 2019 without back pay.

Nurses began limited industrial action on February 23. GEO is refusing to re-enter negotiations before March 12 and has threatened to dock 17 percent of the nurses' wages for every shift they wear the union t-shirt or participate in work bans.

Bluescope workers' union pushes through sell-out wage agreement

Around 500 steelworkers from Bluescope in Port Kembla, south of Sydney, endorsed an "in-principle" wage agreement negotiated between Bluescope and the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and ending seven months of limited industrial action. The pay increase follows a union deal in 2015 which imposed a three-year wage freeze and axed 500 jobs.

The union and management cynically claim that the latest agreement will see the company's "rising fortunes" passed on to employees.

Under the deal workers, in fact, will only receive an 11 percent pay increase over three years in instalments of 4 percent and two 3.5 percent increases, and a \$1,500 bonus. The nominal wage rise, barely in line with the rising rate of inflation, does nothing to compensate workers for the pay freeze they have endured. The company and the union have not made public cuts to conditions that are doubtless contained in the agreement.

In the 2017-18 financial year, BlueScope recorded a global \$1.5 billion gross profit, up from around \$1 billion the year before. The company has predicted that its profits from January to June will be 10 percent higher than the \$745 million it made in the last six months of 2018.

New Caledonia public workers plan indefinite strike

Public sector workers in New Caledonia are preparing to take indefinite strike action next week. They have lodged a strike notice, demanding pay rises of 20 percent to cope with the high cost of living. Two recent pay increases of 0.6 percent have failed to keep pace with inflation.

With provincial elections due in May, unions are calling on the political parties to commit to upholding the purchasing power of the public sector. The strike notice applies to public sector workers on New Caledonia's payroll, but not those of the French state.

Meanwhile, one of the two unions on strike at New Caledonia's SLN

nickel company since the beginning of the year has agreed to resume work. The USTKE union last week signed a deal suspending its action which has affected three of the company's four mines that supply ore to the smelter in Noumea. Members of the CSTNC union remain on strike.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact