

Thousands of doctors strike in Tamil Nadu, India

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.

Workers threatened to commence a hunger strike at the company's headquarters on October 31 if their demands are not met.

Pakistan: Locked out government workers demand reinstatement

At least 220 employees of the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) in Islamabad were locked out by the government on October 21 as it sought to enforce a pro-business restructure. Police were deployed to occupy and seal the premises.

Workers held a protest in front of the Press Club demanding their jobs back. A petition calling for the revocation of the order mandating the restructure is being heard in the Islamabad High Court. While the case is ongoing, the court has insisted that the government pay salaries to the employees.

The dissolution of the PMDC is a part of a broader government attack on the health sector. For the past month, doctors, paramedics, nurses and other workers in government hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces have been striking against reforms aimed at slashing expenditure, winding back services and paving the way for further privatisations.

Striking Bangladeshi pharmaceutical workers threatened with “no pay”

French-owned pharmaceutical distributor Sanofi Bangladesh Limited threatened its protesting employees on Monday with “no pay for no work” if they do not end strike action immediately. Workers began an indefinite stoppage on October 21.

The threat to cut off pay was in response to a 72-hour ultimatum issued by employees last Sunday demanding assurances on a compensation and benefit package when the company sells its shares and transfers its operations to another party. The new company will be invested with all responsibilities, including management of a provident fund and gratuity. Sanofi currently owns 54 percent of the company shares while the government holds the rest.

The workers are members of the Sanofi Bangladesh Employees Welfare Committee, which organised a human chain protest in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka on Sunday. Workers fear the 60-year-old business will close, affecting 1,100 employees, along with their 5,000 dependents and family members.

Bangladeshi school teachers issued show-cause notice after strike

The Bangladesh directorate of primary education has issued show-cause notices to more than 3,000 primary school teachers across the country for taking strike action. Teachers held four days of stoppages commencing on October 14 and ending on October 17. Strike durations ranged from two hours to three hours, half-days and full-days.

The Bangladesh government primary teachers association is demanding salary scale upgrades for assistant teachers and head teachers.

Teachers held a rally in Dhaka on October 23. They threatened to boycott the primary education completion exams scheduled to begin on November 17 and to shut down all 65,626 government primary schools across the country.

India: Telangana plastic workers' relay hunger strike enters fourth week

Workers from the Bakelite Hylam plastics manufacturer in Nacharam, Telangana are maintaining a relay hunger strike that began on October 14. The action is organised by the Bakelite Hylam Employees Union's (BHEU), in opposition to a reduction of staff from 160 to 27, and their replacement by daily wage workers. Workers have also not had a salary increase for several years.

Bakelite Hylam Ltd. was established in 1947 to manufacture thermosetting plastics. It was owned by Union Carbide, then British Petroleum and later by G.P Goenka's Duncan group.

Karnataka railway workers protest against privatisation

Railway employees staged a protest in front of the railway station in Mysuru, Karnataka on October 23, against the central government's move to privatise trains, stations and production units. The rally was organised by the South Western Railway Mazdoor Union (SWRMU).

The government wants to privatise about 150 trains by the year 2020.

Railway workers and students held protests across India on October 23 and 24 opposing privatisation. The All India Railwaymen's Federation (AIRF), the largest rail union, said it would consider national strike action over the issue. Workers have warned that they face mass sackings.

Tamil Nadu government hospital doctors on strike

Over 16,000 doctors in government hospitals across Tamil Nadu walked off the job on October 25 to demand salary increases and promotions. The strike has paralysed hospitals across the state. Since house surgeons joined the strike, minor surgeries and elective procedures have been postponed.

The Federation of Government Doctors Association is demanding an end to salary anomalies, time-bound promotions and periodic salary increases.

Tamil Nadu state transport workers hold multiple demonstrations

State transport workers in Vellore held demonstrations in front of bus depots across the district on October 23 to demand payment of the Deepavali festival bonus and advance. The protests were organised by a number of transport workers' unions.

Workers said the government usually paid bonuses a month before Deepavali. They said that over the last few years, payments have been delayed on the pretext of losses incurred by the transport department.

Tamil Nadu television workers protest bullying

A group of employees from Tamilan Television demonstrated in front of the company's head office in Chennai on October 23 calling for an end to "ill-treatment" by management to. Their demands include the treatment of all employees with dignity and minimum wages to be paid as per labour laws.

Assam midday meal workers protest

Hundreds of midday meal workers demonstrated in the Cachar district of Assam on October 29 to oppose the state government's move to hand over cooking and distribution of school meals to non-government organisations (NGOs). The midday meal scheme is a school meal program launched by the Indian government nationwide. Nearly 2,600,000 workers, mostly women from rural areas, have been employed on a meagre monthly salary of 1,000 rupees (\$US14) as casual workers.

The protest was organised by the All Assam Mid-Day Meal Workers Union in collaboration with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Protesting workers demanded they be made permanent with an increase in salary. According to the unions, thousands of midday meal workers will become unemployed if NGOs take over the task.

English teachers protest throughout China

Hundreds of staff across China of the English tuition company Web International English protested unpaid wages, following the closure of a number of training schools.

Protests have taken place in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shenzhen and Zhengzhou. More than 150 training centres in 60 cities have been hit by the closures, potentially throwing thousands of staff out of work. Many students also took out loans for the courses and are now demanding refunds.

The company had been shedding jobs for some time. One Shanghai office reduced its staff from 200 to 20. Web International English said in a statement that it was experiencing financial problems, blaming operational difficulties and increased costs for the closures and its failure to pay staff on time.

Australia: Crown Casino workers in Melbourne walk out

Bartenders and card dealers at Melbourne's Crown Casino walked off the job for two hours on Friday night, in the first of a series of industrial actions involving 5,000 staff over a new enterprise agreement (EA). The United Voice Union said the workers had overwhelmingly voted for strike action for the first time in 16 years.

Negotiations for a new EA have been underway for six months. The union claims to be demanding 5 percent annual pay increases over three years and improved job security. Up to 70 percent of Crown's workers are part-time or casual. Crown has offered 2.5 percent annual increases.

Crown Casino workers in Perth are also in a dispute over a proposed EA. Workers rejected the company's offer of annual pay increases of just 1 percent. UV is demanding wage hikes of just 3 percent per annum, barely enough to cover the rapidly rising cost of living.

Queensland Catholic school teachers endorse protected strike action

Over 7,000 members of the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA), including teachers and support staff, from 195 Catholic schools across Queensland have voted to take protected industrial action in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Action could range from selected work bans to strikes.

A spokesperson from the IEUA said the move follows the failure of Queensland Catholic school employers to address concerns regarding workload, insecure employment and wage parity with the state sector. Key issues are the widespread prevalence of insecure contract work for teachers and support staff and the need to maintain the 30-year wage parity with the state sector through the provision of a \$1,250 one-off payment to all Catholic school staff.

The IEUA announced that work bans in some schools will begin on November 5, one day prior to the reopening of negotiations on November 6.

Melbourne restaurant workers protest over wage theft

Over 100 restaurant workers, members of Hospo Voice (a division of the United Voice union) held a procession along Melbourne's Southbank on Tuesday to protest against wage theft by prominent restaurant owners. Workers demonstrated outside several restaurants ending at the Rockpool Bar and Grill. According to Hospo Voice, Rockpool has withheld as much as \$10 million in owed wages from its staff.

In September, members of Hospo Voice demonstrated in front of the Tolarno Eating House in St Kilda after management defied a court order to pay tens of thousands of dollars in outstanding wages. One worker said he was owed \$13,000 by the restaurant. The Fair Work Ombudsman has started legal action against operators of the Barry café in Melbourne's inner city alleging wage theft of 73 employees totalling \$180,660 over a 12-month period.

The giant supermarket chain Woolworths admitted this week that it had underpaid nearly 6,000 employees as much as three million dollars. The theft came to light when workers in February compared a new enterprise agreement with the General Retail Industry Award. Underpayments could extend back to 2010.

laboratory technicians and psychologists. The union has signalled that it is preparing to sell out the MITs by inviting the DHBs back to the bargaining table this week to "try and find a solution to the bargaining."



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Maribyrnong council workers accept small pay offer

Some 180 employees from the Maribyrnong City Council (MCC) in Melbourne's inner west ended industrial action over a proposed enterprise agreement this week after accepting the latest offer from management.

Following five months of negotiations, members of the Australian Services Union (ASU) had rejected the council's EA offer that included reduced redundancy entitlements and a reduced redeployment period from 8 to 4 weeks. The previous offer limited pay increases to just 2 percent per annum and extended the period after which casual employees could apply for permanent positions from six to twelve months.

In the agreement that was voted up, the council slightly increased its wage offer to annual increases of 2.5, 2.25 and 2.25 percent or roughly \$30 a week. The council claimed that it would not reduce entitlements and made vague assurances of more accountability around the use of agency and labour-hire staff. The ASU leapt upon these worthless pledges to sell out its members. The union has absurdly claimed that Maribyrnong employees "will have a secure workforce for years to come."

New Zealand radiographers strike

Nearly 1,200 radiographers (Medical Imaging Technologists, MITs) employed by New Zealand's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) took strike action this week after rejecting an offer to settle their pay dispute. Negotiations for the MIT national Multi Employer Collective Agreement have now been ongoing for over 10 months.

The strike action, which took place between October 29 and November 2, came after four 24-hour strikes held over recent months. Another 24-hour stoppage is due again on Monday, November 4.

According to the APEX union, the DHBs' revised offer made some "small concessions," but it also included a massive reduction in back pay compared to the DHBs' previous offers. The DHBs had given assurances there would be full backdating to February of any increases to pay. They have now reneged on that commitment and only offered a \$1,600 lump sum which is worth thousands less than the full value of back pay.

APEX has dragged out the dispute for nearly a year while isolating the MITs from other striking health workers, including resident doctors,