

Burmese police attack striking railway workers; West Bengal contract teachers demand equal pay; Australia: NSW ambulance paramedics to protest casualisation

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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

Burmese police attack striking railway workers in Mandalay

On Wednesday, about an hour after the government's 8 p.m. curfew began, police violently attacked state railway workers' housing areas in Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city.

Earlier in the day, local residents had sat on railway tracks in support of the striking rail workers. The workers had decided on the previous Sunday to join the loosely organised Civil Disobedience Movement initiated by health workers to oppose the military coup of February 1 that ousted the National League for Democracy government led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

The attack by dozens of heavily-armed police was in apparent retaliation for the events during the day. Social media video and photos revealed flashes from police guns and injuries inflicted by rubber pellets. Police were also seen using slingshots to hurl stones at the workers. There were reports of arrests of rail workers.

The rail workers are part of a growing movement of government employees protesting against the military coup.

India: Childcare workers in Uttarakhand demand pay rise and public sector status

Anganwadi (childcare) workers demonstrated in the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand on February 16 to demand a salary increase and recognition as permanent government employees. The workers gathered at Gandhi Park in Almora district and chanted slogans denouncing the state government for ignoring their demands.

Anganwadi workers in Uttarakhand are only paid an 8,000-rupee (\$US109) monthly honorarium. They want this increased to 18,000 rupees. Apart from the duties during the COVID-19 pandemic, these important front-line workers play a major role in helping health workers with vaccination programs and other vital health care duties.

Tamil Nadu anganwadi and midday meal workers protest in Chennai

Thousands of anganwadi (childcare) workers, midday meal workers and pensioners demonstrated in Chennai on February 9 over their long-outstanding demands. Organised by the Tamil Nadu Mid-Day-Meal and Anganwadi Pensioners Union, protesters rallied outside the Panagal Building in Saidapet, which houses the Social Welfare Department.

Another demonstration, led by the Tamil Nadu Nutritious Meal Workers Union, was held outside the state guest house in Chepauk. Protesters demanded 450,000 vacancies be filled, permanent jobs for 350,000 employees with time-scale pay, a 7,850-rupee monthly pension, and a 500,000-rupee gratuity upon retirement.

West Bengal contract teachers demand equal pay

Contract teachers at government schools in West Bengal demonstrated near the chief minister's residence on Wednesday over a 26-point set of demands, including equal pay with regular government teachers and inclusion in the state's pension scheme. Around 150,000 state contract workers, including 63,000 teachers, are maintaining protests they began in December to win their demands.

In the latest action, the teachers jumped into a canal near the residence of the state's chief minister. "We want the government to take a decision on our demands and ensure that we get a respectable salary," one teacher told the media.

Hyderabad municipal workers demand pay rise and job permanency

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) workers demonstrated outside the corporation's office on February 12. They were demanding permanent employees be paid a 24,000-rupee minimum monthly wage, in accordance with the Pay Revision Commission (PRC), and that all contract staff be made permanent. The protest was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

Telangana sugar factory workers demand compensation

Around 20 workers from the now closed Nizam Deccan Sugars Limited

(NDSL) factory in Nizamabad district held a hunger strike protest on February 8 and marched from the sugar factory towards Hyderabad. The demonstrators demanded that the government-owned factory be reopened and that around 200 permanent workers who lost their jobs when the factory closed be paid full compensation.

NDSL, which was established in 1937, covered 1,600 acres in Bodhan and was the largest sugar producer in Asia for decades. The plant used to employ over 2,000 people. Following its closure sugarcane farmers in the district were forced to shift to paddy cultivation.

Karnataka: Bengaluru public transport workers demand unpaid wages

Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) workers protested in Bengaluru on February 10 to demand unpaid wages. Workers told the media that they had only been paid about 50 percent of their wages in December and January. Some said that they had only received around 10,000 rupees in the last two months and were unable to meet daily expenses and rent. BMTC management claimed the wages had been delayed because the state government had not paid a promised grant.

As well as demanding on-time and full payment of their salaries, protesters called on management to review the recently-introduced duty hours which penalise some workers. The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) Staff and Workers Federation want all the four public transport corporations in Karnataka to be merged into one entity and the corporations be allocated 10,000 million rupees annually and be exempted from paying vehicle taxes, toll fees and taxes on fuel.

Tamil Nadu: Former workers under the Employment Guarantee Scheme demand jobs

A group of protesting workers employed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) submitted a petition to the district collector in Tirunelveli on February 15 demanding they be rehired into the scheme.

The protesters, who were from the villages of Vadakku Salaipudur, Ramakrishnapuram, Pallivasal and Seevalaperi, have not worked for six months. They demanded immediate reemployment, saying the scheme was their only source of income and that most of them were starving and unable to have one good meal a day.

MGNREGS, enacted in 2005, is a social security scheme that guarantees work in the rural areas across India. It only guarantees 100 days employment in a financial year to every household, however. Workers must then wait until the next financial year to be reemployed, leaving households with no income.

Tamil Nadu: Vantec Logistics workers oppose sackings

Workers from the auto parts provider Vantec Logistics protested against the sudden termination of 49 colleagues without notice on February 13. According to workers, the 49 colleagues came to the office in Chennai as usual on company transport but were informed they were terminated from service. Workers started protesting on the day of termination and

continued their strike on February 15.

Vantec is a leading company in the global supply chain for the automotive parts industry.

Dock workers at VICT container terminal ramp up industrial action

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at the Victoria International Container Terminal (VICT) at Webb Dock in Melbourne planned to strike for 24 hours on yesterday, and again beginning Sunday for 36 hours, and impose a series of work bans, including on overtime, the use of personal phones for work purposes, and other specific work tasks.

The industrial action follows a four-hour strike last Tuesday in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The MUA, which is a division of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, covers 128 members of the 160-strong workforce at the dock. It wants major changes to the original agreement negotiated by the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU), which covers crane operators at the fully-automated dock.

The MUA wants 3.5 percent annual pay increases on top of new classifications that would lift the annual minimum salary by \$20,000, the most senior classification by \$10,000, and a reduction in the standard working week to 37 hours, down from 42 hours. The MUA is also demanding a week off every 10 weeks so that VICT's four-day-on, four-day-off roster at 12-hour shifts averages out to 37 hours a week.

There is a severe shortage of staff at the facility, requiring employees to work huge amounts of overtime, in many cases between 50 and 70 additional 12-hour shifts during the last year.

VICT has offered its low-paid 65 casual workers a 20 percent wage rise in the first year, 2.5 percent for the second and 3 percent for the third and fourth years. It has also offered to increase pay for the permanent workforce, mostly operating cranes from a control tower, by 11 percent over four years. Ninety percent of workers rejected the company's offer.

New South Wales power distribution workers oppose job cuts

Around 25 delegates from the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) demonstrated in Gosford, 70 km north of Sydney, on February 11 calling for Ausgrid, a major power supplier in New South Wales, to stop cutting jobs. Workers from the Ourimbah regional depot, north of Gosford, claim that Ausgrid has axed over 200 jobs, leaving the depot with only 100 workers.

An ETU spokesman said the company plans to cut another further 500 positions state-wide by 2022, bringing total job losses to 2,500 since the utility was privatised in 2015. The ETU represents more than 1,700 employees at the power company. According to the ETU over 80 percent of Ausgrid workers are prepared to take industrial action to protect jobs.

The ETU and Ausgrid are currently negotiating a new enterprise agreement. Ausgrid has flatly rejected the union's demand for a job security clause to be inserted into the proposed EA. Instead, the company has demanded workers agree to a 12-month wage freeze with increases in the following two years limited to the consumer prices index (CPI) increases. Ausgrid also wants to restrict the amount of annual leave that workers can accrue.

Mater hospitals' maintenance workers to vote on industrial action

The Electrical Trades Union and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union members at Mater hospitals in several states will vote on future industrial action in their dispute with Mater management over its proposed enterprise agreement.

If accepted, Mater's proposed EA, which also covers members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, would impose a two-year wage freeze, followed by a 1 percent increase. The ballot is due to close on March 26.

New South Wales ambulance paramedics to protest

The Ambulance Division of the Health Services Union (ADHSU) covering paramedics employed in New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) announced this week that they will implement a "Day of Action" on February 26 in opposition to NSW's decision to implement a part-time structure for newly-recruited university graduates.

NSWA wants to hire new paramedics on permanent part-time contracts with no right to a full-time job. Management has confirmed that there will be no trial period and that the new recruits will only be guaranteed 0.5 part-time hours in order to provide maximum roster flexibility. Paramedics fear that this will lead to the new recruits being used as casuals and be required to fill rostering gaps.

The very limited action will consist of paramedics in the field and in control centres across the state implementing a uniform ban. They will wear yellow vests with a union campaign paper insert while on the job. The union threatened that it will escalate action if any member is stood down for not wearing their uniform. It did not say what that action would be.



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