

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

24 September 2021

India: Tamil Nadu village health workers demand 8-hour day

About 200 village health nurses (VHN) demonstrated in Chennai on Tuesday over a 40-point charter of demands, including reduction of the workday from 12 to 8 hours. A delegation from the Tamil Nadu Government Village Health Nurses' Association submitted their demands to Health Department authorities.

The nurses are involved in maternal and child healthcare, immunisation, maternity assistance and family welfare services. Along with their regular work, they maintain registration of Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation (PICME). They alleged that all nurses had to work for 10 to 12 hours with PICME registration work extending up to 12 midnight. They want planned COVID-19 vaccinations that do not affect their routine maternal and child healthcare services.

As well as the eight-hour day, nurses want leave on government holidays and festivals and one day off each week. There are more than 10,000 VHNs, 1,400 sector health nurses and 384 community health nurses working in primary health centres run by the state's Directorate of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

Ashok Leyland bus assembly workers demand wage rise

Over 500 workers from the Ashok Leyland bus assembly plant in Hosur, Tamil Nadu demonstrated in Hosur on September 20 and 22 to demand a pay revision, equal wages for equal work, and a yearly bonus based on the company's profits. They protested in July over these demands.

Workers say their wages agreement expired 15 months ago. Wage revision agreements are generally negotiated once every three years. Workers want salaries on par with workers at the company's Enmore metal casting plant in Chennai.

Ashok Leyland manufactures long- and short-distance passenger buses with a workforce at the factory of 1,640 permanent employees.

Chennai conservancy workers protest against increased workload

Ambattur zone conservancy workers hired by the Greater Chennai Corporation under the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) protested in Ambattur on September 20 over the lack of safety measures and increased workloads. They alleged that they were not provided gloves, masks and other safety gear, particularly while doing waste segregation.

Workers said they were set targets to deliver a certain quantity of

biodegradable waste into the composting yard and alleged that some divisions ask employees to work for more than eight hours at night and that shift times were not fixed.

Karnataka building workers protest in Bangalore

Over 10,000 building construction workers demonstrated in Bangalore on September 20 to demand a meeting with the government over a series of grievances.

Protesters marched from the Bangalore Railway Station to Freedom Park, where they were addressed by Karnataka State Building Workers Association Coordination Committee officials. Workers were told that senior government officials would hold a meeting with Coordination Committee leaders before the end of the month.

The building workers held several protests in Bangalore during July over their demands, which mainly relate to COVID relief. These include a 10,000-rupee (\$US133.97) monthly relief payment for the next three months, along with supplies of groceries and other essential commodities. The affected workers currently only receive a one-time 3,000-rupee government assistance payment.

They also want a 500,000-rupee cash payment so workers can construct their own homes and extension of the child delivery benefit to workers who have a labour card.

Andhra Pradesh contract medical officers demand unpaid salaries

General Duty Medical Officers, employed in a recruitment drive on six-month contracts during the COVID-19 pandemic protested in Vijayawada on September 15 to demand their salaries. They were sent to COVID-19 wards at Government General Hospitals, area hospitals and COVID Care Centres in Andhra Pradesh.

The doctors alleged that they had not received a single month's salary even though their six-month contracts were ending soon. They want immediate payment of salaries and other arrears.

Pakistan: Water and sanitation utility workers demand pay rise

Hundreds of sanitary workers and tube-well operators from the Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSC) in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demonstrated outside the district municipal administration office on

Monday to demand a pay increase and overdue wages.

Workers said they had not been paid the increments announced by the provincial government and which applies to all government employees. They also demanded three months' overdue wages. The WSSC Workers Union has warned that it would call a strike if the authorities failed to grant workers' claims.

Bangladeshi cargo truck owners and drivers end strike

Members of the Bangladesh Truck, Covered-van and Prime Mover Goods Transports Owners Association and Chattogram Prime Mover Workers' Union ended a 72-hour strike on Wednesday after the government said it would grant their demands.

The strike affected the country's export and import business, mainly goods handling at the Chattogram (Chittagong) port—the country's largest port.

The association and union have advanced 15 demands, including an end to additional income tax, direct issuing of heavy vehicle drivers' licences and changes in the Road Transport Act-2018.

They also want speedy issuing of driving licences, collection of operating expenses by the council, designated truck terminals, designated roadside places with resting facilities and document checking, and for only highway police to patrol the highways. Association president claimed the government would grant 14 out of 15 of drivers' demands.

Thousands of truck drivers across Australia strike

Around 2,000 drivers from Australia Post-owned StarTrack parcel delivery company walked off the job for 24 hours on Thursday in their dispute for an improved enterprise agreement offer. Transport Workers Union (TWU) members want a "fair" pay increase, improved employer superannuation contributions, equal pay for labour hire workers and caps on outsourcing.

The strike followed a 24-hour stoppage by 4,000 TWU members from Toll and its subsidiaries on August 27 with similar demands and job security. Around 4,000 FedEx drivers have voted for protected industrial action with similar demands.

Close to 2,000 transport workers employed by trucking companies Linfox and its subsidiary BevChain voted this week to begin industrial action in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Workers are opposed to the introduction of a two-tier workforce and Linfox's refusal to allocate work to permanent drivers before employing low-waged labour hire drivers.

The TWU claimed that deals have been done on most issues but the main demands of workers for job security, improvements to superannuation contributions and limits on outsourcing labour are still to be resolved.

Toowoomba Regional Council outside workers strike again

For the second time this month around 150 outside workers from the Toowoomba Regional Council, 100km west of Brisbane, walked off the job on Tuesday in a dispute over the council's proposed enterprise

agreement (EA). The council locked workers out for the day on September 2 in response to limited strike action.

The council employs around 1,650 outdoor workers who are covered by multiple unions, the Australian Workers Union, Electrical Trades Union, Plumbers Union, Transport Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union.

As well as 2.5 percent annual pay increases, workers want job security and compensation for working with asbestos and high voltages. The council has only offered a 2 percent pay increase and no improvement in conditions.

Saint-Gobain abrasives plant workers in Melbourne strike again

About 35 workers at the Saint-Gobain abrasives manufacturing plant in Melbourne walked off the job on Tuesday, for the second time in a week, to demand an improved pay offer and retention of entitlements in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers want 3 percent annual pay increases and retention of their superannuation contributions at 1.5 percent above the minimum requirement. The United Workers Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claimed the company repeatedly shut down talks, refusing to negotiate a deal.

The AMWU claimed that workers at the plant achieved a 20 percent productivity increase since the last agreement making them determined to win their demands.

Boral Cement workers in New South Wales impose bans

Twenty members of the Electrical Trades Union at Boral Cement in New South Wales (NSW) are in their sixth week of an imposed overtime ban in their dispute for an improved enterprise agreement (EA) offer. Boral Cement employs around 200 workers from various unions, the Australian Workers Union (AWU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), at three sites on the NSW South Coast.

The company is attempting to impose a four-year agreement that includes a total pay rise of only 3.5 percent plus major cuts to long held conditions. Boral wants to abolish rostered days off (RDO), remove clauses restricting contract labour and job security, reduce annual leave loading and remove the Dispute Settlements Procedure clause. The Combined Unions claim is for a three-year agreement with 4 percent annual pay increases and retention of conditions.

Boral is a major supplier of concrete and other materials in building construction and the road building industry. According to an ETU spokesman, Boral raked in a group net profit of \$640 million last year.

Wine estate workers strike in South Australia

More than 150 workers from the American-owned Accolade Wines Berri Estates in South Australia walked off the job for 24 hours on Thursday in response to the company's attempts to remove worker protections and attack conditions in its proposed enterprise agreement. In

a protected action ballot in early September, 95 percent of participants voted in favour of strike action.

The United Workers Union claimed that Accolade, which was bought out by multi-billion-dollar bankers Carlyle Group in 2018, proposed that workers accept cuts in working hours and superannuation as well as higher levels of casualisation and labour hire. Workers said they will take further action if the company maintains its position.

A strike by the company's workers in 2019 caused a nationwide bread shortage.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

New Zealand health sector unions settle pay claims

New Zealand's District Health Boards (DHBs) announced this week that settlements had been reached with the Public Service Association (PSA), which covers mental health and some public sector nurses, and the Midwifery Employee Representation & Advisory Service (MERAS).

Both unions held ballots to ratify the settlements after recommending the deals to members, but no voting details were released. About 1,500 midwives held rolling stoppages earlier this month after rejecting a previous pay offer.

A DHB spokesperson said employers had been working closely with both unions. In fact, the settlements were within the "approved DHB financial mandates" and the government's employment relations "expectations" for the public sector—in reality a pay freeze under the current 3.3 percent inflation rate.

The pay increases are virtually the same as those rejected by 30,000 nurses who are members of the NZ Nurses' Organisation (NZNO). These include a \$1,800 increase on base rates funded out of DHB operating budgets and a \$1,100 lump sum in lieu of back pay. A \$4,000 "interim" payment on a yet to be negotiated "pay equity" claim, which purportedly measures nurses' pay against "male dominated" professions, is being used to fraudulently boost the value of the settlement.

Nurses have already voted to strike for a second time over the DHBs' derisory offer to the NZNO. The union cancelled the latest scheduled stoppage, using recent COVID-19 lockdowns as an excuse. The acceptance of the deal by the PSA and MERAS pits one section of the health workforce against another, while setting a precedent that the Labour government will attempt to use to impose on nurses.

Auckland bakery workers walk out

Nearly 100 workers at George Weston Foods bakeries in Otahuhu and Wiri, South Auckland, walked off the job at the end of their shift on Friday, and began a limited strike over pay and long working hours.

A FIRST Union spokesman said the company currently pays just 12 cents above the minimum wage, which is \$20 an hour. The union wants all staff to receive at least the so-called "living wage," set at \$22.75.

The "living wage" is promoted by the unions as the minimum necessary to live on. In fact, it is grossly inadequate in the face of escalating food and housing costs. The company claims it has offered workers a 5 percent pay increase over the first year and 3 percent the second, but the union said it hadn't seen any offer with rises that "generous."

The union says it does not intend to "disrupt the supply chain" during the COVID lockdown, but workers will not work more than 45 hours per week for less than they can afford to live off. The company declared it has taken on "contract and temporary staff" to cover the shortfall.

George Weston Foods, one of the country's biggest bread manufacturers, is part of multinational company Associated British Foods.