

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

29 October 2021

Asia

India: Anti-malaria contract workers in Delhi demand permanency

Hundreds of Anti-Malaria Ekta Karamchhari Union members from municipal corporations in Delhi walked off the job on Tuesday and demonstrated at the city's Civic Centre to demand permanent jobs.

There are around 3,500 Domestic Breeding Checkers (DBC's) in the national capital, who are employed on contract by the North, South and East Municipal Corporations. They are deployed in the region to control the diseases spread through mosquitoes, such as malaria and dengue.

Protesters threatened to strike again starting on November 25 if their demands are not addressed. Workers alleged that they are paid low wages and do not receive any additional benefits such as Employee State Insurance, Provident Fund or paid leave.

India: Tamil Nadu government hospital workers strike for unpaid wages

Nurses and health workers at the Dharmapuri Government Medical College hospital demonstrated on October 25 to demand unpaid salaries. Over 170 workers allege that two months' salaries are outstanding. The hospital has over 300 nursing staff.

Workers have blamed government authorities for delaying the payments. Protesters returned to work after the college dean met them and gave an assurance that arrears would be "cleared soon."

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation workers and retirees on hunger protest

Workers and retirees from the Puttur division of the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) began an indefinite hunger protest on Monday over the non-payment of salaries and pensions. The KSRTC Mazdoor Sangha have been holding dharna (a sit-down demonstration) in Puttur since October 21. They allege that although they were given full salary slips for August, they were only paid half of the amount.

CSB Bank employees in Kerala hold one-day strike

Thousands of workers from the privately-owned CSB Bank in Kerala, supported by employees from other banks in the state, walked out on October 22 to demand fair wages and job protection for all CSB employees. The CSB Staff Federation said it would campaign against the policies of the new foreign investor of the bank and strike again on December 30, 31 and January 1, 2022.

CSB Bank workers want implementation of the 11th industry-level bipartite wage settlement, effective from November 2017, withdrawal of vindictive action against union office bearers, and for job permanency for over 3,500 contract and casual employees hired on meagre wages. Formerly known as the Catholic Syrian Bank, CSB has a network of over 450 branches and more than 300 ATMs across India.

Pakistan: Karachi police attack sacked government workers

A protest by recently sacked government workers was attacked by Karachi police as they marched to the Karachi Supreme Court on Wednesday. The All-Pakistan Sacked Employees Central Joint Action Committee, which was established after 17,000 were sacked across Pakistan in August, said members were beaten and some arrested.

The workers want reversal of a court order axing the jobs. The protest followed similar demonstrations earlier this month in Peshawar and Lahore.

Workers were originally appointed in 1996 but terminated in 1997 on spurious grounds of administrative inconsistencies. They were reinstated to their positions in 2010. A petition to the court sought their termination again in 2012, but the court had held to its original decision, and they remained in their positions. Despite growing anger among government workers over increasing job losses, stagnant wages and privatisation, the Committee has largely isolated this struggle.

Hong Kong construction workers protest over withheld wages

About 40 construction workers blocked a major road on Tuesday morning in protest over unpaid wages. The Pok Fu Lam Road was blocked for about an hour before police forced an end to the protest. There were no arrests.

According to the Hong Kong Construction Industry Employees General Union, the workers were terminated when their subcontract employer lost a contract. The union claimed that the workers were owed approximately \$HK3 million (\$US385,800) in wages and that their personal belongings on site had been thrown away. The subcontractor pledged to pay half a day's wages for affected workers as well as the outstanding pay within a

week.

Filipino teachers threaten action over unpaid overtime

The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) issued a statement this week that it would hold mass leave action if the Philippines Department of Education does not pay 77 days of overtime owed for the 2020–2021 school year. The department has denied it has any obligation to make the payments.

Australia and New Zealand

Patrick port workers resume strike action in Melbourne

One hundred Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members resumed suspended strike action at Patrick Stevedores' Melbourne terminal on Monday. The action is part of a national campaign by 1,080 dock workers at Patrick terminals in Brisbane, Sydney, Fremantle in Perth and Melbourne in their dispute for a new work agreement.

As well as 12-hour stoppages at Port Melbourne every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, MUA members at Brisbane and Port Botany in Sydney held 12-hour stoppages on Friday and will hold one-hour stoppages three times a day at Sydney and Fremantle on Tuesday.

Patrick responded on Tuesday by applying to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to terminate its existing enterprise agreement, potentially forcing MUA members on to the industry award with minimum pay and loss of most entitlements.

The MUA and Patrick began negotiations for a new agreement about two years ago. The MUA has agreed to forgo its original claim for annual 6 percent pay increases over four years and accepted Patrick's 2.5 percent increases, well below the current CPI increase of 3.8 percent.

Workers are opposing Patrick's use of casual labour, its current rostering regime and recruitment plans. The union wants a proportion of new hires to be selected from current employees' friends and family in consultation with the union. This is similar to a deal the union negotiated with Melbourne's fully automated VICT container operator and included a 10-year no-strike agreement.

Fremantle Port Authority workers to strike on November 2

The MUA announced on Monday that it would restart strikes, commencing on November 2, at the government-owned Fremantle Port Authority (FPA) in Perth. The union said members would also impose indefinite work bans on mooring and unmooring ships operated by the Japanese-owned Ocean Network Express (ONE).

The MUA abruptly withdrew the strike threat, however, late on Wednesday following pressure from FPA management and a call from Western Australia's construction industry, demanding the state and federal governments intervene and stop the strike. While some work bans will remain, they have little impact on port operations.

It is the second time the MUA has abruptly called off industrial action for a new enterprise agreement. The union called off more than two

months of rolling stoppages in July, claiming that there had been a "bit of movement" in "high level" negotiations.

Talks for a new agreement began over 20 months ago, during which the MUA accused the FPA of stonewalling, opposing clauses relating to consultation, disciplinary procedures, dispute resolutions and union representation rights.

According to the union, FPA management claims pay rises cannot break the state government's current wage cap limited to \$1,000 a year. The company has rejected all demands for improved working conditions.

Last week the MUA abruptly suspended an 11-week struggle by its Qube Port members at Fremantle, forcing them back to work under conditions dictated by the company. The MUA was responding to a threat from the federal Liberal-National government that it would ask the Fair Work Commission to terminate all industrial action at Qube and impose compulsory arbitration.

South Australian public hospital health workers strike

Around 100 allied health professionals from nine major public hospitals across South Australia held one-hour rolling stoppages on October 22 over a wages and conditions dispute with the Marshall Liberal state government.

The Health Services Union (HSU) said the workers, which include physiotherapists, social workers, radiographers and occupational therapists, were opposing the government's "insulting, unfair and disrespectful" approach to enterprise agreement negotiations.

Workers want the agreement to include safe staffing levels and workloads, an extension of professional development entitlements, and a commitment to revised classification structures, as well as a fair pay increase.

Last month, state government health and emergency workers, including nurses, doctors, ambulance paramedics, fire fighters and other public sector workers, rallied in Adelaide to protest the desperate lack of state government resourcing which has thrown South Australian public hospitals into crisis. They demanded increased resourcing and appropriate staffing levels in all health and emergency services.

Queensland aged care workers protest in Mackay

Nurses and carers from the Glenalla Care Centre in Mackay, north of Brisbane, demonstrated outside the facility on Tuesday over low pay and management's refusal to offer "basic and fair" working conditions. They held placards saying, "Wage rise now" and "Over worked and under paid."

According to the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union, the Glenalla workers are among the lowest paid nurses and carers in Queensland with wages 20 percent to 30 percent below colleagues in the state. Care centre management arrogantly "offered" a \$0.75 per hour pay rise.

Western Australian public sector workers demonstrate against six-year wage cap

A group of state public sector workers demonstrated in Perth, Western Australia's capital, on Tuesday to protest the McGowan Liberal government's six-year wages rise cap imposed on all public sector workers. Organised by the recently formed Public Sector Alliance, comprising nine unions, the workers held placards stating, "Scrap the Cap" and "West Australians need a pay increase."

Under the wage rise cap announced in June 2017, the regular meagre 1.5 percent annual public sector pay increases were limited to \$1,000 per year for four years. This was reviewed in October this year and extended for another two years. The cap is predicted to save the state budget \$518 million over four years.

The state Labor government policy was extended to include Government Trading Enterprises employees, such as the Fremantle Ports Authority.

New Zealand rail workers to vote on strike action

The New Zealand Maritime and Transport Union (RMTU) has notified members that 2,500 rail workers employed by state-owned KiwiRail are to be balloted for strike action over the 2021–2023 employment agreement.

The ballot follows what the RMTU describes as an "insulting and derisory" pay offer by the company and is recommending a "yes" vote to strike. The action proposed is for single-day strikes on any dates between November 30 and December 24. The RMTU is presenting the range of dates and dragging out the postal ballot until November 12 to give itself plenty of time to reach a deal and call off any action.

The union's claim is for a basic 8 percent pay increase to all wages and allowances, with a 12-month term. The company's counteroffer is for a 2-year term with a 2 percent wage rise across all wage rates and allowances in each year. A lump sum of \$750 would be paid to all RMTU members covered by the agreement. The company is also proposing attacks on current Lieu Day entitlements and Medical Retirement changes.

One rail worker told the WSWS that most employees regard the offer as insulting and derisory and are "highly likely" to approve strike action. KiwiRail reported \$NZ63.2 million surplus profit this year, compared to \$40m last year, with total revenue of \$681.6m.



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