

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

23 December 2021

Asia

India: Delhi school teachers suspend online classes over unpaid salaries

About 200 teachers from all three branches of the SS Mota Singh School in Delhi suspended online classes on December 20 in protest over unpaid salaries. The teachers allege that they have not been paid salaries for the last four months. Non-teaching staff have also not received their pay.

Teachers decided to strike after management failed to clarify when wages would be dispersed and said they will remain on strike until the issue is resolved.

Punjab hospital nurses demonstrate and strike against pay cut

Around 200 striking nurses from hospitals in Ludhiana, Punjab state, marched from the Civil Hospital to Jagraon Bridge on December 18 to protest a pay cut. The nurses walked out on indefinite strike on December 16 in opposition to the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations.

The Punjab Nurses Association said that rather than increase the pay grade of nurses, their sixth pay commission had cut their wages. Nurses are demanding a pay increase and payment of certain allowances. They said the strike will continue till their demands are fulfilled.

Resident doctors at government hospitals in New Delhi on strike

Resident doctors at government hospitals in New Delhi walked out on December 21 as part of a nationwide protest to oppose the suspension of postgraduate medical admissions, which is causing extra workload. Resident doctors from several states across India walked out on December 6 over the issue. The action is being coordinated by the Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA).

This year's NEET-PG 2021 post graduate entrance exam, which usually occurs in January, was postponed until September because of rising COVID-19 cases. Post graduate medical admissions have been stayed by the Supreme Court, which has postponed hearing petitions filed by students questioning the validity of resident seat allocation

until January 6.

The striking doctors said they will not return to work until they receive a written assurance from the government that the issue is being resolved.

Sri Lankan public sector doctors hold national walkout

The Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) called a country-wide indefinite strike on December 21 over seven demands. These include an end to the violation of the national wage policy, stopping appointments for post-internship graduate doctors without approval of the transfer board and for the 2022 transfer list to be published. The GMOA warned that the strike will continue until an acceptable solution is found.

South Korea: Unions at Hankook Tire plants shut down 23-day strike

Unions at Hankook Tire's manufacturing plants in Daejeon and Geumsan, South Korea called off their 23-day strike on December 17 after organising a new wage deal with management.

The two major Hankook Tire unions, affiliated with the Federation of Trade Unions and Trade Unions of Korea, called an indefinite strike on November 24, after four months of negotiations and ineffective short-duration rolling stoppages during November.

Unions initially demanded a 10.6 percent wage increase to compensate for a wage freeze last year that followed five years of low wage increases between 2 and 3 percent. Management offered only a 5 percent wage increase and a bonus of 5 million won (\$US4,200). Hankook Tire's net profit more than doubled to 525.4 billion won between January and September, up from 235.2 billion won a year earlier.

The unions called off the strike after accepting a slightly improved offer from management that fell far short of worker's wage demand. The deal includes a 6 percent increase in basic monthly pay, 5 million won in performance-based pay and a bonus of 2 million won.

Filipino food-processing workers imprisoned for striking

Over forty striking workers from pasta producer Soft Touch

Development Corporation (STDC) in Valenzuela, 14 kilometres north of Manila, were viciously attacked by police using water cannon on Tuesday and imprisoned on anti-democratic charges. They were charged with holding an illegal assembly, disobedience towards a person in authority and causing alarm and scandal. They were released 36 hours later.

The workers walked out after management told them they were to be laid off on December 24 for forming a union. According to a lawyer representing the workers, the company claimed employees were prohibited from forming a labour union because their employer is a manpower agency that hired them.

The companies' use manpower agencies as "shields against labour unions," a practice that deprives workers of their rights. He said this has been a recurring issue involving the practice of enforcing short-term work contracts.

Australia

Senior nurse managers at New South Wales regional hospitals strike

Senior nurse managers at several health facilities in Western NSW stopped work between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on Tuesday to protest the "dire state" of rural and regional health. Members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) Nurse Managers branch in the Western NSW Local Health District met on December 17 and voted to walk out over the state government's failure to respond to their formal complaints.

A NSWNMA spokesperson said senior nurse managers and health services managers are concerned that they cannot fill rising nurse vacancies and critical gaps in rosters. "The circumstances are devastating for the nursing workforce, which is also grappling with pandemic fatigue," the spokesperson said.

NSWNMA wants an urgent meeting with the government and introduction of state-wide nurse-to-patient ratios on every shift, including a minimum of at least three nurses in every rural and remote facility, two of whom must be registered nurses with first-line emergency care qualifications.

New South Wales commuter rail workers continue limited strike action

As part of over three months of ongoing industrial action over bargaining for a new enterprise agreement (EA) for members at Sydney Trains and NSW Trains, the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) called strike action on Monday. RTBU members stopped work for 8 hours starting at 8 p.m. on Monday while AMWU members held rolling stoppages at rail network depots on Tuesday.

The unions want 3.5 percent annual pay increases, slightly above the current official CPI of 3 percent, but far short of what is needed to keep up with the rapidly increasing cost of living. Transport for NSW

(TfNSW) is only offering a 2.5 percent annual pay rise that includes a 0.5 percent superannuation bump, meaning the actual wage increase would be just 2.04 percent.

Rail is the last mode of public transport to remain on state-owned following the sell-off of the state's bus and ferry networks, spearheaded by the Labor Party and enforced by the unions.

In preparation for possible privatisation, TfNSW has rejected demands that the new enterprise agreement retains base working conditions if employees are transferred to a private company, permanent job conversion for contractors after three months service and that any employee affected by a restructure or workplace change be given job priority in the new structure. TfNSW also wants to slash redundancy payments from a maximum of 64 weeks' pay to 12 weeks.

The unions have restricted industrial action, dragging out the dispute in the hope of wearing down workers until they accept a deal that fits into the NSW government's privatisation plans for Sydney Trains and NSW Trains.

Sydney bus drivers continue industrial action in wage dispute

Drivers working for contract bus operator Transit Systems across Sydney's inner west and southwest, reimposed work bans on December 16 in their struggle for a pay increase in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Transport Workers Union and Rail Tram and Bus Union members turned off their fare collecting readers for 24 hours, did not wear their uniforms and refused to access company communications out of hours.

The drivers began industrial action on November 22, turning off fare collection readers for 24 hours, and again for three days on November 29, followed by 24-hour strikes on December 6 and 7 in region 6 and region 3 respectively.

Transit Systems workers want an end to the two-tier employment system in Region 6 and improvements to Region 3 pay and conditions to align them with public sector drivers. The unions are seeking a meagre 2.5 percent wage increase, less than the current consumer price index (CPI) of 3 percent, far short of the rapidly increasing cost of living in Sydney.

Transit Systems NSW is contracted by the NSW state government to operate in two of Sydney's 14 contract regions. It has 1,867 workers and 848 buses operating out of six depots.



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