

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

4 March 2022

Asia

India: Delhi childcare workers maintain strike in face of government threats

Thousands of anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers have been on strike in Delhi since January 31 to demand higher wages. This week they began overnight protests outside the headquarters of the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department and demanded immediate withdrawal of an order issued last week warning them of disciplinary action if they did not return to work.

Several thousand workers have been holding daily protests outside the chief minister's office. There are about 10,700 anganwadi centres and 20,000 anganwadi workers and helpers in Delhi.

The present monthly honorarium received by anganwadi workers and helpers in Delhi is 9,678 rupees (\$US128) and 4,839 rupees respectively, on top of minor incentive payments for selected programmes. Strikers are demanding a monthly wage of 25,000 rupees (\$US330) for anganwadi workers and 20,000 rupees for helpers.

Tamil Nadu government doctors hold one-day strike

Doctors at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai held a one-day strike on Thursday over two issues. They were demanding proper relief for families of medical professionals who died due to contracting COVID-19 and implementation of a pay band. The doctors threatened to intensify their actions if demands were not soon met.

Tamil Nadu government revenue officers strike over sacking of colleague

Revenue officers in Coimbatore stopped work on February 25 and held a sit-in at the Collectorate premises to protest suspension of the tahsildar (chief tax collector). The workers are members of the Tamil Nadu Direct Recruitment (Group-II) Revenue Officers' Association.

The tahsildar was suspended on February 9 after his name was mentioned in a First Information Report registered by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption. The protesting workers alleged that the case was framed. They said the tahsildar was on COVID-19 leave at the time of the alleged offence.

Strikers alleged that some staff were given memos and subjected to

disciplinary action for "silly" reasons and demanded the memos be withdrawn. They threatened to call an indefinite strike if their grievances were ignored.

Tamil Nadu state transport workers protest

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) workers demonstrated in Madurai on February 26 demanding uniforms, stitching allowance and the right to take leave. The protests, organised by the TNSTC Workers Union, which is affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, were held at various TNSTC and State Express Transport Corporation depots.

The same workers demonstrated at their depots five days earlier over intolerable working conditions. They demanded canteens, toilets, rest houses, improved sanitation facilities and immediate implementation of the 14th pay commission recommendations.

Tamil Nadu power-loom workers end strike

Striking power-loom workers in Coimbatore returned to work on March 2 following a tripartite agreement between the union, labour commissioner and power-loom owners. Power-loom workers in several districts had been on strike since January 9. About 50,000 had already returned to work a fortnight ago after accepting pay rises between 15 and 19 percent from master weavers.

The power-loom owner-operators and the hired hands who work alongside them have not received a pay increase since 2014. There are about 500,000 power-loom operators in Coimbatore.

Jammu water conservation workers hold three-day strike

More than 21,000 daily-wage workers from the Jammu division of the Jal Shakti Department (water conservation) stopped work for 72 hours on February 24 demanding to be made permanent and for the release of pending salaries. The strike covered all ten districts of the Jammu division and impacted the water supply in several areas.

Workers said that some daily-wage workers have served at the department for three decades and that their salaries have been held up for months. Their wage is a meagre 255 rupees (\$US3.36) per day.

Haryana auto components workers demand equal pay for equal work

Bellsonica Auto Component India factory workers in Gurgaon marched to the mini-secretariat on February 23 to protest provocative actions by company management.

Bellsonica Auto Component India Employees Union members allege that management responded to their demands for equal pay for equal work and permanent workers for permanent work by repeatedly establishing inquiries, issuing show cause notices, pressuring workers to increase production and threatening to cut facilities.

Workers said management is using contract workers, trainees and apprentices to do the work of permanent skilled workers but providing inadequate pay.

Retrenched Hindustan Motors workers in Tamil Nadu begin indefinite hunger protest

Over 50 retrenched workers from Hindustan Motors in Thiruvallur, Tamil Nadu began an indefinite hunger strike on Tuesday to demand reinstatement or return of their land.

About 175 permanent workers and over 150 contract workers were retrenched when the Hindustan Motors plant was transferred to PCA automobiles early last year. The retrenchments ignored an agreement with the state government that all Hindustan Motors workers would transfer to the PCA auto assembly factory in Thiruvallur.

When Hindustan Motors needed to expand in 1968, local landowners agreed to give up their agricultural land provided the company employed family members in the plant. Now that these workers have been retrenched, they want their parents' land back.

Bangladeshi government administrative workers strike

About 25,000 Bangladeshi lower grade government employees from the field administration's offices of the divisional commissioner's, deputy commissioner's and assistant commissioner's (land) departments struck on Tuesday to demand the upgrading of non-cadre posts at the field level.

Workers held sit-down protests outside their respective offices from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Dhaka, Chattogram and other places. They threatened to continue the strike until March 24 if their demand is not met. The strike was called after the state minister for public administration failed to honour an agreement to meet their demand by February 28.

Bangladesh Islamic University officers stop work

About 100 officers from the Bangladesh Islamic University (IU) in Kushtia stopped work on February 26 and staged a sit-in protest. The IU Officers Association members presented three demands. These were an increased pay scale, extension of retirement age from 60 to 62 years, and a change in working hours from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. instead of 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The officers ended a strike on February 19 after the university administration falsely assured them that their demands would be considered.

Australia and New Zealand

Hanson quarry truck drivers in New South Wales locked out

Over 50 tip truck drivers from Hanson Construction Materials quarries in the Hunter and Central Coast, north of Sydney, have been locked out since February 25 when they initiated protected industrial action. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) and Hanson are in dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The TWU said Hanson's tip truck drivers in the Hunter and Central Coast are paid significantly lower rates than drivers employed by the company to do the same work in Sydney and the South Coast. The drivers want an end to Hanson's two-tier wage system, which the union accepted in previous agreements, and for a pay increase to bring them in line with other Hanson drivers.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began the union allowed Hanson to force many full-time drivers onto individual flexibility agreements under which they became permanent part-time. They were also required to take annual leave. Those who refused were threatened with redundancy.

The locked-out workers were holding daily protests outside the company's head office in Parramatta, Sydney before Hanson agreed to meet with the TWU on March 2.

Hanson Australia is a division of the global Heidelberg Cement company. It operates 210 concrete plants in Australia along with 71 quarries and other construction material supply operations.

New South Wales train maintenance workers strike for job security

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members who maintain the XPT train fleet that travels between Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane stopped work for 24 hours on Tuesday after failing to reach an agreement with the state Liberal government and Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) for a new enterprise agreement.

A major demand of the workers is for job security when the current XPT regional train fleet is replaced by Spanish-built trains that will be maintained by private contractors. Workers have insisted that the government insert provision in the agreement to stop further privatisation of the rail network.

An AMWU press release claims the union is fighting for wages that go beyond cost-of-living increases, rostering provisions that allow for a work-life balance, improved job security, and a safe workplace where workers are given PPE that is fit for purpose.

Rail Tram and Bus Union members at the government-owned Sydney Trains and NSW Trains have been maintaining multiple work bans since February 6 in their dispute for a new agreement. TfNSW is only offering 2.5 percent annual pay increases that includes a 0.5 percent superannuation bump, meaning the actual wage increase would be just 2.04 percent, a pay cut.

New South Wales ambulance patient transport officers stop work

Ambulance patient transport officers (PTOs) from the NSW state-run health services provider HealthShare held a stop work meeting on Tuesday to oppose the state government's changes to workers compensation legislation and underpayment of the infectious cleaning allowance.

The Health Services Union (HSU) say that proposed changes to the Workers Compensation Act will make it nearly impossible for frontline workers to claim compensation if they contract COVID-19 at work. Currently healthcare, education, retail, transport, emergency services, construction, disability and aged care, dining and entertainment workers are automatically entitled to compensation if they contract COVID-19.

The amended bill requires these workers to show proof that they contracted the virus while at work, an impossible task. The Perrottet Liberal state government says that the amendment could save businesses up to \$638 million. PTOs are proposing industrial action that includes refusing to transport any COVID-19 patients when and if the compensation amendment bill is passed.

Entitlement to the infectious cleaning allowance of \$6.13 is triggered when transmission-based precautions such as masks, gowns and gloves are used when transporting any patient during a shift. PTOs have been doing full vehicle cleans between all patient transfers without receiving the allowance.

PTOs are refusing to clean their vehicle between patients and will drive the vehicle back to their depot to have it cleaned by an officer who is appropriately compensated until the infectious cleaning allowance and back pay is disbursed.

Aged care nurses protest in Victoria and Tasmania over low wages and chronic understaffing

Aged care nurses held protests on Tuesday to mark one year since recommendations from the Royal Commission into aged care were released. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) held lunchtime protests outside the offices of two federal Liberal-National parliamentarians in Victoria and the Tasmanian seat held by embattled Liberal Aged Care Minister Richard Colbeck.

Protesting nurses are calling for the appropriate funding of aged care and an end to the decades-long underfunding and understaffing facilitated by Labor and Liberal state and federal governments that has resulted in the atrocious conditions exposed by last year's Royal Commission.

The aged care demonstration follows a major public hospital strike in NSW by thousands of nurses opposing the Liberal-National state government's wage freeze and for improved nurse-patient ratios, as well as state and federal governments' unsafe pandemic policies that have resulted in mass infections, deaths and three years of chronic staff and equipment shortages.

The ANMF and the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMNA) are seeking to prevent any militant action by diverting their members into dead end union-controlled online forums, questionnaires and community protests.

Tasmanian government bus mechanics protest additional workloads

Bus mechanics employed by the government-owned Metro Tasmania, the state's largest commuter transport operator, demonstrated outside the Moonah bus depot in Hobart on February 24 to oppose higher workloads.

The Liberal government announced plans to include voluntary unpaid IT and security camera maintenance work in the mechanics job description with no extra pay or training.

Up until 18 months ago, critical video maintenance and IT work was conducted by dedicated IT specialists. When the last one resigned midway through the COVID-19 pandemic the mechanics volunteered to do his work in support of their bus driver colleagues' safety.

The AMWU said talks with Metro Tasmania failed to resolve the issue and that management is refusing to pay the mechanics for the specialist work or to hire replacement IT technicians.

New Zealand pallet workers declare indefinite strike

Workers at one of New Zealand's largest pallet suppliers have gone on indefinite strike as drawn-out negotiations over wages and job conditions stall.

Workers at CHEP's Auckland service centre, an Australian-owned multinational pallet supplier, held a number of one-day strikes in February. They are now manning a daily 24-hour picket line outside the Penrose centre until an agreement is reached.

The FIRST Union is claiming a "living wage" and "significant increases" for people who had spent many years working for the company. The so-called "living wage," which is promoted by the trade unions, is set at an inadequate \$NZ22.75 an hour, barely above the legal minimum pay of \$20.

First Union has been bargaining with CHEP since June 2021 and sought mediation this week. CHEP unsuccessfully attempted to serve an unenforceable trespass order to stop strikers gathering on the footpath outside the premises on Wednesday last week. The pickets have largely stopped trucks from going in and out of the site.



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