

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

11 March 2022

Asia

India: Unorganised workers in Karnataka protest poverty wages

Thousands of low-paid unorganised workers from across Karnataka demonstrated in Bengaluru on March 4 over several demands. These included a 24,000-rupee (\$US316) monthly wage, state government allocation of 5,000 million rupees to the Labour Welfare Board and a minimum wage for all anganwadi workers. The large protest at Freedom Park spilled out onto nearby streets disrupting traffic flow.

The State Anganwadi Workers' Association, the Federation of Karnataka Auto Rickshaw Drivers, the Karnataka State Federation of Mid-Day Meal Employees and other trade unions, organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, said that they had staged several demonstrations after which the government had falsely promised to resolve their grievances.

Himachal Pradesh government workers demand old pension scheme

Thousands of state government workers from across Himachal Pradesh, who have been forced to contribute to the New Pension Scheme (NPS) protested in Shimla on March 3 demanding the restoration of their old pension scheme. Protesters picketed the assembly complex and held a sit-down protest at the main gate.

While police tried to stop the workers near the assembly complex by using water cannons and erecting barricades, protesters smashed all hurdles and picketed the assembly. They said they will not leave the protest until their demand was met.

About 90,000 government employees in Himachal are covered by the NPS. Hundreds protested in December demanding its abolition.

The NPS was introduced by the central government in 2004 as an austerity measure, replacing a fully government-funded system which offered a guaranteed pension based on workers' last-drawn pay.

Under the NPS, workers have to pay 10 percent of their salary into the scheme, fattening the profits of major investors, and tying pensions to the fluctuations of the market. Pensioners receive far less than under the old defined benefits scheme.

Delhi municipal mosquito eradication workers take indefinite strike action

Hundreds of mosquito eradication workers from the three municipal corporations in Delhi have been on strike for more than three weeks to demand permanent jobs. The strike follows several unsuccessful meetings with the corporations.

The workers are employed by the municipal councils as part of their mosquito breeding control program. The strike was called by the Anti-Malaria Ekta Karamchari Union, which is affiliated to Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Andhra Pradesh childcare workers demand minimum wage

Hundreds of anganwadi (childcare) workers protested in Visakhapatnam on March 7 to demand implementation of the minimum wage. Protesting workers marched from Visakha Saraswati Park to the Collectorate where a large contingent of police blocked them from entering the grounds.

Other demands included provision of money for maintenance of the anganwadi centres and extension of the benefits of government welfare schemes to anganwadi workers.

Anganwadi workers in Jammu and Kashmir demand pay increase

Anganwadi workers and helpers demonstrated in Srinagar on March 3 to demand an increase in honorarium. The Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Association members chanted slogans in support of their demands.

Workers want a pay rise to bring them in line with childcare workers in other states. They currently only receive a meagre 5,000 rupees (\$US65) per month. Their counterparts in other states are paid two or three times higher. As well as doing anganwadi work, they also perform duties for the health department, education department and social welfare department without any additional pay.

Life Insurance Corporation workers in Tamil Nadu oppose privatisation

Workers from the government-owned Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India staged a dharna (sit-down protest) outside the Collectorate in Salem on March 5. The protest was part of a long campaign by workers across India opposed to the Modi government's move to sell shares of LIC.

Insurance Corporation Employees' Union members and other

organisations complained that the government was selling off profit-making Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and that LIC was in the list. They said the LIC was a huge contributor to the growth of the nation and its shares should not be sold to private players.

LIC workers in Madurai held a protest on the same day. They warned that nationwide protests would be conducted on the day LIC shares are listed in the stock exchange.

Haryana urban planning workers strike to demand unpaid wages

Haryana Shahari Vikas Pradhikaran (HSVP) (urban planning agency) employees stopped work in Gurugram on March 2 to demand outstanding wages. The data entry operators and security personnel said they have not been paid for three months.

Workers from the administrator's office, estate office, engineering cell and land acquisition wing held a sit-down protest outside the HSVP office. Workers returned to work after an assurance was given by senior officials that their salaries would be processed in the next two to three days.

Pakistan: Sindh power utility workers oppose privatisation

Sindh state-run power utility Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) employees demonstrated in Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas on March 3 as part of their long struggle against the federal government's plans to privatise state-owned enterprises.

Workers also demanded allocation of a disparity allowance to WAPDA employees, a 10 to 25 percent wage increase based on the pay scale and mass recruitment to fill 62,000 vacant posts. The shortage of staff combined with the lack of safety measures and equipment have significantly increased workplace accidents in recent years. Workers also protested against increased power tariffs which is part of the Imran Khan government's agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

While WAPDA workers demonstrated their willingness to expand the struggle in response to the intensified drive of the government to reform the sector, the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union has not called a province-wide protest, and, as in the past, the latest protest was restricted to the two cities.

South Korea: CJ Logistics workers' union ends strike without resolution

On March 1, the union representing nearly 1,700 striking parcel-delivery workers from CJ Logistics in Seoul, shut down their two-month strike and ordered members to immediately return to work. The Parcel Delivery Workers Union (PDWU), affiliated to the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, reached a deal with the company that did not resolve any of the central issues.

The delivery drivers stopped work on December 28 to protest brutal conditions in their industry. Extreme overwork and low wages are the norm while package delivery companies have reaped huge profits throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Strikers were demanding higher pay and improved conditions and an end to unsafe workloads.

The union claimed that CJ Logistics failed to use the full amount of increased delivery charges that should have been spent to reduce workloads under a January deal between the government and logistics firms. The deal called for logistics companies to hire extra workers to sort parcels and take other steps to prevent overwork.

The agreement was made after mass protests following the death of 16 delivery workers allegedly caused by overwork. According to the union, CJ Logistics is spending only 30 percent of the increased shipping charges to improve working conditions for delivery workers.

In the sell-out deal between CJ Logistics and PDWU the union agreed that both sides come up with a follow-up deal "on areas of contention" and finalise it by the end of June. Meanwhile, the workers have been thrown back into the same unsafe, deadly and intolerable working conditions which had driven them to strike and sacrifice three months' pay.

Cambodian police arrest 180 protesting NagaWorld casino workers

Police in Phnom Penh arrested another 180 striking employees from the NagaWorld casino on Monday and forced them onto buses for transportation to one of the city's COVID-19 quarantine centres. Hundreds of striking workers have been protesting outside the NagaWorld casino and hotel complex in Phnom Penh since mid-December demanding reinstatement of 365 terminated union members and an end to alleged discrimination against the union.

Workers have been threatened with fines and imprisonment if they continue their action. Union leaders have been arrested on bogus charges of "incitement to commit a felony" and the Phnom Penh Municipal Commission to Combat Covid-19 has issued a directive telling the strikers to immediately end their protest. The Phnom Penh Municipal Court has issued summonses for protesters to appear for questioning over their alleged "blocking of implementation of Covid-19 preventive measures."

In April, the Hong Kong-owned complex used the COVID-19 pandemic as the excuse to restructure its operations, sacking 1,329 of its 8,000-strong work force and targeting the union organisation. Only 85 workers accepted a severance payout which the union claimed was less than what is required by law. Workers said management had refused to negotiate with the union, instead insisting that they represent themselves in severance discussions.

As well as demanding reinstatement of the 365 union members, workers want a review of termination packages to bring them in line with Cambodia's Labor Law.

Australia and New Zealand

Boral Cement plant workers in New South Wales strike

About 200 workers from Boral Cement production plants at Marulan, Berrima, and Maldon in southern New South Wales walked off the job for 24 hours on Thursday after the company refused to make major changes to its proposed enterprise agreement. Workers have maintained overtime bans and short ad hoc stoppages begun in August. Boral is refusing to negotiate while industrial action is on.

The workers are covered by various unions: the Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Electrical Trades Union

and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union.

The unions claim Boral wants to impose a four-year agreement that includes a wage freeze in the first year followed by annual 1.25 percent increases in the next three years, plus major cuts to long-established conditions. Boral wants to abolish rostered days off, remove clauses restricting contract labour and job security, reduce annual leave loading and remove a Dispute Settlements Procedure clause.

The current agreement expired on June 13 last year with the last pay increase in June 2020. The Combined Unions want 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 the construction and road building industry. The Boral group made \$640 million net profit in the 2020–21 financial year and returned \$3 billion to its shareholders after selling its North American business.

The dispute has dragged on while the unions ensure that eight months of limited industrial action does not disrupt Boral's lucrative business operations.

West Australian Newspaper workers still locked out

Over 100 print workers employed by the West Australian Newspaper (WAN) print facility, owned by Seven West Media (SWM), in Perth have been locked out since February 7 in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The indefinite lockout was the company's response to a one-hour strike by the workers.

Negotiations between the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and SWM for a new agreement began in 2019. While two years of talks produced no deal, the company put its proposed agreement to workers in December. The proposed deal, which stripped away workers' current redundancy entitlements and attacked wages and conditions, was rejected by union members.

Despite having wages frozen for over two years, the AMWU is only seeking 2 percent sub-inflation annual wage increases, an effective pay cut. The workers have not had a pay increase for two and a half years, following a deal done between the AMWU and SWM to extend the current expired agreement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

AMWU members on Thursday voted to reject the company's offer for the third time. The workers are relying on donations from the public to help them survive while management attempts to maintain production using scab labour.

Helicopter maintenance engineers to strike in Western Australia

Helicopter maintenance engineers at Petroleum Helicopters International (PHI) in Western Australia gave notice this week that they will begin rolling stoppages from March 16 until April 5 unless their demands in a new enterprise agreement are accepted.

PHI transfers workers between offshore LNG platforms and land facilities at Broom in northern Western Australia. The 15 Australia Licenced Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA) members have several major demands which they say are more important than their wage demand.

The engineers want protection of jobs against outsourcing to low-wage labour hire contractors, an end to fixed-term employment contracts and for all engineers to be employed on a permanent basis, and the locking in of even-time rosters and paid annual leave.

The ALAEA is represented in negotiations by the Offshore Alliance (OA), (made up of the Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia). OA claims that PHI want an EA which gives the company an ability to sack highly skilled helicopter engineers at the end of their fixed term contracts and displace them with low wage labour hire contractors.

OA has alleged that PHI is advertising for contract engineers to scab on the engineers' strike.

Deal ends New Zealand pallet workers' strike

An indefinite strike at New Zealand's largest pallet supplier ended last week following a deal negotiated by the First Union. Workers at CHEP's Auckland service centre originally began industrial action in February. Following several one-day strikes and stalled pay talks they began picketing the Penrose centre and declared they would stay out indefinitely.

First Union spokesman Mark Muller told the media that workers voted unanimously in favour of a new agreement, which he claimed would see most of workers earning a "living wage or higher" and receiving back-paid wage rises above 6 percent and further increases later in the year. The so-called "living wage," at \$22.75, is totally inadequate and just above the legal minimum of \$20. The deal also includes overtime rates for weekend shifts.

In an indication of the value the company places on its relationship with the union, the agreement includes a sign-on bonus of \$500 for First Union members.

Air New Zealand trainers to strike over pay

Cabin crew leaders who fly on 787s and are responsible for inflight crew training have issued strike notices to Air New Zealand over stalled wage talks. The industrial action will stop regulatory in-flight training of existing and returning crew, taking effect from 22 March.

The E t? union has been bargaining the new agreement for more than two years but the company has so far refused to recognise that current wages for experienced cabin crew are too low. The start rate is only just above the \$20 per hour minimum wage. The union wants it starting from the so-called "Living Wage," itself set at an inadequate \$22.75.

Air New Zealand's focus on ultra-long-range trips to North America means the company wants crew to fly for up to 19 hours, and up to 22 hours in case of a disruption to scheduled flight times.

An E t? spokesman said the union recognises the company is in debt and needs to trade its way back to profitability, but it also needs skilled staff. "Crew can't survive on these low rates," he said adding the union has limited the strike to the in-flight training component of their jobs, "to avoid major disruption to passengers."



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