

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

1 April 2022

Asia

India: Tamil Nadu mini-clinic doctors protest sackings

Doctors and support staff from mini-clinics across Tamil Nadu whose employment contracts were due to end on March 31 protested in Chennai on March 23 demanding extension of services and permanent jobs. Around 1,600 doctors and 3,600 multipurpose hospital workers will be out of work when their contracts end.

The doctors set up an online protest on March 18 over the issue, using social media platforms to publicise their demand, and sharing videos of their work over the past two years when the state was reeling from COVID-19. The doctors and other staff were employed in ICUs, COVID care centres, fever wards, fever camps, testing collection and vaccination centres.

The government has justified the sackings, claiming that there were “almost” no COVID-19 cases in many hospitals and that the demand for staff had reduced. The government held talks on March 24, but doctors said no concrete promises were made.

Tamil Nadu childcare workers protest privatisation

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers in Madurai protested on March 29 against the government’s plan to privatise the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). They also demanded time scale pay, wage increases based on experience, pension benefits and extension of pension benefits to family members. The current anganwadi wage is 10,000 rupees (\$US131) a month and pension pay is as low as 2,000 rupees.

Pakistan: Lahore college academics demand benefits and job security

Hundreds of professors and lecturers from government-run colleges across Punjab province have been demonstrating for nearly four weeks outside the Civil Secretariat in Lahore demanding full benefits of government service entitlements and permanent jobs for those serving in contracts. The large protest, which has been joined by college students, has affected some vehicular traffic in the city.

In addition to the sit-in protest, teachers are boycotting classes for one hour every day. Over 7,000 academic staff are affected by the issues.

In 2019, the government was forced by widespread protests to place some teachers in permanent positions. Despite repeated promises, the government has refused to count their service under temporary contracts depriving them of benefits stemming from years of service.

Australia and New Zealand

Cairns aged care nurses protest cuts to wages and conditions

Queensland Nurses and Midwives’ Union (QNMU) members at the Regis Whitfield aged care facility in Cairns, North Queensland, plan to hold a demonstration at the facility on April 4 to protest cuts to wages and conditions in the company’s proposed enterprise agreement.

The QNMU alleges that Regis is trying to force nursing and care staff to work up to 20 days in a row, for up to 10 hours without overtime pay, and to be on call on days off. It said management has offered a minimum wage increase of 1 percent each year (roughly 25 cents an hour) for the next three years for some staff, and between 2 and 3.5 percent for others. The consumer price index (CPI) increase for Queensland is currently above 4 percent.

Tasmanian aged care workers protest cuts to wages and

conditions

Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members at Tasmania's largest private aged care provider Southern Cross Care (SCC) held stop work meetings at several SCC facilities during the week to protest cuts to wages and conditions in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. They are also demanding proper staffing levels and improved safety for residents.

In December, the HACSU applied to the Fair Work Commission to stop SCC from cutting kitchen hours at four aged care facilities. The union accused SCC of trying to divide staff to push the cuts through by saying care and other staff or even residents can pick up duties currently completed by kitchen staff.

In December, nurses at SCC facilities, covered by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), rejected SCC's proposed agreement. SCC demanded that nurses give up paid meal breaks, overtime restrictions, access to training, redeployment and redundancy entitlements, cuts to shift penalty rates, and accept "pay increases" averaging just 1.7 percent per annum, well below Tasmania's CPI increase for 2021 of 3.5 percent.

Komatsu dealership workers in Queensland strike

About 100 workers from four Komatsu earth excavation equipment dealership sites in south-east Queensland walked off the job for 24 hours on March 25 in an enterprise agreement dispute. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members at Komatsu sites at Wacol, Sherwood, Hemmant and Field have not had a pay increase for two years and rejected the company's pay offer saying it failed to keep up with the cost of living.

Union calls off strike by Melbourne tip truck owner drivers

A strike and protest planned for last Monday by 200 independent heavy vehicle tip truck drivers in Melbourne was suspended by the Victorian Tippers United (VTU) union at the last moment.

The drivers, who are key to the Victorian Labour government's major multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects and to the profits of construction contractors, had planned to strike and drive their trucks to the Victorian state parliament to protest recent diesel fuel price increases.

Diesel costs have more than doubled rising from \$1.17 per litre last July to \$2.27 at their peak this year. This additional cost has not been matched by increased hourly rates or contract returns, creating a squeeze that is threatening the viability of many of these self-employed transport workers.

The VTU justified its shutdown of the strike telling drivers it had been in negotiation with the government which had promised a recalculation of fuel excise taxes by the end of the week. The Liberal-National federal government announced on Tuesday evening that it has reduced the excise tax on all fuels by \$0.22 per litre from midnight. However, this is a temporary meagre relief and will only be in effect for six months.

New Zealand rail union holds strike ballot in pay dispute

The New Zealand Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) is currently balloting rail workers in Auckland on strike action over a contract dispute. The union has begun negotiations with Auckland One Rail (AOR), the private operator of passenger rail services in the city, but reported in the *Transport Worker* in March that "bargaining with AOR is now at a point where it has broken down."

AOR offered a below-inflation wage increase of 5.4 percent for all workers for 16 months, or 5.5 percent for Locomotive Engineers and 5.3 percent for the rest of the workforce. The RMTU has asked for a vague "reasonable pay increase coupled with a weekend allowance for drivers for a 12-month period." Inflation has increased to 5.9 percent and is estimated to exceed 7 percent this quarter.

The union said the AOR offer, effectively a pay cut, is "deeply unfair and downright immoral" given rail workers' sacrifice of health to work throughout the pandemic. The RMTU, however, has a history of using rail workers' grievances as a bargaining chip, only to impose sellout-deals. Workers voted to strike at state-owned KiwiRail in December, but the union canceled it and returned to negotiations, settling on a below-inflation deal.

In the capital city Wellington, the 2019–2022 Multi-Employer Collective Agreement (MECA) between Transdev Wellington and the RMTU expires on July 3 and wage negotiations there begin in May.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact