

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

Our reporters
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Asia

Contract teachers from the government-funded girls school Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in (KGBV) in Hyderabad demonstrated outside the Directorate of School Education office on Monday. The more than 400 teachers involved were opposing the termination of their contracts.

Contracts of 937 teachers are being terminated by the state, including those of resource teachers, post-graduate resource teachers and physical education teachers. Hired on November 17, 2021, they demanded to know why they were being terminated even while the government had released a notification to fill another 1,000 posts on a contract basis.

Non-teaching staff from the Kuvempu University at Shankarghatta, Karnataka held a sit-down protest outside the administrative block on April 28 over delays in the payment of salaries. They submitted a memorandum of their demands to the registrar and addressed to Karnataka's chief minister.

They have demanded an end to salary payment processing through the Human Resources Management System. Workers alleged that salary payments had been delayed every month since the new system was introduced.

Teachers from state government colleges in Himachal Pradesh demonstrated in Shimla on April 27 to demand the introduction of the 7th UGC (university grants commission) pay scales. The Himachal Government College Teachers Association submitted a letter to the chief minister and education minister saying that 27 states had already implemented the scales. They accused the Himachal Pradesh government of deliberately delaying the higher pay scales.

Around 150 terminated sanitation and canteen workers from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi were laid off on Wednesday after announcing that they would strike for three months of unpaid wages. The workers are now demanding immediate reinstatement, written assurance from the Dean of Students about non-reduction in the number of workers, and a written assurance about payment of wages within the seventh day every month.

Twenty-seven outsourced workers from the government-run General Hospital in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu walked out on a

wildcat strike on May 3. The workers were involved in sanitation, gardening, carpentry, plumbing, electrical works, and housekeeping. They decided to strike because the outsourcing company was only paying them 4,500 to 5,000 rupees (\$US59.01 to \$65.57), well below the government-fixed amount of 12,500 to 13,000 rupees.

While police intervened in an attempt to break up the strike, workers only returned after hospital management assured that they would be paid the correct amounts.

Tea garden workers from Chittagong, Sylhet and other areas demonstrated on May 1 over several demands. The Bangladesh Tea Workers Union called on the government to end the discrimination and harassment of tea garden workers and increase the minimum wage. The daily minimum wage was fixed at a miserable 120 taka (\$US1.4) per day following a bilateral agreement between owners and unions in 2020. The deal has been breached by tea garden management. Workers are demanding the daily rate be 300 taka.

Around 100,000 people are employed in more than 150 tea gardens across the country. According to a 2021 survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the Unicef, 74 percent of tea garden workers live below the poverty line in Sylhet alone.

Thousands of village services (grama niladhari) officers held a sick-leave campaign on Wednesday and rallied at the Colombo Fort railway station calling on the government to stop political recruitment and anti-democratic suppression of the public service. The Confederation of Grama Niladhari Trade Unions also demanded relief to workers from the exorbitant cost of essential items and worsening shortages.

Protesters marched to Galle Face Green in Colombo outside the Presidential Secretariat and joined other workers who have been maintaining non-stop anti-government protests since April 9. Millions of workers across the country have held two general strikes over the past two weeks to demand the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapakse and his government.

A group of union members from Samsung Electronics demonstrated outside the Seoul regional employment and labour administration building on Monday. The union, which accounts for around 4 percent of the total 110,000 Samsung workforce, have accused management of illegally making a pay deal with the company's labour-management council in

violation of industrial law. The union has registered a complaint with the government.

The company announced a 9 percent wage increase and three days of paid leave but according to the union, most employees will only receive a 5 percent salary increase. It claimed most employees opposed the deal.

Since October the union has held 19 meetings with management, including arbitration by the labour commission, trying to reach agreement on a pay deal. The union wants an annual salary increase of 10 million won (\$US8,155) per employee, full disclosure of its incentive system and abolition of its peak wage system, which reduces salaries gradually for several years before retirement.

Samsung announced abolition of the company's union-free management policy in May 2020 but continued to negotiate wages with the labour-management council. The union claimed this was in violation of Article 33 and Article 5 of the Workers' Participation Act.

Australia

About 100 members of the Australian Services Union (ASU) from the Moreland City Council, an inner-north Melbourne suburb, walked off the job between 6 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Wednesday. They picketed several depots in the morning and held an afternoon demonstration at Brunswick Town Hall. The workers are in dispute over the council's proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers are maintaining several work bans, including not picking up garbage from street bins. The council has called in contractors as strike breakers to remove the piles of garbage littering the city's streets.

According to the ASU, council management called an end to negotiations in early April with the bargaining group, which included the ASU and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), with 40 unresolved claims on the table. Workers have unanimously opposed the councils "insulting" pay increase offer of 1.5 percent this year followed by 2 percent, a fraction of the current CPI rate of 5.1 percent.

Indoor staff at Ipswich City Council in southeast Queensland plan to walk off the job on May 11 and meet outside the council administration building to demand an improved pay offer. The Services Union (TSU) members took two days of industrial action on April 7 after rejecting the council's proposed 9 percent pay increase over a three-year enterprise agreement.

The union wants an increase of at least 10 percent, in line with rises given to some other council workers. A 10 percent pay rise, however, is an effective pay cut. The CPI increase for Queensland is currently 5.1 percent, meaning workers would need a 15.3 percent increase over three years just to keep up

with inflation.

South Australia's monopoly power distribution company SA Power Networks (SAPN) has begun standing down electricians and apprentices in response to industrial action by fellow workers to defend wages and conditions in a long running work agreement dispute.

The electricians and apprentices were stood down without pay over several days late in April in an obvious attempt to divide workers during the dispute.

The company's action follows two years of failed negotiations with the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) for a new enterprise agreement. The previous agreement expired in 2020.

CEPU members have three times rejected SAPN's 3 percent pay offer and its demand for a two-tier wage structure with new recruits paid 20 percent less. Management also wants to change job security, remove limitations and conditions on the use of labour hire and contract workers. The CEPU is seeking sub-inflation annual pay increases of just 3.5 percent in a three-year agreement.

Garbage collection truck drivers in the Randwick Council area, an eastern suburb of Sydney, walked off the job for 24 hours on Monday in a dispute with their employer, waste management contractor Cleanaway.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) has been negotiating a new enterprise agreement with Cleanaway for several months. The union accused the company of trying to strip workers of their rights, entitlements, and protections that they had with the previous waste contractor at Randwick Council.

A TWU spokesman said that after Cleanaway took over the council's waste management contract in March 2021 it has refused to protect the pay and conditions of workers under a previous agreement made with Randwick Council and Cleanaway.

TWU accused Cleanaway of bypassing the union and using bullying tactics by going directly to workers with a non-negotiated EA and demanding they sign the agreement.

Meanwhile, Cleanaway truck drivers in Tullamarine, Victoria have been taking industrial action in their dispute over the company's proposed agreement. The TWU claims that the drivers have not had a pay increase for nearly two years and that Cleanaway wants to trade off conditions in return for a wage increase.



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