

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

India: Telangana coal mine contract workers strike over wages and conditions

Thousands of contract workers from the state-owned Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) started an indefinite strike across the 11 Telangana mining areas on September 9. The protest was called by the Joint Action Committee of the SCCL Contract Workers' Unions over their long-outstanding demands for higher wages, job security and statutory benefits.

Nearly 24,000 contract workers from various underground coal mines, opencast projects, workshops, exploration wings and several other departments held protests, rallies and meetings in six districts.

Punjab government workers demand restoration of the old pension scheme

Thousands of government employees responded to a call by the Joint Pensioners' Front of Punjab and Union Territory Chandigarh for a protest in Sangrur on September 10 to demand restoration of the old pension scheme for employees appointed after 2004.

The demonstration blocked the Sangrur-Barnala Road for several hours. Protesters accused the government of reneging on a promise it made before the recent elections.

Public sector workers in several states across India have been holding demonstrations for over a year demanding reinstatement of the old pension scheme. The old scheme did not require a 10 percent contribution from employees' salaries and the pension was determined by the employees' final salary. The new scheme reduces the pension and there is no death benefit.

Punjab veterinary university non-teaching staff strike

Non-teaching staff from the Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University in Ludhiana, Punjab held a sit-down protest outside the university's main gate on September 12 to demand implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission salary recommendation. They have threatened to take indefinite strike action if their demands are not met by September

19.

Tamil Nadu municipal contract conservancy workers demand regular wages

Around 50 contract conservancy workers from the Villupuram Municipality demonstrated outside the District Collectorate in Villupuram on September 12 over the irregular payment of wages. Workers later submitted a memorandum to the Collector complaining that they had only been paid once in two months. They also said that large numbers of workers have not received safety gear, such as face masks and gloves. The municipality employs around 350 conservancy workers.

Kerala government doctors protest wage revision anomalies

Doctors from the Kerala Government Medical Officers' Association held a sit-down protest outside the District Collectorate office in Kozhikode on September 12 over anomalies in the wage revision for government doctors. They claimed the government had not kept its promises made during talks in January this year.

The doctors said the salary revision implemented in January 2021 had led to a cut in their basic pay. Other issues include rural allowances, the loss in basic pay for entry-level medical officers and the denial of personal pay for those promoted after 2019.

Bengaluru domestic workers demand government-funded assistance

The Bangalore District Domestic Workers Union, affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), demonstrated in Bangalore on September 13 to demand government-funded financial assistance.

Workers called for the labour department to create a welfare board for domestic workers similar to the "Kerala state model." They also want free bus passes for the children of domestic workers, health assistance, as well as maternity benefits and health insurance.

The female workers confront many health issues, including anaemia, malnutrition, and vitamin B12 deficiency. Last June around 400 domestic workers protested in Bangalore on International Domestic Workers Day. Workers protested over a range of issues, including caste-based discrimination.

Tamil Nadu government doctors oppose heavy workloads and long hours

Government doctors in Chennai began wearing “demand” badges at work on September 12 to draw attention to their demands. The Federation of Government Doctors Association (FOGDA) is demanding guaranteed pay progression as per the government order 354, lighter workloads and working hours, and an increase in manpower.

Three-wheeler taxi drivers in Mumbai strike

Drivers of privately-owned three-wheel taxis in Mumbai stopped work on Thursday to demand a 25 percent increase in fares. Their current minimum charge of 25 rupees was set in March 2021. They want the minimum charge raised to 35 rupees to compensate for the 25 percent increase in gas prices.

Bangladeshi transport workers strike over police harassment

Sylhet District Road Transport Workers Coordination Council members began an indefinite strike in all four districts of Sylhet division on Tuesday to protest ongoing police harassment. Strikers included those from buses, minibuses, auto-rickshaws, trucks, and covered vans.

The workers are demanding an end to ongoing harassment by traffic police, and excessive fines. The coordination council called off the strike on the same day, following a meeting with Sylhet divisional authorities which made a vague promise that drivers demands “would be considered.”

Northern Territory power and water utility workers strike

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the state-owned Power and Water Corporation (PWC) and Territory Generation stopped work across Australia’s Northern Territory for four hours on September 14. It was their second strike this month. They are demanding an end to the government’s wage freeze and a “reasonable” enterprise agreement offer.

The ETU has said that the industrial action will continue until the government returns to the negotiating table.

The four-year wage freeze on 20,000 public sector workers was imposed in November 2020 as part of the Labor government’s “budget repair roadmap.” The freeze was calculated to save the government \$424 million over four years.

Over 1,000 public sector workers in the NT struck on September 1 to demand an end to the territory government’s four-year public sector wage freeze.

Australia’s lowest paid dentists apply to take industrial action[subhead]

Over 600 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the Cairns and Townsville campuses of James Cook University (JCU) have voted unanimously to apply for a Protected Action Ballot Order, which would allow them to approve taking industrial action.

The JCU workers’ decision follows similar votes by 1,400 other tertiary education workers at the University of Queensland and Griffith University this month, and Queensland University of Technology and the University of Canberra last month.

An NTEU spokesperson said the current enterprise agreement expired 15 months ago with negotiations commencing in June 2021. Management has refused to negotiate on key claims for better job security, reasonable workloads, and a decent pay increase.

The NTEU says JCU workers were among the lowest paid in the country and that because the university made \$24 million profit in each of the past two years, a real pay rise is affordable.

Australian Services Union imposes inferior wages deal at Stonnington Council

The Australian Services Union (ASU), representing over 200 workers from the Stonnington City Council (SCC) in Melbourne, has pushed through a sub-inflation enterprise agreement. The union notified SCC on September 9 that a majority of members had accepted the in-principled agreement and that work stoppages and work bans would be withdrawn.

ASU members—gardeners, leisure facility operators, roads maintenance workers and office staff—rejected the council’s original proposal, which cut overtime penalty entitlements and offered a below inflation wage increase of just 2 percent. The official inflation rate for Melbourne is over 6 percent.

While the deal increases leave entitlements and redundancy payouts, it enforces a three-year real pay cut with other demands unresolved. Annual wage increases will be well below inflation and include \$35/week or 2.5 percent from July 2022 and \$34/week or 2.25 percent from July 2023.

New Zealand casino workers rally over pay

Cleaners and housekeepers at SkyCity Casino in Auckland, New Zealand, rallied outside the company’s CBD premises on September 10. It was one of a series of protests and stoppages by casino workers and supporters over recent Saturdays.

According to the Unite Union, the workers want a “living wage” and for all employees to get an above-inflation pay rise. The so-called “living wage,” which is being promoted among low-paid workers by the trade unions, is currently \$23.65 per hour. This is only marginally above the legal minimum of \$21.20 and is not enough to live on, especially in Auckland, the country’s most expensive city.

Cleaners and security staff are being offered pay rises of between 4 percent and 5.6 percent, well below inflation at 7.3 percent and is an effective wage cut. Union advocate Mike Treen said Unite had been negotiating with the company for almost a year in an effort to get the “living wage.” SkyCity agreed to the demand a year ago, but then withdrew because of COVID lockdowns.

Unite boasts that it represents thousands of low paid hospitality workers in fast foods, cinemas, casinos, hotels, restaurants, bars and cafes. It has opened a “Give a Little” appeal for funds to support the SkyCity workers, saying that strikes are simply aimed to get the employers “to offer a better

deal.”



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