

# 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: Tripura state police attack protesting teachers

At least 30 teachers were injured and over 300 detained while marching to the Tripura state assembly in Agartala on September 26 to demand reinstatement. Police brutally attacked the protesters using water cannon, tear gas and canes.

The Tripura High Court terminated over 10,300 teachers due to what it claimed was a faulty recruitment process in 2014. The retrenched teachers and the Left Front government had filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court challenging the order, however the court upheld the High Court's order of 2017.

In an attempt to head off further protests, the chief minister claimed he had directed the district magistrate to give appointments to the sacked teachers.

## West Bengal commuter transport workers end six-day strike

Striking contract bus drivers and their assistants from the South Bengal State Transport Corporation (SBSTC) returned to work on Wednesday after walking out on September 22. They were demanding permanent jobs and equal pay and conditions in line with permanent workers. The strike had a major effect on services in the state's southern and western districts.

Strikers agreed to return to work after the transport minister said he had talked with SBSTC management and guaranteed that each worker would get 26 days' work every month. Entitlements, including paid leave, are supposed to be discussed later.

## Tamil Nadu district cooperative workers protest low pay

Members of the Dindigul District Cooperative Employees' Union, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, demonstrated outside the collector's office in Dindigul on September 26 with a charter of 14 demands. These included a 20 percent increase in bonus, a minimum bonus of 8,400 rupees (\$US102.5) across all grades, a 5 percent ex-gratia pay increase, festival advance of 20,000 rupees, provision of toilets in office buildings and a pension for all workers.

## Tangedco workers protest loss of entitlements

Thousands of workers from the state-owned electricity generation and distribution company Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) staged a sit-in protest on the premises of the Tangedco chief engineer's office in Coimbatore on September 26. The protest was called by 18 Tangedco unions.

Workers complained that Tangedco has restricted loans and advances previously paid to other employees but now must be approved by the state government. The dearness allowance has also been cancelled.

Workers demanded that Tangedco stop filling the existing 58,000 job vacancies across the state with cheaper outsourced labour who are not entitled to the benefits of permanent employees. The unions called for a tripartite agreement with the government and Tangedco to implement the government order on pensions and settlements.

## Tamil Nadu government doctors protest for promotions and pay rise

Nearly 500 government doctors from various parts of the state protested near the collectorate in Chennai on September 25 to demand promotions and higher pay in line with central government doctors.

MBBS doctors complained that they must wait 20 years before being upgraded. They called for it be reduced to 12 years. Doctors also demanded the government change its decision to increase working hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., restoring it to 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation sanitation workers protest

Temporary sanitary workers from the Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation in Tamil Nadu demonstrated on the corporation's premises on September 26 with several demands. Major demands were payment of wages on the first day of every month and recording attendance in a mobile app instead of signing a register kept in the corporation office.

Drivers complained that they are forced to keep the corporation's electric vehicles at their own risk. They demanded the vehicles be kept at the corporation premises because batteries and other parts are stolen, and workers were made to pay for them out of their own pocket.

## Tamil Nadu rural childcare workers demand allowance increase

Rural childcare (anganwadi) workers and helpers protested outside the collector's office in Krishnagiri on September 26 to demand an increase in allowances. They carried gas stoves saying they are not properly compensated for cooking for children in their care.

Protesters said they are given responsibility for 15 to 20 children but were paid allowances for only four children. While the gas cylinder prices have skyrocketed to 1,100 rupees (\$US13.47), the workers were paid only 400 rupees as allowances.

The anganwadi workers said potatoes, eggs, porridge and other foodstuffs were insufficiently allocated and inadequately funded. Workers also demanded upgrading the employment of anganwadi workers to public service status, new cellular phones, filling of all vacancies and unconditional promotion upon completion of 10 years' service.

### **Nagaland ad-hoc teachers demand permanent jobs**

Striking ad-hoc teachers in Kohima, Nagaland continued their sit-in protest for a second day on September 27 in defiance of government threats that they would be docked pay. The teachers are demanding permanent jobs.

The All Nagaland Ad-hoc Teachers Group (ANATG)-2015 Batch consists of about 1,166 teachers. While the government claims they are "illegal appointees" the teachers said they were appointed against sanctioned posts at different times from 2015.

### **Tasmanian public-school teachers strike**

Thousands of teachers stopped work for two hours on Wednesday morning and rallied at 15 locations across Tasmania. Over 1,000 public school teachers and support staff rallied outside state parliament in Hobart holding placards stating, "Support new Teachers," "More in-class support," and "More time to teach."

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has been in negotiations with the state Liberal government for a new enterprise agreement for over 14 months. Teachers want a pay rise that brings them into line with colleagues in other states, reduced workloads, and more resources. They are also demanding an end to the forced stand down of teacher assistants without pay for 12 weeks each year.

Teachers rejected the government's latest state public sector workers pay cap offer of 2.75 percent over four years, plus a one-off \$1,500 bonus. Teachers said the offer did not do anything to end critical staff shortages or reduce workloads. The AEU said the offered pay increase would still see Tasmanian teachers paid less than their interstate counterparts.

### **BHP mine workers in Queensland to vote on strike action**

Three separate unions covering workers at BHP mines in central Queensland have been successful in their applications to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to conduct protested action ballots of their members. The Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, who cover over 2,000 workers at Saraji, Peak Downs, Goonyella Riverside and Blackwater mines, have been

attempting to reach a deal with BHP for a new enterprise agreement (EA) for over 15 months. Four months of mediation in the FWC reached deadlock this month.

A CFMMEU spokesperson claimed the drawn-out negotiations had not even begun discussing wage increases because the focus was on conditions and job security.

The unions have allowed an increasing number of BHP's workforce to be drawn from labour hire companies. BHP has its own in-house labour hire provider Operations Services. Workers are concerned about job security and want job protections built into the EA, redundancy protections and career progression.

BHP is part of the Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) with BHP holding 50 percent and Mitsubishi Development the other 50 percent. It is the largest metallurgical coal producer in Australia and operates seven mines in central Queensland's Bowen Basin as well as the Hay Point Coal Terminal.

### **New Zealand university staff vote in nationwide strike ballot**

New Zealand university staff have been voting in an on-line ballot this week whether to take strike action in a pay dispute. University of Auckland, AUT, University of Waikato, Massey University, Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), Canterbury University, Lincoln University and University of Otago are all involved.

Tertiary Education Union (TEU) members attended two-hour union meetings on September 21 and near unanimously approved sector-wide strike ballots for each of their collective agreements. Negotiations covering about 10,000 academics began in July.

The TEU is seeking an 8 percent pay rise, marginally above the current 7.3 percent inflation rate. It will soon be overtaken by rapidly rising costs and does nothing to replace effective wage cuts since 2008. Data published by the TEU shows real wage cuts of between 7 and 17 percent across seven universities. This has accompanied nearly 1,000 job cuts during the COVID pandemic.

The TEU took no co-ordinated strike action to oppose this assault on wages and jobs. That the union is forced to do so now is due to anger among the entire working class over plummeting living standards, overseen by the Labour government.

VUW Branch President Dougal McNeill, leader of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation declared: "Over the past two years we have had to deliver classes both online and in person which effectively doubled what for many were already unmanageable workloads caused by persistent cost cutting and underinvestment in staff. We are in no mood to take an effective pay cut on the back of that." However, academics can place no confidence in the TEU, which has repeatedly proved that it will seek to impose a settlement on terms dictated by the ruling elite.

### **New Zealand primary health care nurses rally over pay**

Primary health care nurses rallied in New Zealand centres on September 29 calling for additional funding from the Labour government. Hour-long lunchtime rallies involving hundreds of nurses were held in Auckland, Tauranga, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch. Similar rallies were held in late August.

The nurses work in private practices, primarily doctors' surgeries and clinics. The NZ Nurses Organisation (NZNO) said a nurse at a medical

centre earns between 10 and 20 percent less than their counterparts in public hospitals, while nurses working for Māori providers can earn up to 25 percent less.

Primary care nurses are joining a wave of strikes by other workers over low pay and deteriorating conditions in the health system due to COVID. In May, 10,000 health professionals, including anaesthetic technicians, audiologists, occupational therapists, dental technicians, social workers and physiotherapists, took industrial action after rejecting a below-inflation pay offer from District Health Boards.

The NZNO is restricting the nurses' current action to occasional protests and toothless appeals inviting the public to sign postcards and post stickers asking the government to provide funding "to properly value" the nurses.



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