Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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

Food Corporation of India workers protest four-tier wage structure

Food Corporation of India (FCI) workers demonstrated outside the corporation's office in Phagwara, Punjab, on October 11 to protest the four-tier wage system. Members of the FCI Labour Union said they were particularly concerned about the plight of contract-based employees at the corporation.

Protesters said the government-run FCI employs four classes of workers. The first class of workers are paid on par with regular government employees, the second class are guaranteed a minimum wage only, the third class are on a "no work-no payment" model and the fourth class are contract workers.

Delhi rural childcare workers continue protests over sackings

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers in Delhi are continuing to protest the sacking of nearly 1,000 fellow workers who participated in a 39-day strike that ended on March 14. Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union members held a two-day hunger protest outside the Women and Child Development Office in Delhi on October 10. The union is making a futile call for the Women and Child Development Department to appeal to the High Court to overturn the terminations.

Thousands of anganwadi workers across Delhi walked out on January 31 to demand an increase in their honorarium and fixed working hours. They ended the strike after the government imposed its anti-strike Essential Services Maintenance Act and began issuing termination notices against striking workers. Nearly 12,000 workers were issued show-cause notices by the Delhi government.

Gurgaon farm equipment manufacturing workers hold hunger protest

Workers from the farm-equipment manufacturer Metal India held a hunger protest and demonstration at the Mini Secretariat in Gurgaon on October 9. They accused management of intimidation and ignoring their demands. They said 20 workers were fired after they presented letters with their demands. These included a wage increase and to be made permanent.

Zet Town factory workers in Utter Pradesh protest non-payment of overtime

Around 500 workers, most of them women, from the electronics manufacturer Zet Town in Noida, Utter Pradesh demonstrated outside their factory on October 11 demanding payment of overtime. Management called police who attempted to disperse the protesters. Three workers were injured.

Protesters said that for the past three years they have been working 10 to 12 hours a day but are only paid for 8 hours. They said when they complained to management several workers were fired and others were told they could resign. One worker complained that while workers at other companies get their bonus for Diwali festival, they are struggling to get regular wages on time.

Tamil Nadu Electricity Board pensioners demand outstanding dearness allowance

Retired employees who receive a pension from the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) are waging an ongoing struggle against the non-payment of outstanding dearness allowance (DA). They held a "half-naked" protest in front of the TNEB office in Virudhunagar on October 10 saying they had not been paid the allowance for 30 months. The TNEB Pensioner Welfare Association said they also want the New Pension Scheme scrapped and replaced with the old scheme.

Pakistan water and power utility workers protest the death of 45 linesmen

In simultaneous protests held in multiple cities across several provinces on October 4, workers from the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) denounced widespread safety violations that resulted in the deaths of 45 linesmen since the beginning of the year.

The All-Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union called protests in Lahore, Peshawar, Abbottabad, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Multan, Sukkur, Hyderabad and Quetta, among others.

Protesters demanded the government address the chronic staff shortage, saying it was one of the main causes behind the increasing occurrence of accidents in the state-owned utility giant. Workers also demanded an increase of the minimum monthly wage to 40,000 rupees ($US184.20).

The latest demonstrations followed a rally by hundreds of WAPDA workers on September 29 in Lahore. In addition to deaths due to criminal lack of safety and a chronic staff shortage, protesters opposed the skyrocketing cost of living, driven mainly by the massive hike in the prices of energy products, including electricity and gas, a result of the

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government's implementation of the International Monetary Fund's demands for budget cuts and privatisation. Workers also denounced widespread poverty among working people and increasing inequality.

For its part, the All-Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union is doing all it can to keep the power workers trapped in isolated protests and dead-end appeals to the government.

Bangladeshi apparel workers demand unpaid salaries

Janoron Sweater factory workers in Ashulia of Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka, demonstrated on Tuesday to demand payment of outstanding salaries and other arrears that were due on Monday. They blocked the Tongi-Ashulia-EPZ road in the morning.

Other demands included removal of some factory officials who they blamed for an attack by thugs the previous evening when they protested inside the factory. They said thugs came on motorcycles and attacked them, leaving some workers with serious injuries.

Public hospital nurses in Western Australia strike for better pay and conditions

About 2,000 members of the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) from Western Australian public hospitals walked off the job between 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday and attended a stop work meeting at Perth's Convention Centre. They discussed ongoing industrial action following a breakdown in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

The action followed a similar protest in August when thousands of public health workers walked off the job to oppose the state Labor government's 2.75 percent cap on wage increases for public sector workers. At the stop work meeting on Wednesday nurses approved a round of industrial action including bans on overtime, double shifts, bed closures, rolling stoppages and strikes in their fight for the end to critical staff shortages and for a "decent" pay increase.

ANF members rejected the government's latest "smoke and mirrors" pay offer (offered to all public sector workers) that will see workers who earn less than $104,000 only paid an extra $60 a week, while workers over that threshold will be paid an extra 3 percent a year. Both will also get a one-off $3,000 sign-on bonus.

The ANF, which represents 39,000 of the state's nurses, midwives and carers, wants the government to agree to a range of conditions to alleviate chronic hospital understaffing. Nurses are demanding nurse-to-patient ratios of four patients during the day and one nurse to eight patients at night to be written into the proposed enterprise agreement.

At Wednesday's meeting nurses rejected the federation's call for 5 percent annual pay increases and demanded 10 percent annual pay rises, with a CPI top-up, and a one-off payment of $4,500.

South32 alumina refinery workers in Western Australia strike again

About 100 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the South32 Worsley alumina refinery, south of Western Australia's capital Perth, struck for 48 hours on October 4 in a fight for their first enterprise agreement (EA). The action followed two four-hour stoppages in July when negotiations reached deadlock.

About 280 members of the Electrical Trades Union, including electricians, mechanical trades, and trades assistants, are currently employed on common law contracts. They have been pushing to transfer to an enterprise agreement for more than nine months.

Workers are calling for an end to two-tier employment in which new recruits are on a lower wage with reduced entitlements. Workers said that from 2019, South32 stopped offering 16.5 percent superannuation, private health, and subsidised bank loans to new employees as a COVID cost-saving measure. The union estimated the 25 workers employed after 2019 were $20-$30,000 worse off than those hired before 2019.

ETU members also want improved superannuation, income protection, retention of medical benefits and career progression pathways. Other demands include a five-panel 36-hour rotating shift roster, a three-day work week to allow day workers to perform three 12-hour days and guaranteed pay increases on par with wages at comparable industries. According to the union, previous pay increases were consistently below CPI.

Lockout at Manildra grain-processing plant in New South Wales enters second week

Thirteen electrical maintenance workers at the Manildra Group grain-processing plant in Bomaderry, south of Sydney, remain locked out since October 6 following the commencement of protected industrial action in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The limited industrial action, which involved refusal to use company phones, vehicles and computers, came after four months of negotiations between Manildra and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) stalled.

The ETU suspended industrial action in mid-September, after management agreed to resume negotiations and made an "improved" offer. The offer was rejected by workers who want a substantial pay increase and said that their demands for income protection and fatigue management were not addressed. Under the current salaried arrangement, the ETU estimated the electricians' effective wages to be about $32 an hour. Workers want an increase of at least $2.50 an hour.

A worker told media that management was pushing to take them off a salary and put them on wages and rotating shifts. He said the proposal basically meant that he personally would be losing around $30,000 a year in wages.

The ETU said that although Manildra had made an improved pay offer it failed to address any of the issues raised in their log of claims.

Macedon Ranges Shire Council workers strike for higher pay

Australian Services Union (ASU) members from the Macedon Ranges Shire Council in Victoria stopped work for three hours on Tuesday morning as part of industrial action in a campaign for better wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement (EA). Ongoing limited industrial action includes bans on street sweeping, picking up litter around council buildings and mowing grass near the entrances to towns across the shire.

The ASU said issues not resolved in negotiations included the council's low pay offer and a claim for extending a phone allowance to casual workers. Council's proposed EA offered below-inflation pay increases of 2 percent in the first year and 1.85 percent in the second year. The offer equates to a major pay cut when compared to the current inflation rate of

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6.1 percent.

Port workers at Kwinana grain terminal in Western Australia impose bans

Seventy-six members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) initiated work bans at the CBH Group Kwinana grain terminal at Fremantle, in Perth, on Tuesday. The union said a total of 10 work bans have been implemented in the first phase of a campaign for a new enterprise agreement (EA).

Workers are demanding wage increases that are indexed to the consumer price index (CPI). The CPI in Perth is over 7 percent and rising. They condemned the CBH Group board of directors who they claim awarded itself wage increases in the vicinity of 10 percent per year over the next two years.

Victorian firefighters endorse strike action in pay dispute

Over 93 percent of the 2,670 members of the United Firefighters Union of Australia (UFUA) who voted in a protected action ballot approved taking strike action and implementing work bans in their struggle for a new enterprise agreement. The agreement covers over 3,800 workers from Fire Rescue Victoria. UFUA members had already endorsed an earlier plan to strike in July, but the union stalled on taking action and the document expired, prompting the second ballot.

The workers in June rejected the government's wage offer that included 2 percent pay rises per year, as well as annual transition payments of $2,080 on commencement, $2,121.60 in November 2022, and $2,164.03 in November 2023. The state Labor government in January imposed an annual cap on wage increases of 1.5 percent, down from the previous cap of 2 percent. A rollover condition applied to current agreements that expired in 2022 allowing the FRV to offer 2 percent annual increases.

While the voting in the second ballot is in progress a UFUA spokesman said he expected the vote would mirror the results of the July 27 ballot when eighty percent of fire-fighters approved a campaign of operational bans and limited strike action.

Fire fighters want a pay rise of 8.6 percent to match inflation currently running at 7.1 percent in Victoria and predicted by the Reserve Bank of Australia to reach 8 percent by the end of the year. Other demands are for a health insurance policy and the creation of a new division of fire safety officers.

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