

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

21 October 2022

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

## **India: Thousands of Punjab government administrative workers strike for eight days**

Administrative workers from 42 state government departments stopped work between October 12 and 19 to protest the government's inaction on their demands. The strike was called by the Joint Action Committee and the Punjab State Ministerial Services Union and included workers from health, education, social security and other clerical staff members.

The unions alleged that state government officials continued to ignore their requests to meet them about their demands. These include payment of Dearness Allowance arrears, permanent jobs for contract employees, resumption of the old pension scheme and correct application of the pay commission recommendations. Workers demanded that arrears to pensioners and state employees be paid immediately.

## **Unorganised sector workers in Puducherry demand festival allowance**

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) organised a protest march of impoverished unorganised sector workers in Puducherry on Tuesday demanding festival allowance of 5,000 rupees (\$US60). Workers said they needed the government to provide them with financial assistance ahead of the Deepavali festival.

Protesters stressed that the allowance was much needed because they were facing hardship due to skyrocketing price increases for essentials and lack of job opportunities. They urged the government to immediately announce the assistance.

## **Tamil Nadu village council workers protest in Madurai for better pay and conditions**

Lowly paid panchayat (village council) workers, including conservancy workers, garbage collection workers and overhead tank (OHT) operators staged a protest near the Collectorate in Madurai on October 17 with a charter of long pending demands. The protest was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

Demands included the provision of free housing for homeless conservancy workers along with a 3,600-rupee (\$US43) pay rise, and a

salary increase of 1,400 rupees for OHT operators. Other demands were payment of salaries by the 5th of every month, payment of a 15,000-rupee incentive announced during the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation of the basic pay recommendations of the Seventh Pay Commission and rectification of irregularities in Provident Fund and Employees' State Insurance accounts.

## **Delhi Municipal Corporation sanitation workers strike indefinitely**

Thousands of sanitation workers from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) began an indefinite strike on October 14 to demand permanent jobs, payment of pending salaries and payment of bonus ahead of the Diwali festival. They said there are more than 15,000 sanitation workers that have been waiting up to 25 years to be made permanent. Workers alleged that they have not been paid their bonus for the last three years and that one month's salary has not been paid.

## **Tamil Nadu school noon-meal workers demand pension increase**

School noon-meal workers demonstrated across Dindigul district on October 14 to demand payment of the dearness allowance and a pension increase. Protests were held outside the Panchayat Union offices in Palani, Dindigul, Natham and Nilakottai

Tamil Nadu Noon Meal and Anganwadi Pensioners Association members demanded the monthly pension be increased from 2,000 rupees (\$US24) to 7,850 rupees. The low paid workers said they were now living in miserable conditions due to the meagre pension.

Workers chanted slogans urging the government to fulfil promises of payment of time-scale wages, a 3 percent hike in the dearness allowance and the family pension to be given in the event of the death of retired anganwadi workers and helpers.

## **Yamaha Motors factory workers in Tamil Nadu on strike**

Over 350 workers at the India Yamaha Motors factory in Sriperumbudur near Chennai are maintaining a sit-in strike begun on October 11. Members of the Indian Yamaha Motors Labour Association (IYMLA), affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), are protesting management's refusal to recognise their union.

Strikers alleged that management organised with the State Labour

Department to sign a wage agreement with the company-supported minority union, which is not affiliated with CITU. IYMLA members are demanding management hold wage talks with their union. Management has insisted that it will not hold talks with a union that is affiliated with an outside organisation.

### **Bangladesh Railway temporary workers demand permanency**

Hundreds of temporary railway workers from the Bangladesh Railway staged an indefinite sit-down demonstration on October 16 to demand permanent jobs. Bangladesh Railway Temporary Workers' Council members demonstrated outside the Dhaka Railway Station administrative building at Kamalapur in Dhaka.

Other demands included amendments to the educational qualifications required for Class IV employees, cancellation of the work outsourcing system, payment of all arrears, no sudden sacking of temporary workers and an eight-hour workday.

Bangladesh Railway employs around 4,000 temporary daily-paid workers as gatekeepers, points-men and in other jobs. Workers said they will continue protesting until their demands are met.

### **Pakistan: Federal government workers in Islamabad demand pay increase**

Members of the All Government Employees Grand Alliance and the Federal Government College Teachers Association from various government departments demonstrated outside parliament in Islamabad on October 13 to demand a pay rise and elimination of salary and benefit disparities across departments.

Protesters pointed out that the government has reneged on promised increases multiple times. Their renewed demands emerge amidst skyrocketing cost of living. Workers complained that despite the official inflation rate reaching over 27 percent, key allowances such as conveyance, medical and house rent have not increased since 2008.

### **Police attack protesting teachers in Karachi**

Karachi police brutally attacked protesting school teachers who were marching to the provincial chief minister's residence to demand their long-awaited appointments on Tuesday. Police blocked off roads to restrict the march and beat the teachers using batons. At least 80 teachers were arrested. In June, Sindh province teachers holding a similar protest in Karachi were attacked by police.

After completing mandatory job requirements laid out by the government in 2013, the teachers are yet to be appointed to positions. Despite the substantial number of vacant positions, the government refuses to appoint the teachers. The government has used the shortages as an excuse to shut down nearly 7,000 schools in Sindh province.

### **Airport firefighters across Australia vote on taking industrial action**

About 800 members of the United Firefighters Union-Aviation Division (UFUAV) at airports across Australia are voting on whether to approve protected industrial action in their dispute with the government-owned Airservices Australia (AA) for a new enterprise agreement. Action ranging from work bans to strikes could commence in early November and would ground aircraft.

Firefighters want a 15 percent pay rise over three years and an increase in the employer's superannuation contribution. The union said members also had concerns over a national shortage of aviation firefighters which left some airports under staffed. During the COVID-19 pandemic Airservices cut the number of firefighters by 94.

Enterprise Agreement negotiations between Airservices Australia and the UFUAV began nearly a year ago. Firefighters rejected Airservices' pay increase offer of 11.5 percent over three years. The current annual inflation rate is 6.1 percent meaning that a pay increase less than 18.3 percent over three years is a pay cut.

### **Alumina refinery workers in Queensland strike for better pay**

Maintenance workers at the Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL) refinery in Gladstone, northeast Queensland, walked off the job for two hours on Tuesday to demand an improved enterprise agreement. QAL's most recent pay offers were rejected in September and again on October 6.

The dispute involves over 130 members of the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union who have been in enterprise agreement negotiations with QAL since February.

Workers are demanding "fair and equal" pay and that shift allowances be made proportional to base salary, rather than the current arrangement which is a fixed loading. A union spokesperson said tradespeople at QAL were underpaid when compared to similarly qualified positions in the industry.

### **OGS construction workers at lithium refinery in Western Australia strike**

About 50 mechanical, electrical and inspection workers employed by engineering contractor OGS to commission the Albemarle lithium refinery in Kemerton, near Bunbury in Western Australia, began protected industrial action on Thursday. Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members are fighting to transfer their common law employment contracts with secure leave conditions into a new enterprise agreement.

The unions had been in negotiation with OGS since May hoping to secure the agreement before the winding up of the project's commissioning works. Workers have approved industrial action that includes work bans and two-hour stoppages that are expected to continue until mid-November.

### **Power generating maintenance workers in NSW and WA on strike**

Over 50 power generating equipment maintenance workers employed by engineering contractor PGSR in New South Wales and Western Australia went on a seven-day strike on Thursday in their dispute for a new

enterprise agreement. The action will affect work at all PGSR power stations and workshops.

The highly skilled workers are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union which claimed PGSR management had walked away from negotiations and is trying to force through an unendorsed agreement for a vote. The union has not made public its log of claims except to say members want an agreement that respects their experience and skills.

### **Kone workers' union in Canberra accepts sub-inflation pay increase**

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU), covering 24 workers at the lift installer and maintainer Kone, in Canberra, has accepted the company's latest enterprise agreement offer. Kone had locked out 12 lift installation workers on October 13 in response to four weeks of work bans and stoppages. On the following day the remaining 12 workers in the critical maintenance and servicing department took indefinite strike action in solidarity, forcing a complete shutdown of Kone's operations and forcing management back into negotiations.

The ETU declared the outcome a win, bragging that management was forced to concede on all key demands tabled by the union. The deal delivers a pay increase of 15 percent over the three-year agreement. In effect a pay cut when compared to the current consumer price index of 6.1 percent, or 18.3 percent over three years. Superannuation will be bumped up by 0.75 percent. All overtime will be paid at double time but workers will have to wait until August 2023 before it comes into effect. The workers are still to vote on the agreement in a formal ballot.

### **Teaching staff at five Queensland universities strike for improved conditions**

Over 2,500 education workers from the University of Queensland, the Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, University of Southern Queensland and the University of the Sunshine Coast stopped work on Thursday and rallied in Brisbane and Cairns for an improved enterprise agreement. A National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) representative said members want an end to rising workloads, secure jobs, better leave entitlements and a "real" pay increase.

NTEU members almost unanimously voted to strike last month following the rejection of offers from their individual university managements. The universities had been offering below inflation pay increases of 1 percent from January 2023 and a 5 percent rise over the term of the three-year agreements.

University workers want pay rises exceeding the rate of inflation to make up for past wage restraint. The NTEU is only campaigning for 5 percent annual pay increases, an effective pay cut because inflation in most Queensland cities is 7.2 percent.

### **Apple retail store workers hold Australia-wide strike**

Around 150 of Apple's 4,000 retail store workers walked out for one hour on Tuesday in a first ever nationally coordinated strike by retail industry workers in Australia. The workers are members of the Retail and

Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) who walked out of stores in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle and Adelaide in a dispute over pay and conditions.

The workers are opposed to Apple's proposed enterprise agreement, which is offering annual pay increases of only 2.6 percent, a massive wage cut in real terms. This paltry wage bump will only be given to workers who are currently receiving the minimum rate for their classification, which has been frozen since the last enterprise agreement expired in 2018.

Apple also wants to retain conditions in the existing agreement which enable it to roster any employee on any shift, seven days a week, with no set days of work from one two-week roster period to the next.

Other unions involved in negotiations with Apple are the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) and the Australian Services Union (ASU), who have isolated the RAFFWU members by not backing industrial action. Apple said it will continue negotiations with the unions and 35 non-union representatives.

RAFFWU members have implemented more than a dozen work bans, including refusing AirPods repairs and stock deliveries, and intend to "take their weekend back" by stopping work all day Saturday.

### **Nurses at a major Sydney public hospital walk out over unsafe staffing levels**

Nurses and midwives at the Blacktown Hospital walked out in their own time on Wednesday over ongoing concerns for patient safety and a lack of safe staffing levels across the Western Sydney facility. New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) members complained of ongoing widespread staffing and skill mix issues impacting patient care, along with unreasonable workloads expected of nursing staff in medical and surgical wards, and in the emergency department.

The association claimed that since December, around 35 skilled nurses have left the emergency department, while over 115 nursing and midwifery staff vacancies currently exist hospital wide. Although the conditions at Blacktown Hospital are experienced by nurses at public hospitals across NSW, the NSWNMA has not mounted a state-wide united campaign but instead has promoted the illusion that their dispute with the Western Sydney Local Health District can be resolved in a case currently before the NSW Industrial Relations Commission.

In December, Central Coast nurses and midwives at Gosford Hospital and Wyong Hospital (70 kilometres north of Sydney) demonstrated outside their hospitals to protest excessive workloads and ongoing refusal of the state Liberal government to resolve dangerous staffing levels.

### **New Zealand university workers continue to strike for pay increase**

Staff at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) and Massey University held two-hour strikes on Tuesday and Wednesday respectively to protest against below-inflation pay offers. This follows a nationwide half-day strike involving staff at all eight of New Zealand's universities on October 6, and additional part-day strikes by Lincoln and Otago University staff.

The Tertiary Education Union (TEU) is calling for an 8 percent pay increase for all staff across the country. While slightly ahead of the official inflation rate of 7.2 percent, the claim is still less than the 8.3 percent increase in food prices, and it does not make up for decades of

declining real wages. The universities' pay offers vary. They include zero percent for tutors at VUW, 2 percent for Otago staff and 9 percent spread across two years for Auckland University staff.

During Tuesday's strike, TEU organisers at VUW called on the university leadership to resume talks to avoid future walkouts. Management issued a statement declaring: "No university is in a financial position" to meet the 8 percent claim.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**

### **Nurses at Evolution Healthcare hospitals hold 24-hour strike**

More than 230 nurses held a 24-hour strike at Wakefield and Bowen hospitals in Wellington, and Royston Hospital in Hawke's Bay, owned by Evolution Healthcare. Pay negotiations with the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) have dragged on for 15 months. The strike went ahead despite urgent mediation the day before between the NZNO and the hospital via the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, which failed to resolve the dispute.

NZNO delegate and nurse Lisa Blackmore said in a press release that demands include wages backpaid at the rate of inflation (7.3 percent), as well as the same holiday and sick leave entitlements as nurses in the public system.

### **Primary healthcare nurses in New Zealand vote to strike**

Nurses working in medical centres, after-hours clinics and Plunket child health centres across New Zealand voted last week to strike for four hours on October 27. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) said 4,300 workers would strike after rejecting offers of 3 percent or less—less than half the inflation rate.

The nurses are seeking pay parity with colleagues working in public hospitals, who are paid 10 to 20 percent more. The general practices and other employers involved claim that the Labour Party-led government's funding is too low to meet this claim.

Workers throughout the health system are facing a severe crisis, made worse by the pandemic. Tens of thousands of public hospital nurses recently had their overtime pay cut, and protested by refusing to work overtime for a week. The NZNO refused to call a strike, however.

### **SCG oil and gas service workers strike**

SGS oil and gas service company workers who are members of FIRST Union in New Zealand are on strike from October 19 to October 25 after workers voted to reject a below-inflation pay offer.

The multinational company has over 800 employees in New Zealand, but a union statement failed to reveal how many are on strike. It said those on strike are mainly workers involved in loading and unloading fuel for shipping from the ports at Marsden Point, Mount Maunganui, Napier and New Plymouth.

Headquartered in Switzerland, SGS has 96,000 workers and is active in nearly every country in the world. Its full year profit for 2021 was 655 million Swiss francs (\$NZ1.15 billion), an increase of 29.7 percent from the previous year.