

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.

India: Assam state government workers protest over pension scheme

Thousands of Assam state government workers demonstrated in Guwahati on November 8 to demand re-introduction of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS). Public sector workers from various districts and other states joined the demonstration, which was organised by the All Assam Government NPS Employees' Association.

Public sector workers across India have been holding demonstrations for over a year demanding reinstatement of the old pension scheme which was withdrawn in 2003. The old scheme did not require a 10 percent contribution from employees' salaries and the pension was determined by the employees' final salary. Under the new scheme, the pension is reduced and there is no death benefit.

Assam has around 500,000 government employees, out of which around 240,000 are under the New Pension Scheme (NPS). Workers threatened to hold more protests until their demand is met.

Casual and outsourced sanitation workers in Odisha protest

Sanitation workers from the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) protested over unfair labour practices and poor wages in Bhubaneswar on November 7. Thousands of BMC sanitation workers are employed on an insecure basis which protesters are opposing.

Workers claimed that nearly 700 are employed on the casual labour roll, 350 on the daily labour roll and 3,000 workers employed through private sanitation agencies. Workers are also demanding to be supplied with safety protection equipment.

Andhra Pradesh teachers from disadvantaged schools demand overdue wages

Teachers from several disadvantaged (mandal) schools protested against salary delays on November 8. Over 3,000 government teachers in Vizianagaram district have been waiting for their salaries for the last week. The Andhra Pradesh Teachers' Federation accused the government of causing untold misery to the teachers in spite of their dedication and hard work. They demanded that the government pay the salaries immediately.

Delhi University teachers demand permanent jobs

Delhi University teachers staged a protest on November 9 demanding permanency of ad hoc and temporary teachers. The university currently has over 4,200 ad hoc teachers in 66 colleges. The protest was organised by the Academic for Action and Development Delhi Teachers' Association.

On October 7, teachers organised by the Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) held a one day strike to demand that all ad-hoc teachers be absorbed into the university. The strike was sparked after several long-serving ad hoc teachers were not selected to fill permanent positions.

Tarn Taran bank workers in Punjab strike for pay rise

Administrative workers from the Tarn Taran Central Cooperative Bank struck work on November 2 and demonstrated outside the bank on November 4. They demanded a pay increase on par with the state government as per the sixth pay commission. Services at the bank's 40 branches across the district were halted.

Andhra Pradesh: Vizag steel plant workers protest privatisation

Hundreds of workers and family members were arrested in Gajuwaka after they held a street procession on November 9 to oppose the Modi government's plan to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) in Vizag. Leaders of the Vizag Ukku Poratta Committee organised the protest to coincide with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the city.

The government has approved a 100 percent disinvestment of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), VSP's corporate entity, and private management of the steel plant. Widely supported demonstrations against privatisation have been ongoing since February 1 last year.

West Bengal school teachers demand promised jobs

Around 600 West Bengal school teachers who had cleared their exams and had been assured jobs in 2016 are still waiting for placement. Teachers protested in Kolkata on Wednesday to demand jobs. They accused the government of "indulging in fake recruitment," in a scam of 8,000 jobs in 2016. The teachers protested in 2019 and again in 2021 demanding jobs.

Pakistan: Federal government workers in Islamabad strike again for pay increase

Workers from federal government departments in Islamabad closed down gates to the Pakistan Secretariat on Tuesday to demand a substantial pay hike and increase in allowances. The renewed protest erupted as inflation continues to rise in the country. A staggering 26.6 percent price hike for essentials was reported in October over the previous month.

Workers are demanding a 150 percent pay increase for workers in grades 1 to 16, the lowest grades. Other main demands include the absorption of all temporary workers into permanent positions, increases in house rent allowances, and medical and conveyance allowances to reflect their respective current cost.

The protests were a continuation of those held in October. None of the workers' demands have been won so far. The government responded on Tuesday by deploying large numbers of police and other security personnel to intimidate protesting workers.

The All Government Employees Grand Alliance, an umbrella union, which announced the protests under pressure from the growing resentment among workers, did not resist the request from authorities to open the gate to the Secretariat. When workers responded by launching a sit-down demonstration, the union alliance ordered workers to not block roads in the capital. Thus, the powerful struggle launched by the workers was reduced to a minor inconvenience to the government.

Opal factory workers take national strike action for better pay

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union announced Wednesday that 700 of its members employed by Opal Packaging/Fibre in its plants across Australia were taking industrial action, including strikes. The workers are in dispute with Opal over its proposed enterprise agreement.

Opal workers in Perth, Western Australia walked out for 48 hours on November 5 and workers at the company's Revesby plant in Sydney, New South Wales, struck for 74 hours and imposed a ban on overtime work.

The vote to take industrial action came after workers rejected the company's last proposed agreement and the AMWU and Opal failed to reach agreement on an improved offer. Workers said they will not accept an agreement that attacks conditions won over 30 years and which offers a real pay cut. They oppose, in particular, Opal's demand that new starters be put on lower wages.

Chubb fire and security workers in Tasmania locked out

Eight members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) employed by Chubb Fire and Security in Tasmania were locked out by management on November 4 after taking protected industrial action. The low-level action included one hour stoppages and bans on overtime and on-call.

The workers are demanding an enterprise agreement that pays them the same wages that other workers with the same skills, qualifications and experience are paid while working for the same clients. This was rejected by Chubb. The union told members that management said workers' jobs would be at risk, competition companies would win all the work and the business would close.

The current inflation rate in Tasmania is 8.5 percent and workers are

demanding an equivalent pay increase.

Coca Cola plant workers in Victoria strike for pay increase

Twenty-six members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) at Coca Cola's Moorabbin factory, in Melbourne, walked off the job Wednesday for the first time in twenty years. The workers want an improved enterprise agreement (EA) offer and a wage rise equal to the rate of inflation. Union members on October 19 voted by a large majority to authorise protected industrial action after rejecting Coca Cola's below-inflation pay increase offer.

The AMWU is at the same time working to convert other workers in the factory from the non-union Coca-Cola Amatil (Aust) Equipment ServiceEnterprise Agreement which is due to expire next year into one covered by the AMWU.

Airport firefighters across Australia vote to strike

Ninety-three percent of about 800 members of the United Firefighters Union-Aviation division (UFUAV) at airports across Australia have voted to take industrial action in their dispute with the government-owned Airservices Australia (AA) for a new enterprise agreement. Industrial action, including strikes ranging between two and twenty-four hours as well as work bans can commence after the union gives authorities seven days' notice.

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 above 7 percent, meaning that a pay increase less than 21 percent over three years is a pay cut.

The UFUAV is demanding only a 15 percent pay rise over three years, an increase in the employer's superannuation contribution and safe staffing levels. The union said members 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.

South Australian naval shipyard workers walk out

More than 200 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Australian Workers Union (AWU) at the Osborn Naval Shipyard in Adelaide walked off the job on October 28 in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The workers, employed by BAE systems, also struck in July over the issue.

The AMWU claimed that BAE is trying to introduce an effective pay cut and attacked conditions in its proposed agreement. BAE has offered a pay increase of only 5.4 percent over three years. This is a massive real pay cut compared to the current official CPI of over 7 percent.

Northern Territory bauxite mine workers threaten to strike

Over 80 workers from four unions at Rio Tinto's bauxite mine operations on the Gove Peninsular in the Northern Territory have threatened to walk out if Rio Tinto does not return to the bargaining table for a new enterprise agreement.

The unions involved are the Electrical Trades Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, United Workers Union (UWU) and Australian Workers Union. A representative from the UWU said the workers have not had a pay increase for three years, while Rio Tinto recorded a profit of almost \$US15 billion in the last quarter.

The unions have allowed negotiations to drag on since talks began in July 2020. They have not said what their demands are except that they want a "reasonable pay increase" and changes to clauses in the existing agreement.

Woodside gas production workers in Western Australia take industrial action

Contract maintenance and construction workers employed on Woodside's Pluto offshore LNG platform and the Karratha Gas Project (KGP), in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, are in their second week of low-level protected industrial action. The workers are in dispute with contracting company UGL-IASIS over the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers are covered by several unions, the Australian Workers Union, Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. Their bargaining representative is the Offshore Alliance (OA).

Workers have near unanimously, on two occasions, voted down a UGL-IASIS proposed agreement. The OA claimed that UGL had failed to close the gap for FIFO employees compared to the rates of rival contractor Monadelphous, and UGL wanted to reduce real wages and undercut site standards.

OA added that the proposed agreement would leave KGP workers thousands of dollars worse off than other KGP contractors and that UGL wants to unilaterally change their income protection policy however they like, severely affecting injured or sick workers in the process.



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