

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.

South Korea: CJ CheilJedang food processing workers strike

Union members at the CJ CheilJedang's Blossom Campus food processing plant in Jincheon, North Chungcheong Province, struck from November 10 until November 14. The workers formed a union in March this year ending a 70-year non-union history at the company. The plant produces products under the brand name Bibigo.

Workers are in dispute over the company's refusal to abolish a blanket wage system which pays workers monthly salaries that include extended, night and holiday work allowances in a lump sum. The company has also refused to pay bonuses of 16.6 percent of each worker's annual salary every year.

The strike followed 11 rounds of negotiations between June and September over several issues for improved pay and conditions. Over 96 percent of union members agreed to take strike action in a vote held from October 26 to 29. The union has threatened to call further strikes.

India: Swiggy food delivery workers in Kerala strike over exploitation

About 5,000 gig workers employed by Swiggy Global Food Delivery in Cochin stopped work on November 14 to demand higher wages. These exploited low paid workers are called delivery partners by the company to avoid labour laws and hide the oppressed conditions they are forced to endure.

Strikers were demanding a wage of 35 rupees (\$US0.43) if the delivery distance was 2.5 km radius, compared to the current rate of 20 rupees for 4 km radius. Workers said that most of the wages they make in a day would go to fuel and what was left was just enough to feed them and their families. The workers were organised by the All India Trade Union Congress.

Uttar Pradesh school teachers protest against new pension scheme

Over 50,000 government school teachers demonstrated in Lucknow on Tuesday demanding reintroduction of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS). They carried placards condemning the ruling Yogi Adhyanath and BJP government. Teachers said protests would be intensified if their demand

was not met before the municipal elections. The protest was called by the Uttar Pradesh Prathmik Shikshak Sangh.

Thousands of Assam state government workers demonstrated on November 8 to demand re-introduction of the OPS. Public sector workers across India have been holding demonstrations for over a year demanding reinstatement of the old scheme which was withdrawn in 2003. The OPS 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.

Punjab rural healthcare (anganwadi) workers demand overdue wages

Poorly paid Anganwadi workers and helpers were attacked by police when they protested outside the chief minister's residence in Chandigarh on November 14 to demand six month's wages. Workers condemned the ruling Aam Admi Party which they said promised a better life for anganwadi workers before being elected. They said the attack by police revealed the "real face" of the party.

Pakistani health workers in Sindh province continue strike

Government health workers, including nurses, paramedics and junior doctors, affiliated with the Grand Health Alliance, have been on strike since October 19 in protest over the government's withdrawal of the COVID-19 risk allowance. The action has affected hospital outpatient departments and out posted clinics.

Last week police used water cannon and arrested 25 female protesting health workers when they attempted to march to the Sindh chief minister's house. Workers continue to protest outside the Karachi Press Club and the Sindh Secretariat building.

The health department recently withdrew the risk allowance being given to the healthcare providers on false grounds that the Covid-19 pandemic no longer posed a threat to the population. The allowance was announced when the COVID pandemic struck the country. The allowance was discontinued in late 2020 but was restored in the face of mass protests.

The media reported that the government was considering deploying the Army and Rangers as strike breakers. A spokesperson from the Rangers said its doctors had been offered to keep emergency services functioning.

Mobile crane hire workers in South Australia strike for better pay and conditions

About 30 workers from Crane Services in Wingfield, a suburb of Adelaide, walked out on Monday to demand an improved enterprise agreement offer. Ongoing protected industrial action will include work stoppages and bans on overtime and working when rostered off.

The workers are covered by the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU) which has been in negotiations with the company since April. The union claimed management's latest proposed agreement removed one years' worth of pay rises and was worse than the offer members rejected earlier in the year.

The union said workers want the agreement to include base rates of pay consistent with the company's latest offer but payable sooner rather than in a half years' time, industry standard allowances, protection for the RDOs (rostered days off) they accrue through work performed, consultation terms relating to workplace changes and the right to have disputes settled by an "independent" umpire.

Crane Services operates with 50 different cranes across South Australia with operations in Adelaide, Barossa Valley, Ceduna and Whyalla.

Opal workers hold more strikes for an improved work agreement

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members from Opal Packaging in Perth, Western Australia, walked off the job for 48 hours on Thursday over Opal's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The action followed a national 48-hour strike by 700 Opal workers on November 4.

AMWU members across the country rejected the company's last proposed agreement and the union and Opel 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.

Workers said they want a decent pay rise and to keep current conditions. They voted to hold more strikes and approved a three-day strike commencing on November 23.

Teaching staff at five Queensland universities continue industrial action

Following a 24-hour strike by 2,500 members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) from five Queensland universities on October 20, members recommenced industrial action on Monday.

Teachers are in dispute with university managements at the University of Queensland, the Queensland University of Technology, Griffith University, University of Southern Queensland and the University of the Sunshine Coast over their proposed enterprise agreements.

Queensland University of Technology workers stopped work for 24 hours Monday; Griffith University workers stopped work for 30 minutes on Friday to plan further rolling stoppages; Central Queensland University workers commenced rolling stoppages on Monday; Queensland University teachers staged a "mark-in," with casuals marking assignments; NTEU members at the James Cook University's Townsville and Cairns campuses held protests after management threatened to lock them out if they took strike action.

NTEU members overwhelmingly voted to strike in August, 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 their three-year

agreements.

University workers want pay rises to exceed the rate of inflation to compensate 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.

Ballarat university workers strike for better pay and conditions

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the Federation University Ballarat, Victoria, stopped work for 24 hours on Thursday and held a protest rally at the university's Mt Helen campus. An NTEU spokesperson said the university had opposed job security and fair pay for casual staff in its proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

The action followed another continuing and indefinite strike by staff in the business programs area which began on Monday to demand increased job security in a new enterprise agreement. The NTEU alleged the university had failed to resolve a dispute resolution process in the face of widespread job cuts within the business program, a growing culture of job intensification and unannounced workplace changes.

The NTEU spokesperson said the university had already put staff through a long series of restructures and course cuts and it is now threatening another restructure. The union claimed that one third of the Business School is facing redundancy if the university follows through with its plans. It alleged that course cuts were already devastating the opportunity of regional students' access to a high-quality education.

While workers are opposing job cuts the NTEU wants to be consulted on the purpose of any future restructure and that individual staff members be subject to no more than one change process every three years.

Lockout at Chubb in Tasmania enters second week

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 low level protected industrial action following Chubb's rejection of their claims in a new enterprise agreement. The ETU alleged that other companies had already agreed to the claims.

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. Following meetings with the company, 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 but the union has restricted its demand to only 4.2 percent, a real pay cut.

New Zealand Tertiary Education Union withdraws strike notice

The New Zealand Tertiary Education Union (TEU) withdrew a strike notice at Waikato University this week over the suspension of staff during a pay dispute. Academic staff, many on fixed-term contracts, were suspended for three days with no pay after withholding students' marks, an action the TEU said is only a "small part of their job." The vice chancellor subsequently lifted the suspensions and paid staff.

About 7,000 lecturers, researchers, tutors and non-academic staff held a half-day strike at eight universities on October 6. It was the first nationwide strike in 20 years, called after 87 percent of TEU members voted for national action demanding pay increases matching the soaring cost of living. The union initially called for an 8 percent increase, but this week dropped that to 7.2 percent, the official inflation rate.

While the universities made offers beginning at just 2.75 percent, the TEU abandoned any unified action and reduced staff to isolated protests at individual institutions. This week Auckland University staff also began withholding grades while those at Victoria University of Wellington boycotted a graduation event.

Having suppressed any ongoing co-ordinated strikes, the TEU is appealing to the Minister of Education, Chris Hipkins, to convene tripartite talks to negotiate a settlement. Hipkins has flatly refused.

“justifies lifting the action.”



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New Zealand primary teachers vote on pay offer

Meetings are currently being held by the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) for primary school teachers to vote on a pay offer from the Labour government. The series of 1-hour paid stop-work meetings runs from November 14 to 25.

Bargaining is taking place in the context of Labour's “pay restraint” policy across the public sector. The effective pay freeze was announced as a cost-saving measure during the COVID pandemic as billions in payments were handed out to big business.

The NZEI claim includes non-committal measures to reduce student-teacher ratios and increase non-contact time. On pay, there is only a vague and meaningless call for a “fair increase that recognises the current cost of living situation.”

The Ministry of Education has offered both primary and secondary teachers a flat \$4,000 rise on settlement with no backdating and \$2,000 next year. For most this is below 7 percent over two years, less than half the rate of inflation.

Wellington primary school teacher Carl Pynenberg told Radio NZ it was “hard to stomach” such a low offer. ‘It’s always disappointing to look at record high inflation and an offer that doesn’t even come close to matching that,’ he said.

A spokesperson for the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) said the ministry’s two-year offer was about half what the secondary union had asked for over the same period and was an actual pay cut. The PPTA would hold meetings in a couple of weeks to discuss the offer and next steps that “could include industrial action.”

New Zealand justice staff begin action over cost of living

New Zealand court proceedings will be disrupted into next month as Ministry of Justice staff take action over cost-of-living pressures. Under a work to rule until December 19, Public Service Association (PSA) members will follow standardised start and finish times and morning and afternoon break and lunch times. The action involves PSA members at the Ministry of Justice, contact centres, processing centres, technology staff, national office and tribunal hearing centres.

About 1,500 justice workers walked off the job in 2018 over pay negotiations. The PSA is however keeping the current action strictly limited while it bargains to purportedly “achieve a settlement that properly recognises the cost-of-living pressures on workers” and that