

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 December 2022

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

India: Andhra Pradesh port workers protest privatisation

Port workers in Vishakhapatnam demonstrated on December 19 against the government's proposed privatisation of the Vishakhapatnam port and other ports across India. The protest was called by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, All India Trade Union Congress and the Hind Mazdoor Sangh.

Workers from the United Port and Dock Workers Union opposed the privatisation of the port hospital, port lands and buildings. A union spokesperson also called for a wage rise without any pre-conditions and withdrawal of the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP).

The NMP was set up by the Modi government in August 2021 to identify and coordinate the privatisation of public assets. Under the NMP the government has already sold off over \$US4 billion worth of public assets to the private sector.

Public hospital cleaners at Kozhikode in Kerala oppose changed recruitment rules

Government General Hospital cleaners in Kozhikode district, Kerala, have been protesting for several weeks at the hospital over alleged unfair labour practices by management. Janakeeya Samara Samiti (People's Struggle Organisation) members demonstrated at the hospital's entrance on December 15 demanding that the new recruitment process be reversed.

Workers accused management of favouritism when appointing new recruits and opposed the end of service age limit being set at 50. It is currently 60 across the rest of the state. The union complained that many workers who have been appointed are in their late 40s and will lose their jobs after only a short period of employment.

Tamil Nadu sugar mill workers in Udumalpet end hunger strike

Udumalpet Cooperative Sugar Factory workers in Tamil Nadu ended a protest hunger strike after five days on December 16 following written assurances from the labour commissioner that their demands would be fulfilled before December 30.

Workers were demanding payment of four months' outstanding wages,

payment of provident fund, which has been pending for the past 25 months, and payment of 25 years of Earned Leave wages.

Tamil Nadu transport workers in Madurai protest job vacancies

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation workers picketed the corporation's Madurai district head office on December 19. About 200 workers participated in the action, which was called by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU). They demanded workers be hired to cover the already existing 25 percent vacancy rate, payment of incentives, proper work tools and the construction of a cement-covered yard at the transport workshop.

Karnataka government workers oppose new pension scheme

A group of state government workers protested against the New Pension Scheme (NPS) at Freedom Park in Bengaluru this week. Workers said that the previous pension scheme provided retired workers with a secure social income.

When the NPS was introduced in 2006, government employees were not made aware of the reduced benefits. Under the NPS, workers with 10 to 15 years of service would only receive 1,500 rupees (\$US19.36) per month upon retirement. The old scheme guaranteed a higher pension based on a percentage of a worker's final salary.

Karnataka railway station contract cleaners fight sackings

Contract cleaners at the Hubballi railway station at Hubli, in Karnataka, demonstrated at the station on Monday demanding reinstatement of 95 low-paid co-workers. The Dharwad District SC/ST Pourakarmika (cleaning workers) and Employees Association called the protest.

The contract cleaners also called for the release of outstanding wages, payment of overtime, dearness allowance and gratuities. The workers are employed by a contract company based in Uttar Pradesh.

Punjab rural social health workers demand higher pay

Thousands of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers demonstrated outside the Civil Surgeon's office in Amritsar on December 16 and in Jalandhar on December 19. ASHA workers from surrounding districts joined the protests, which demanded free insurance of 500,000 rupees, an annual 20 percent increase in incentive payments, maternity leave, minimum wages, an ex-gratia grant and jobs for family members of ASHA workers in case of their death.

Other demands were for a separate uniform and laundry allowance, free outdoor and indoor treatment at hospitals, one ASHA worker for 10,000 people, and for ASHA facilitators be put on the same scale as Anganwadi (rural childcare) supervisors.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest retrenchment and unpaid wages

Bangladeshi garment workers from the Prime Textile factory at Fatullah in Narayanganj, 16 km south of Dhaka, protested at the factory gate when the factory suddenly closed on Tuesday morning and its gates were locked. Workers claimed they are owed two months of wages in arrears.

They said the owner also laid off 360 workers last month without giving any prior notice. Factory authorities have announced that another 650 employees would also be retrenched. Workers threatened further actions over the sackings..

Thales military equipment manufacturing workers in Victoria strike for higher pay

Over 120 production workers at the Thales military equipment manufacturing plant in Bendigo, Victoria, walked off the job for 4 hours on December 16 to demand an improved pay offer in Thales' proposed enterprise agreement. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union said negotiations had stalled with Thales continuing to push for a "wage increase" that is, in real terms, a pay cut.

Eighty-six of 88 AMWU members who participated in a protected action ballot on November 24 voted for industrial action. Action could include bans on overtime and call-backs, and unlimited periodic or indefinite stoppages.

Thales' Bendigo plant manufactures armoured vehicles, such as the Bushmaster and Hawkei, for the Australian military and for export. The company employs 3,800 people at 35 sites across Australia.

Healthscope non-clinical workers in Tasmania take industrial action

Ancillary health workers at Healthscope's Hobart Private Hospital are taking low-level industrial action in a fight for an improved enterprise agreement (EA) offer. Members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) want improved conditions and a wage increase that keeps pace with the increasing cost of living.

Workers complained that Healthscope has cut hospital cleaning and kitchen staff and that emergency administration staff were calling for extra support due to double workloads per shift. The HACSU claimed that Healthscope's pay offer is below inflation with no improvements in working conditions.

HACSU members, including health professionals, planned to stop work for half an hour on Thursday and protest in front of the Hobart hospital to push their demands.

Government-employed allied health professionals across Tasmania resume industrial action

State government Allied Health Professionals (AHPs), covered by the HACSU-Allied Health Sub-branch, overwhelmingly voted to resume industrial action after rejecting the state government's latest proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The union claimed the proposed enterprise agreement gave very low increases to most AHPs and offered very few improved conditions.

One demand is for the government to offer conditions on a par with workers covered by the Public Sector Unions Wages Agreement, which provides additional paid holidays and improved parental leave.

The HACSU has directed its members to commence low-level, non-disruptive, action from 8 a.m. December 22. This includes displaying union messages and slogans in workplaces, distribution of union material to patients and the wearing of union-badged clothing while at work. To head off any immediate demands for more effective industrial action, the union told members that it had "not ruled out" escalating the industrial action if a solution to the current issues cannot be found.

Allied health professionals at three private hospitals in Victoria demand for pay rise

Over 90 allied health professionals (AHPs) at hospitals owned by Cabrini Health in the Melbourne suburbs of Brighton, Malvern and Elsternwick are taking industrial action in their dispute for a pay increase. The occupational therapists, exercise physiologists, speech pathologists and social workers, who are members of the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA), began limited industrial action on December 6 and this week held protests outside their respective hospitals.

After six months of negotiations between Cabrini Health and the VAHPA for a new enterprise agreement, workers rejected a below-inflation pay offer from management. Workers want wage rises in line with inflation, equivalence in pay rates between same-graded professions in the industry and payment for all staff acting in higher duties.

Cabrini Health is a Catholic health services organisation with nearly 4,500 employees providing hospital and out of hospital care in Melbourne's southeast.

Municipal workers in Wollongong apply work bans over unfair dismissal

About 500 workers from the Wollongong City Council, 80 km south of Sydney, walked off the job in a snap strike on December 14 to protest alleged management bullying. The walkout was sparked by what workers said was the illegal sacking of a fellow employee. The United Services Union (USU) has registered its opposition to the sacking with the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission.

After a meeting with council management this Wednesday, workers

imposed several work bans, saying council had failed to resolve their grievances over management's bullying. Bans include not collecting fees at the council waste disposal tip and at leisure centres. The bans will remain in force until the union meets with council management on January 18.

Door installation electricians in New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory strike

Electrical Trades Union members employed by Dorakaba in the installation and maintenance of commercial building access doors in NSW and ACT stopped work for one hour on December 17 in a campaign for better pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The 28 members of the ETU want their pay and conditions brought into line with their Dorakaba colleagues in Victoria and Queensland.

Workers involved in a "protected action" ballot on November 17 voted unanimously for action that includes strikes up to 24 hours and a raft of 12 work bans on overtime, travel and paperwork, among others.

American Samoa nurses walk out over pay

About 50 nurses at the LBJ hospital in American Samoa walked off the job last week after discovering their wages had not been increased as management had previously promised. The nurses decided not to show up for work on Friday, December 15, to call attention to their situation. They then held a protest on Monday about unpaid overtime and the hospital's failure to pay them promised wage increments.

The hospital had completed a salary reclassification for nurses which would bump up the entry rates for nurses and all salary levels. Those who did get pay increases received hikes ranging from just 18 cents an hour to \$1 an hour, but some did not receive any pay rise. They also say they work a minimum of 12 hours and the ratio is sometimes one nurse to 12 patients because of the acute nursing shortage, which is against regulations and puts patients' lives at risk.

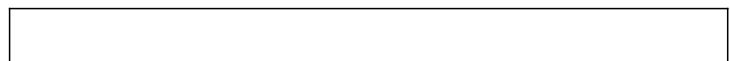
Contract nurses have been manning the wards and clinics, including newly hired ones from Fiji who have yet to undergo certification under US standards.

Unions call off pay dispute in New Caledonia

New Caledonia unions have hastily settled a pay dispute in order to suppress a growing strike movement. The unions had sought an across-the-board pay increase of six percent in the private sector to offset the impact of inflation, which in November was 4.4 percent.

They settled for a 4.2 percent increase of the lowest salaries from January 1, 2023. The very limited below inflation wage adjustment applies only for those between the monthly \$US1,440 minimum pay and those earning up to \$US1,775.

A large crowd of up to 5,000 workers had rallied for a general strike outside the offices of the employers' organisation MEDEF on December 19, to press their demands when the settlement was announced.





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