

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.

China: Zybion medical supply factory workers protest terminations

Thousands of workers from the Zybion (Zhongyuan Huiji) medical supply plant in Chongqing, which produces COVID-19 antigen test kits, demonstrated outside the factory on January 7 to protest mass terminations. A large number of police contained the protest while workers occupied the street and trampled on COVID-19 test kits.

About half of the company's 20,000 workers were told they were to be terminated after management claimed that orders for test kits had declined. Workers said they are still owed back pay.

According to China's labour contract laws, workers are entitled to severance pay at the minimum rate of one month's pay for each year worked at the company. Most Zybion workers, however, do not have full-time job contracts with the company, meaning their entitlements are not guaranteed.

Workers ended the street protest after management said it would pay a better hourly rate for the back pay.

Taiwan: Chunghwa Express delivery workers protest reduced year-end bonus

The Chunghwa Express Co employees' union has threatened that it could call a strike before the Lunar New Year holiday. A vote by workers on January 14 approved taking action in their dispute over the year-end bonus. The company, which mainly delivers cheques and paperwork to financial institutions, is a subsidiary of state-run Chunghwa Post Co.

Chunghwa Express workers ended two years of negotiations and a strike for a pay rise in July last year after the company agreed to a \$5,000 (\$US168) monthly pay increase. Workers have now accused the company of deducting the monthly raise from their annual bonuses, resulting in a year-end bonus of only a month's salary and losing about \$30,000 to \$50,000 per person. The union is demanding a year-end bonus of 1.5 months of salary.

Hong Kong: Cathay Pacific flight attendants implement work-to-rule

The 3,000-strong Cathay Pacific Airways Flight Attendants Union (FAU) has imposed work-to-rule measures in their dispute over long working hours and staff shortages. The FAU directed members, starting Thursday, to strictly follow airline policies and standards and refuse to

work on days off.

An FAU spokesperson alleged that the airline had introduced "inhumane flight patterns, perpetual manpower cut, and additional workload." He said management had refused to have any dialogue over these issues since 2021.

Indonesia: Two nickel mine workers die during protest over poor pay and conditions

At least two workers died during a protest at a nickel mine on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi on January 15. Locally employed workers at the Chinese owned Gunbuster Nickel Industry mine downed tools and went on strike after negotiations for better working conditions and wages failed to reach settlement.

Police alleged that angry workers set buildings and equipment on fire and clashed with workers that remained on the job. Nine workers were seriously injured and required hospitalisation.

Indian bank unions threaten two-day national strike

The United Forum of Bank Unions, an umbrella body of nine banking unions, has called for a two-day nationwide strike on January 30 to demand implementation of the "11th wage settlement" agreed between the unions and the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) on November 11, 2020. The IBA represents 247 banking companies operating in India.

Major demands are a five-day work week as opposed to the current six-day week, filling of all vacant posts and reversion to the old pension scheme (OPS). Workers complained that under the OPS they did not have to make any contributions. Under the new scheme, introduced in 2006, workers are forced to make deposits and the pension entitlement amount is less.

Sanitation workers in Jaipur hold two-day strike over poor working conditions

Around 8,000 sanitation workers from the Jaipur Municipal Corporation, in the capital of Rajasthan state, struck for two days on Wednesday to demand better working conditions, recruitment to fill all vacant jobs and for current contract workers to be given priority in filling these posts. There are around 4,500 vacant positions at the municipal corporation.

The union held a rally on Wednesday near the corporation's office with workers threatening further industrial action if their demands are not

granted.

Jharkhand contract health workers demand permanent jobs

Around 10,000 contract health workers, including midwives, lab technicians and paramedics, struck on Tuesday to demand permanent jobs. The strike, organised by four unions—the Jharkhand Rajya National Rural Health Mission, Auxiliary Nursing and Midwifery, General Nursing and Midwifery and the Anubandh Karmachari Sangh—followed a protest march on Monday to the governor's residence in Rabchi. Police used barricades to block the march.

Kerala power utility workers protest installation of smart meters

Electricity Employees Federation of India members, including officers, permanent workers and contract workers, demonstrated at the Kerala State Electricity Board headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram on Monday. Workers burned copies of government orders introducing prepaid smart meters to track electricity consumption in the state.

Up to 3.7 million smart meters were installed in the first phase. Workers fear that it is a move by the state government to allow private operators into the power distribution sector.

Sri Lankan government hospital workers protest deteriorating health facilities

Hundreds of health workers, including doctors and other professionals, demonstrated on Tuesday outside government hospitals in Jayawardenapura in Colombo, Karapitiya in Galle, and Matara hospitals in Southern Province over several demands. They chanted slogans like “Lack of medicine,” “Stop unreasonable taxing,” “Patients forced to get testing done in private labs” and “Confirm educational rights to children.”

On Wednesday, doctors at Northern Province government hospitals at Kilinochchi, Mannar and Mullaitivu protested outside their respective hospitals against the Wickremasinghe government’s new income tax policy and the lack of medicines. They also called for a halt to increases in bank loan interest rates now at 16.5 percent.

Visy factory workers in Victoria strike for higher pay offer

About 40 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) at the Visy packaging plant in Shepparton, Victoria, walked off the job for 24 hours on Wednesday after the union and Visy failed to reach agreement during five months of negotiations for a new enterprise agreement (EA).

Workers voted in December to take industrial action after rejecting the company’s offer of a 2.6 percent wage increase. They want an increase in line with inflation. The consumer price index (CPI) for the September quarter was 7.3 percent. Visy’s pay offer is effectively a pay cut.

The previous agreement negotiated by the AMWU limited pay increases

to 2 percent in the first year, 1.3 percent for the second year and 1.5 percent for the third year (2022) leaving workers well behind current rises in the cost of living. The workers have not had a pay increase since their current agreement expired in June.

AMWU members at Visy’s paper recycling plant in Perth, Western Australia, walked out on a 48-hour strike in mid-December, after rejecting the company’s pay offer. The AMWU demanded a “decent” wage rise and for new starters to be put on the same rates as other employees at the plant.

Visy Industries is a paper, packaging and recycling company. With an annual turnover of more than \$7 billion, Visy is the largest privately-owned company in Australia, with its executive Anthony Pratt worth an estimated \$14 billion.

Cleanaway truck drivers in Queensland strike against attack on pay and conditions

Close to 30 workers operating out of Cleanaway Commercial and Industrial Services depots at Darra in Brisbane and Burleigh on the Gold Coast, walked off the job for 24 hours on Thursday in opposition to the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. Transport Workers Union (TWU) members set up pickets at both depots.

The TWU claimed that Cleanaway’s proposed EA stripped away fundamental rights and conditions. A union spokesman said that proposed changes to rostering would seriously impact on drivers’ pay and conditions and attack their hours of work and rates for working unsociable work patterns.

The union claimed on social media that it is fighting for a pay rise that keeps pace with the cost of living and to maintain existing conditions. The TWU has a long history of suppressing wages by signing below-inflation wage deals.

Prince of Wales Hospital ancillary health workers impose bans over outsourcing

About 20 ancillary health workers at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, New South Wales, have imposed work bans after management moved full-time workers from mental health and replaced them with contract staff from ISS. Members of the Health and Services Union have refused to work in mental health areas as long as ISS workers remain there and banned training the workers.



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