

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: Tamil Nadu rural sanitation and water delivery workers demand wage rise

Around 300,000 village conservancy and overhead tank (OHT) workers demonstrated at district collectorate offices across Tamil Nadu on Monday. They were protesting against the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led state government's reneging of election promises to increase wages.

The workers' main demand is for a 300,000-rupee (\$US3,668) gratuity payment and a 3,000-rupee monthly pension for retiring OHT workers. They have a six-point charter of demands, including a pay increase and job permanency.

Workers pointed out that the former All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) state government ordered OHT workers' basic daily pay be increased from 2,600 (\$US0.17) rupees to 4,000 rupees. Two years since the DMK came to power there has been no pay rise.

West Bengal tea estate workers protest delayed wages

Over 1,000 tea estate workers at Alipurduar Estate in West Bengal stopped work and demonstrated outside the estate's main office on Monday over delays in wage payments. Workers allege that the company did not deposit their fortnightly wages in their bank accounts on January 21.

Following the protest, management agreed to pay the outstanding wages. The tea estate employs nearly 2,000 workers.

Karnataka childcare workers continue protests over pay and conditions

Thousands of anganwadi (childcare) workers are maintaining an indefinite protest they began on January 23 at Freedom Park in Bengaluru, Karnataka state's capital. It is part of a national campaign by anganwadi workers to demand higher wages and their recognition as teachers. Nearly 30,000 anganwadi workers across the state are involved in the action.

On Monday, protesters set a 48-hour deadline for the state government to fulfil their demands or they would relocate to outside the chief minister's residence.

One of their demands is for a gratuity payment in line with guidelines recently issued by the Supreme Court, after 16-year legal battle. A spokesman from the Karnataka State Anganwadi Employees' Association said that an estimated 30,000 anganwadi workers have retired since 2011 and are entitled to gratuity.

The government has held two meetings with the workers since January 3 but is now refusing to meet with them. The state is ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, which also holds power federally.

Pakistan railway workers protest delays in wage payments

Pakistan Railways employees demonstrated in Lahore this week to protest delayed wage payments. The delays are not limited to Lahore. Rail workers' monthly wages were delayed by several weeks across Pakistan during 2022 and in some cases were paid only after workers protested.

Pakistan Railways, like other federal government agencies, is in deep financial crisis. Government workers in Karachi, the capital, were not paid in August. Delayed payments have also impacted over 150,000 pensioners.

The Railway Workers' Union and other major unions have refused to mobilise workers in a united fight against wage payment delays and cuts to jobs and safety. These unions have played a critical role in limiting workers' struggles to isolated local protest actions.

Punjab government workers demand unpaid wages

Workers from the Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (a subsidiary of the Ministry of National Food Security) from several cities in Punjab have been protesting for three weeks in Multan demanding seven months of unpaid wages. Over 1,100 workers are affected.

Retired workers who have not received their pensions joined the protest. One worker reportedly attempted suicide on Monday, which his fellow employees blamed on the severe financial difficulties they were forced to endure.

Nurses and midwives at major Sydney private hospitals walk out over low pay and unsafe nurse-patient ratios

Nurses and midwives employed at Sydney's Mater Private Hospital and St Vincent's Private Hospital walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday and Thursday in protest against their managements' attempt to impose a below inflation wage increase in the enterprise agreement being negotiated with the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA).

The action followed a one-hour stoppage in December over the same issue. More than 730 NSWNMA members are involved in the dispute.

Although a large majority of union members voted in mid-December to take industrial action, the union is keeping this to a minimum. NSWNMA members at the Mater Private Hospital voted to ban overtime for 12 hours from midday on Wednesday. St Vincent's Private Hospital union members banned overtime requests for 24 hours on Thursday. Nurses and midwives are also continuing to refuse domestic duties at both hospitals.

NSWNMA members want an improved pay rise offer, as well as better rosters and safe staff patient ratios. St Vincent's initial pay offer was only 3.75 percent, well below the 7.8 percent December quarter consumer prices index.

Prince of Wales Hospital ancillary health workers walk out over outsourcing

About 20 ancillary health workers at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday in protest against management using external contract staff to deliver essential medical services. The Health Services Union (HSU) said patient services assistants had been moved out of the mental health unit and replaced with ISS contract staff.

Workers claimed that ISS staff do not have the training or

knowledge to deliver adequate care. HSU members are refusing to work in mental health areas while ISS workers remain there and have banned training the contract workers. HSU members have told management that unless contractors are withdrawn by 12 p.m. February 8 they will walk out on strike for the afternoon.

Visy factory workers in Victoria strike again for higher pay

About 40 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) at the Visy packaging plant in Shepparton walked out for 24 hours on Wednesday, the second strike in two weeks, to demand an improved pay offer in a new enterprise agreement.

After five months of management and union negotiations, workers rejected Visy's 2.5 percent below inflation pay rise offer and voted in December to take industrial action.

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

Dynelec engineering workers in New South Wales strike for improved conditions

Ten members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) from the Dynelec workshop at Unanderra, a Wollongong suburb, walked off the job for 24 hours on January 27 to demand a better enterprise agreement. The union said further stoppages and work bans are planned.

Workers' demands include a 36-hour week with a nine-day fortnight, pay rises that keep up with the cost of living, income protection and top-up insurance, and the right of union delegates to access training.



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