

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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

Asia

India: Utter Pradesh contract teachers demand better pay and permanent jobs

More than 60,000 contract primary school teachers demonstrated in Lucknow, the Uttar Pradesh capital, on Monday to demand permanent jobs, equal pay for equal work, and for the retirement age to be lifted from 60 to 62 years.

There are more than 150,000 contract primary school teachers in Uttar Pradesh. Teachers want the state government to recruit them as assistant teachers. Some have already passed the Teacher Eligibility Test, which qualifies them for permanent jobs. Contract teachers are paid only 10,000 rupees (\$US120) a month while permanent teachers receive 40,000 rupees.

Protesting teachers complained that they have to do additional duties, including election work and various surveys, with no additional pay and are only paid for 11 months in the year.

The teachers said that the BJP election manifesto in 2017, before it came to power, promised to look into their grievances. In 2021, the chief minister told parliament that the government would increase the contract primary teachers' salary to 20,000 rupees, but has failed to do so.

West Bengal government workers hold second strike for higher dearness allowance

West Bengal government administrative employees stopped work and occupied their offices on Monday and Tuesday as part of their fight for increased dearness allowance (DA).

The state-wide strike was called by Sangrami Joutha Mancha (the United Struggle Forum), an alliance of about 30 state government employees' organisations. It followed a one-day strike on February 13, a sit-down demonstration in Kolkata in January, and hunger protest on February 8.

Workers alleged that the dearness allowance paid by the central Indian government is currently 38 percent and most of the Indian states pay between 20 and 40 percent of the basic wage. The West Bengal government only pays 3 percent and has not increased the allowance since 2009. Last week the West Bengal government's state budget indicated

that it will not increase the allowance.

The government attempted to stop this week's industrial action by threatening all strikers with disciplinary action, including a break in their work service. The threat was ignored and nearly all government administrative services across the state, including court hearings, ceased during the strike.

Australia and New Zealand

Spotless/Downer workers across Australia strike for higher wages

Around 400 electricians and plumbers employed by Spotless/Downer took nationwide strike action on February 17 to demand higher wages and improved conditions. Spotless/Downer holds numerous contracts at military bases and other facilities throughout Australia. Each have separate work agreements.

Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) members working on service contracts at eight worksites took action. These were at Myer and the International Convention Centre in Sydney, military bases near Wagga in southern New South Wales, a military facility in Canberra, naval shipbuilding yard at Osborne in South Australia, Royal Adelaide Hospital and a military base in Townsville, North Queensland.

New South Wales ambulance paramedics take action for a pay rise

NSW Ambulance paramedics have begun a five week campaign of industrial action in their fight for a pay increase and to be recognised as professionals. The Ambulance Division of the Health Services Union (ADHSU) said NSW paramedics receive a base salary about \$20,000 a year less than their counterparts in Queensland and Victoria.

On February 17, ADHSU members held a one-hour stop work meeting and voted to impose work bans. The limited bans include wearing union stickers on their safety vests, chalking union slogans on ambulances, restrictions on shift changes, and a work to rule. The union also plans to stop billing patients for services as its campaign continues.

As part of their struggle for professional recognition, the ADHSU has banned paramedics using their higher-level skills, including administering certain medicines, that made them "quasi-doctors."

Visy workers in Shepparton continue rolling strikes

About 40 workers at two Visy Paper production plants at Shepparton, in central Victoria, are continuing to hold rolling strikes in their dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The industrial action, which began nine weeks ago, is the first strike at the plants in sixty years.

Visy workers in November approved taking industrial action after eight months of negotiations between the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and Visy management. Workers rejected the company's sub-inflation pay rise offer of 2.66 percent per annum in a three-year enterprise agreement. This is well below the current consumer price index (CPI) of 7.8 percent. The last wage increase workers received was in July 2021 and was only 1.5 percent.

In a move designed to wear members down, the AMWU has organised limited one-day and two-day strikes, along with a series of marches through Shepparton, to make useless calls on the local federal MP to intervene.

University of Queensland teaching staff strike over stalled wage negotiations

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of Queensland struck for 24 hours on Wednesday in their long-running battle to secure a new enterprise agreement. University staff are frustrated that after 600 days of negotiations, agreement has not been reached.

Striking workers protested on the street outside of the university holding placards with multiple demands. Placards read, "Overworked Underpaid," "Casualisation Sucks," "For-profit Education is a Scam," "No more sham redundancies" and "Pay for every hour worked."

As well as demanding a "real" pay rise, the NTEU said it wanted "pathways" to secure jobs and safe workloads. It is also demanding gender affirmation leave.

The current agreement expired on 30 June 2021. Wednesday's strike was only the third day of industrial action called by the NTEU since negotiations stalled.

Tasmania: Allied health professionals strike over excessive workloads and underfunding

Allied professional health workers stopped work for an hour and demonstrated outside the Royal Hobart Hospital on Thursday to protest extreme workloads, lack of services and low wages. Allied health workers in Tasmania's north plan to protest at the Launceston General Hospital on February 28 over the same issues.

The action follows six weeks of failed enterprise agreement negotiations between the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) and the Rockliff Liberal state government. The health workers have rejected the government's wage increase offer of 3.5 percent for the next year, and pay rises of 3 percent for the following two years. This is a real pay cut in the context of Tasmania's 8.6 percent inflation rate.

Workers are also concerned about the lack of funding for health services and staff levels which are increasing admission and treatment waiting times. The limited one-hour protests called by HACSU are combined with useless appeals to the government.

McDonald's restaurant workers in Victoria walk out over safety

Workers and supporters, including a shift manager, demonstrated outside the McDonald's restaurant in Traralgon, Victoria on February 17 to protest the company's inaction over ongoing sexual harassment at the store.

Distressed young workers walked off the job on February 2 in a snap action over sexual harassment. They said they feared for their safety if they remained at work. Unable to reach senior local management, the shift manager closed the restaurant and called the police.

McDonald's responded by berating the shift manager, sending her a letter claiming her action had impacted the restaurant's profitability and reputation and accusing her of "wilful and deliberate misconduct in the workplace."

The public protest was organised by the Restaurant and Fast Food Workers Union. The union said it was considering legal action against McDonald's, but gave no details.

New Zealand night club dancers protest sackings

Nearly 20 dancers at Wellington's Calendar Girls night club are picketing the CBD premises after losing their jobs following an attempt to collectively negotiate a contract.

One worker said the issue arose when 35 dancers signed an email with "just two requests." The email opposed a new payment system that would result in cuts to dancers' income and a larger percentage for the club owner. She told the media that the new payment system was "ludicrous" and "unnecessary."

Instead of engaging with the workers, who had requested a 60/40 income split, the club owner posted a message on Facebook telling the women to "clear out" their stuff.

The worker said there were "compounding issues" in clubs around the country, including "very heavy" fines. Calendar Girls lists 13 "inconvenience fees" dancers are sometimes obliged to pay. These include a \$500 fee and 50 percent tip forfeiture for being "rude" to management.

Controls imposed by clubs, she said, extend to "how many songs you dance to, what kind of style of music you dance to, how many hours you have to work, when you're allowed to go and eat."

The sacked workers are being blacklisted from other clubs over the contract dispute.



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