

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: Jammu and Kashmir education department workers protest poverty wages

About 7,500 Contingent Paid Workers (CPW) employed at government schools by the Jammu and Kashmir education department demonstrated in the state's capital Srinagar on Monday demanding unpaid wages, higher pay and promotions. Most of these workers had given their land to the government to build primary schools on the condition that they would be recruited in permanent positions with regular pay.

CPWs are employed as cleaners, sweepers and watchman on poverty wages ranging from 500 rupees (\$US6) to 2,000 rupees a month. But even this meagre wage was stopped in 2017 by the People's Democratic Party- Bharatiya Janata Party coalition state government, saying that under a new department their salaries will resume and they would be paid the minimum wage of 24,000 rupees a month. The promise was never kept and the workers have been forced to do other work to earn an income while still working at the schools.

West Bengal childcare workers demand higher wages and permanent jobs

More than a thousand Anganwadi (childcare) workers under the Integrated Child Development Scheme protested in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, on April 26. The demonstrators, representing around 100,000 Anganwadi workers in the state, demanded permanent job status, a wage rise and retirement pension. They also want to be issued with mobile phones, which is now mandatory for them to upload reports to authorities.

Workers also alleged that they are now getting only 8,250 rupees (\$US101) per month. One worker said it was difficult to provide for family needs on the meagre wage and added: "How can we buy a 10,000-rupee smart phone to send out reports?" Workers also complained that they had to run two to three childcare centres simultaneously. They demanded that all vacant childcare positions be filled.

Bangladeshi tannery workers protest on May Day

Hundreds of Bangladeshi tannery workers demonstrated on May Day in the Tannery Industrial Estate at Hemayetpur, on the outskirts of Dhaka. The Tannery Workers' Union put forward 12 demands, including a wage increase, improved safety and family welfare security.

Workers demanded formation of a minimum wage board and a new wage structure. They want an end to recruiting workers below the government declared minimum wage and the minimum wages prescribed for various grades as per the collective bargaining agreement signed between the union and employers.

Other demands were the implementation of all tannery related labour laws, improving occupational health and safety, setting up a full-fledged 50-bed hospital in the industrial estate and other support facilities. Over 3,000 tannery workers at the estate walked off the job in September 2017 over the same long pending demands.

Bangladeshi commuter transport workers call indefinite strike

The Bangladeshi District Bus, Minibus, Coach and Microbus Workers Union called an indefinite strike in Sunamganj, in Bangladesh's northeast Sylhet Division, for May 4 to demand an end to extortion and for justice against those who carried out attacks on workers. The union claimed that workers' claims of extortion of money remained unresolved despite the official recording of cases against perpetrators.

ACIRL laboratory workers in Queensland strike for higher pay

Over 40 workers from coal testing laboratories of ACIRL walked off the job for 24 hours on Tuesday to protest the company's latest pay offer. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members in Richlands, Emerald and Central Queensland, and Lithgow, in New South Wales, have three times rejected ACIRL's pay offer.

The AMWU alleged that workers' claims were rejected without being considered and that ACIRL had put forward another near

identical proposed enterprise agreement for a vote with the only change of offering three months back-pay instead of a \$500 sign-on bonus.

ACIRL provides coal sampling and analysis services which determine the inherent value and quality of coal products for the mining industry.

Patient transfer officers in New South Wales strike over pay and conditions

Patient Transfer Officers (PTOs) employed by the state-owned body HealthShare stopped work for 21 hours from 9 a.m. on April 28 in their dispute with the state Labor government over low pay and for improved conditions.

Health Services Union (HSU) members want removal of the state government public sector wage cap and a revision of what they describe as their “unworkable” rosters. The wage cap limits annual pay increases to only 3 percent at a time when the state’s current consumer price index (CPI) is 7 percent.

The HSU has appealed to the Minns minority Labor government to keep an election promise that it would negotiate a lifting of the wage cap. Prior to being elected, Minns insisted, however, that any increase would only be granted on the basis of “strict economic principles” and “with budget savings and productivity gains.”

Cleanaway workers in Western Australia reject latest enterprise agreement offer

Cleanaway waste collection workers in Perth, Western Australia, rejected the company’s latest enterprise agreement offer on April 26, a week after holding a 24-hour strike which impacted on household garbage collections in nine local government areas and major commercial customers, including hospitals and Perth Airport.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), which represents over 300 Cleanaway workers in Perth, said members are opposed to the company’s sub-inflation pay offer and its proposal to remove daily overtime and force weekends to be worked as normal hours. Cleanaway’s pay increase offer is just 5 percent for the first two years and 4 percent in the following two years, well below the national CPI of 7 percent.

Cleanaway is currently negotiating separate agreements with the TWU at many of its sites across the country. The company has contracts with 130 local councils and 150,000 business customers across Australia, running 5,000 waste collection trucks. It reported a net profit of \$80.6 million in the 2021–22 financial year and \$49 million after tax in the first six months of this financial year.

Workers in all states have rejected Cleanaway’s proposed agreements and are demanding that new agreements include job security, no loss in conditions, retention of existing rosters, no

weekend work, and a pay rise consistent with the rate of inflation.

Visy workers’ industrial action in Victoria enters 16th week

Over 40 workers at Visy’s Wheeler Street can manufacturing plant in Shepparton, Victoria are continuing rolling strikes begun on January 18 in their dispute over the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members rejected the company’s last pay increase offer in March of just 8.75 percent over three years or 2.9 percent per annum.

The Shepparton workers’ last wage increase was in July 2021 and was only 1.5 percent. Workers are demanding a wage rise in line with inflation, which still fails to make up for years of below-inflation pay increases. One worker claimed that skilled workers at the factory are paid around \$20 an hour, which is low in the industry and low compared to workers at other Visy plants.

Visy is one of Australia’s largest private companies, with operations in most Australian states. The company reports having a workforce of 2,650 people. It operates at 11 sites in Melbourne and has two at Shepparton.

The AMWU’s defense of these workers and their struggle has been drawn-out and limited to just the Wheeler Street Site where it has imposed limited rolling three and for day strikes that have allowed the company to continue operations. It has steered the workers into making useless appeals to the local federal MP to intervene.



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