

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.

Asia

Philippines: Jeepney drivers hold nation-wide strike against modernisation

More than 200,000 jeepney (minibus) drivers covered by the PISTON and Manibela unions struck across the Philippines this week. PISTON drivers struck for three days from Monday and Manibela for three days from Wednesday. PISTON claimed that 90 percent of services were off the road.

Traditional jeepney drivers are opposed to the government's public utility vehicle (PUV) modernisation program. The Marcos government claims the modernisation program is needed to reduce the number of old polluting PUVs in high-density cities.

Drivers complained that they are being forced into significant debt to afford the modern vehicles, which each cost at least 2 million pesos (\$US36,300). One driver told media that on average he brings home \$US3.60 a day after expenses, not nearly enough to save for a new minibus, and which, he said, will "bury us in debt."

Drivers and operators are being forced to consolidate into corporations and cooperatives of no less than 15 vehicles by December 31. The government on Tuesday offered to extend the franchise consolidation deadline for five years. Driver-owners fear they will be bankrupted and their franchises, routes and livelihood taken over by the banks and big business.

PISTON has demanded scrapping of the franchise consolidation requirement and allowing those who previously complied to withdraw their individual franchises; restoration of the five-year franchises for all PUVs and all modified PUV routes; immediate cash aid and reasonable financial support for all affected PUV drivers and small operators.

India: Maharashtra contract health workers demand equal pay and entitlements

Around 2,100 contract health workers employed under the National Health Mission (NHM) at Pune, in Maharashtra state, have been on strike since October 25 demanding permanent appointments, or, at minimum, equal pay and entitlements as permanent employees.

More than 700 held a demonstration in Pune on Monday. Protesters said many have been in the job for 10 years or more without a pay rise.

Currently there are 35,000 contract NHM workers in Maharashtra, including doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmaceutical officers,

community medical officers and management staff at district hospitals, sub-district hospitals, rural hospitals and primary health centres.

Retrenched General Motors India workers in Pune maintain hunger strike

About 1,000 retrenched workers from General Motors India's shuttered plant at Telegaon, near Pune, are maintaining a relay hunger strike begun on October 2. They want reinstatement at the plant, which has been sold to Hyundai Motor India.

The General Motors Employees Union (GMEU) has appealed for the government to intervene, promoting illusions in a false assurance from the state industries minister that workers' demands would be heard, but this has resolved nothing.

Non-teaching staff at the Aligarh University in Uttar Pradesh protest low pay

About 1,500 ad-hoc non-teaching staff at the Aligarh University in Uttar Pradesh held a mock funeral procession on the university grounds on Tuesday demanding resolution of long-standing grievances. Their demands are for permanent jobs, increased wages and payment of long pending increments and allowances.

Karnataka head load workers protest for minimum wage

Head load workers in Hubballi, Karnataka staged a protest on Tuesday with demands that included implementation of the minimum wage, welfare schemes, and gratuity (retirement pay) for head load workers over the age of 60 years. Another demand was for houses for homeless workers.

The Federation of Karnataka State Head Load Workers made an appeal to the government demanding that welfare programmes for head load workers be implemented under the aegis of the state Social Security Board for unorganised sector workers and steps be taken to mobilise funds on the lines of the Labour Welfare Board.

Andhra Pradesh municipal contract workers hold state-wide protests

Municipal contract workers in Andhra Pradesh held state-wide protests

on Tuesday to demand equal pay for equal work and permanent jobs. The AP Municipal Workers' and Employees' Federation accused the chief minister of not fulfilling a commitment prior to coming to power to make all municipal contract jobs permanent.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa health workers protest lack of security at work

Doctors, paramedics and other workers from the King Abdullah Teaching Hospital in Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, held a two-hour strike on Tuesday and protested outside the emergency department, demanding security to protect hospital workers. Workers provided only emergency services between 10 a.m. and 12 noon.

Nurses at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences strike

Nurses from the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in Islamabad have been on strike since November 6, over non-payment of their salaries for the past four months. Management has ordered them back to work, declaring workers must not be allowed to "compromise the treatment and care of patients under any circumstances."

The nurses ended a strike and protest outside the hospital on August 16 after management falsely assured them that two months' salary would be paid immediately.

Sri Lankan expressway workers protest privatisation

Around 11,000 expressway workers across Sri Lanka went on a 12-hour sick leave strike on Wednesday to oppose the government's plan to privatise the island's expressway network. Workers fear for their job security.

The All-Island Expressway Workers' Union demanded that the expressway network remain under the Road Development Authority.

In June 2023, a cabinet paper proposed to establish a company under the Ministry of Finance that will take control of the network. The proposal advocates operating the expressways as a business under a public-private partnership.

Striking workers are also demanding payment of unused sick leave for the year 2022 and ending the delay for approval of the System for Optimized Recruitment (SOR) which deferred the grade promotions of all employees.

Sri Lankan telecommunications and power workers protest privatisation

Members of the Central Cultural Fund Employees Union and Sri Lanka All Electrical Workers Union held demonstrations across the island this week to protest the government's plans to privatise the Ceylon Electricity Board and Sri Lanka Telecom. Workers protested in front of head offices in the cities of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya in Central

Province and Galle in Southern Province. They also demanded resolution of other grievances and for a living allowance of 20,000 rupees (\$US61).

Bangladeshi school teachers protest suspension of union official

Teachers under the Bangladesh Monthly Pay Order (MPO) scheme demonstrated outside the National Press Club in Dhaka on Tuesday demanding withdrawal of the suspension order against the Bangladesh Teachers' Association general secretary. Teachers alleged that the suspension was in response to a series of recent strikes over salary issues, in which the general secretary played a prominent part.

MPO teachers staged sit-in protests in Dhaka, for 22 consecutive days between July 11 and August 1, and a countrywide strike for 17 consecutive days between July 16 and August 1.

Their demands were for 16,000 taka (\$US144) as an entry-level basic monthly salary, 1,500 taka medical allowance, 100 percent of the basic salary as a festival allowance and 45 percent of the basic salary as house rent. The present monthly gross salary is 14,000 taka including 1,000 taka in house rent, and 500 taka in medical allowance.

According to Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022, around 200,000 teachers from 16,766 junior secondary and secondary schools are covered by the MPO, a pay system for teachers in state-controlled public schools and government-approved institutions.

Australia

BHP iron ore train drivers in Western Australia take industrial action

Close to 400 BHP train drivers in the Pilbara region, Western Australia (WA), began protected industrial action on Friday in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. It is the first time the drivers have taken industrial action in three decades. The drivers' current agreement expired in June 2018.

Following two years of failed negotiations between the Mining and Energy Union (MEU) and BHP, 95 percent of workers last month voted for industrial action that could include work stoppages, speed reductions and a range of work bans.

The MEU has admitted that it does not want to disrupt BHP's lucrative mining operations and would be "beginning with a measured and targeted action." This has so far been limited to an indefinite ban on using the company's mobile rostering apps, forcing management to personally contact drivers about roster changes.

Drivers want improvements in a range of areas, including guaranteed annual pay increases and consistent standards in areas including training, consultation, accommodation, application of flight assistance, dispute resolution and the process to change rosters.

BHP iron ore operations in WA include four processing hubs and five mines connected by a 1,000 kilometre railway to its port facilities. BHP's WA operation in 2022 made \$16.6 billion before tax, 60 percent of the company's earnings.

Plumbing parts factory workers in Queensland strike again for higher

pay

For the fourth time this month, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members from Reliance Worldwide Corporation (RWC), a plumbing equipment manufacturer, walked out of the company's plant at Eagle Farm in Brisbane on Wednesday, demanding an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers' last pay increase in June 2022 was a 3.75 percent below-inflation rise. The AMWU has not given details of what it will settle for, except to say members want a "fair" pay offer and new work categories that compensate them for taking on additional skills and responsibilities. The union claimed that some workers haven't been reclassified for decades, despite picking up extra skills and taking on extra responsibilities.

New South Wales paramedics' unions hold separate campaigns for pay increase

More than 1,500 paramedics from New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) have indicated to the state government that they are boycotting reregistration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) by the mandatory deadline of November 30. Were those registrations to lapse, paramedics would be able to do little more than drive ambulances and give basic first aid from January 1.

The paramedics are members of the Ambulance Division of the Health Services Union (ADHSU), who are campaigning for professional rates of pay that reflect their increased skills and training over the past decade. The union argues that new responsibilities mean that paramedics are now required to do complex diagnostics and administer medication. The union claimed paramedics in other states are paid up to 40 percent more than their NSW counterparts.

ADHSU said members would lift their boycott if the government brought NSW classifications into parity with the base pay of their colleagues in the Queensland Ambulance Service.

Meanwhile, members of the Australian Paramedics Association NSW began seven days of industrial action for a pay increase. Members are refusing staff movements and are not responding to non-emergency patient transfer jobs that could be otherwise taken by Patient Transport services.

Both unions want pay lifted by around 20 percent to bring them in line with other states. In close collaboration with the Health Services Union, as well as the Nurses and Midwives Association and other public sector unions, the Minns Labor government has limited public sector pay increases to just 4 percent, well below inflation.



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