

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.

India: Strike by sanitation workers in Gurugram city enters ninth week

Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) sanitation workers have been on strike since September 18 to demand cancellation of direct employment of sanitation workers by existing agencies. The corporation has stopped paying strikers and is acting against those disrupting work.

The corporation sacked 3,480 workers in September and outsourced work to new private agencies. Workers said that after MCG ended the contracts under which they used to get a salary of 15,000 rupees (\$US180), they were asked to work in the operations and maintenance departments under different conditions whereby their salary was reduced to 10,400 rupees.

MCG has been forced to hire private agencies, additional manpower and tractor-trolleys to remove garbage that is piling up in the city.

Jharkhand public sector workers demand higher wages, permanent jobs and improved conditions

Around 30,000 workers from various state-owned services and the community care sector held a protest march in Jharkhand's capital Ranchi on December 4 to demand better working conditions and benefits. They called for pay increases, permanency for informal and outsourced workers, and reform of government department rules relating to wages, allowances, inclusion into pension schemes, and proper classification of workers.

Their union, the Jharkhand Rajya Arajpatrit Karamchari Mahasangh, submitted an 11-point demand letter to the Jharkhand chief minister.

Maharashtra childcare workers still on strike over pay and entitlements

Over 200,000 anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers across Maharashtra are maintaining a strike they began on December 4 over several long outstanding demands. The Anganwadi Workers Union wants increased honorarium and gratuity payments and for workers to be granted government employee status.

The workers want a 18,000-rupee (\$US216) monthly minimum wage, which is the minimum wage for a government contract worker according to existing labour laws, and an additional dearness allowance. In March, their monthly honorarium was raised from 8,500 to only 10,000 rupees. Helpers are paid a meagre 5,000 rupees (\$US60) per month. Anganwadi workers are not entitled to pensions, provident fund or gratuity payments.

The strike has affected the operation of 170,000 anganwadi centres. These workers provide vital services such as the distribution of nutritional foods, monitoring of pregnant women and undernourished children and general health advice.

Andhra Pradesh anganwadi workers and helpers strike

Around 200,000 Anganwadi workers and helpers went on strike Tuesday throughout Andhra Pradesh forcing the closure of about 50,000 centres. Workers want wages lifted to 26,000 rupees (\$US312), gratuity, raising the retirement age to 62 and removal of mini-Anganwadi centres. Anganwadi workers are currently paid 11,500 rupees a month with helpers only paid 7,000 rupees a month.

Uttar Pradesh cancer hospital workers in Lucknow strike

Doctors and outsourced workers at the Kalyan Singh Super Speciality Cancer Institute and Hospital in Lucknow went on strike on Monday. They demanded an increase in honorarium and equal pay with their counterparts at the Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS). The cancer institute has 27 regular doctors and more than 100 resident doctors.

The Faculty Welfare Association claimed that they were promised pay parity a year ago with their SGPGIMS colleagues, but pay was only lifted to be on par with medical colleges. A doctor said more than 20 specialist faculty members have already left the institute in the last several years and others are planning to leave.

Tamil Nadu rural postal workers walk out for pay parity

Rural post office workers went on strike on December 12 and held a sit-down protest in Madurai to demand the same pay as permanent workers, pension benefits, a leave allowance and health insurance. The All India Gramin Dak Sevaks Union said that, though they did the same work as

regular postal workers, their pay was much lower.

Karnataka midday meal workers strike against poverty wages

Poorly paid public school midday meal workers in Haveri, Karnataka, withdrew their labour for an indefinite period on December 10 to demand higher pay. On the third day several under-nourished strikers fell ill and were hospitalised.

Around 3,900 midday meal workers are employed in Haveri. The State Midday Meal Cooks and Assistants Union, affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, wants wages increased from their meagre 3,700 rupees (\$US44.40) a month for cooks and 3,600 for assistants.

Pakistan: Baluchistan Development Authority workers on strike

Baluchistan Development Authority (BDA) workers have been on strike for almost three months in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan. They are holding a sit-in protest in the office corridor of the BDA building. Their main demands are permanent jobs for 617 workers, as previously promised, and the release of five months' outstanding salaries.

A union spokesman said workers had stopped sending their children to school because they could not afford school fees and that it had become difficult to pay for food and other essentials. The workers have threatened a hunger strike "until death" if the government continues to ignore their demands.

Sri Lankan public sector workers protest budget cuts and increased taxes

Thousands of public sector workers have been demonstrating in cities across Sri Lanka over the Wickremesinghe government's IMF-driven budget cuts and the increase of VAT to 18 percent.

The Development Officers Union and the Union of Public Services members protested on Tuesday to demand a 10,000-rupee allowance added to wages from January. Workers held hand-written placards saying, "commodity prices go up, wages go down," and "Reinstate the full pension system," which was revoked in 2016.

Postal workers struck for 48 hours on December 11 to demand the government end plans to sell national resources including the historic Nuwara Eliya and Kandy post offices, which are to be sold to foreign companies. All post offices throughout Sri Lanka remained closed during the strike. The Joint Postal Trade Unions called for an allowance of 20,000 rupees (\$US61) to be paid from January 2024. The unions threatened to take further action if the government continued to ignore their demands.

DP World terminal workers resume national industrial action

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at DP World port terminals in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle resumed

industrial action on Wednesday after suspending action for six days while mediation proceeded in the Fair Work Commission. The union called for the immediate resumption of industrial action through to December 23 after DP World broke off negotiations saying it would not restart talks until January 29.

DP World Tuesday night failed to convince the Fair Work Commission to order a 90-day "cooling off" period as the action was "causing significant economic damage."

Over 1,500 MUA members at DP World terminals have been holding rolling two-hour stoppages and work bans since October 6. They are opposing cuts to pay and conditions in DP World's proposed enterprise deal.

According to the stevedore industry, the ongoing industrial action has led to a backlog of 45,000 containers at terminals around the country. Ships importing white goods, medicine and food, and exporting grains, meat and wine, are facing delays of 10 days on average and as much as 19 days.

Negotiations for a new agreement covering the four ports began in April. The union claims the company wants to cut wages by up to 32 percent, undermine job security, and introduce a flexible rostering system that will require its members to work 65 Saturday or Sunday shifts a year, up from the current 52.

The MUA has submitted 300 bargaining demands, including for pay rises of 8 percent a year, 13 percent superannuation and increased contributions to the union's income protection policy. The union claims that DP World is paying 10 percent less than other stevedores.

Royal Flying Doctor Service nurses in Queensland begin industrial action

Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) nurses in Queensland are taking unprecedented industrial action following eight months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. Low-level action by 70 nurses covered by the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) includes wearing reflective vests with the slogan "Fair Go for RFDS Nurses."

Nurses want the new agreement to guarantee that they are paid for all hours rostered, worked and spent on call. A union spokesperson said nurses are seeking rosters and conditions that reflect the significant increase in RFDS Queensland services. "In recent years, RFDS Qld management have required nurses to work more overtime, attend more frequent calls and respond within shorter timeframes. As a result, existing rosters and other conditions are no longer sustainable," the spokesperson said.

RFDS primary health care nurses fly into remote areas to routinely staff Queensland Health clinics and provide health care for entire communities including babies, children and women. They are qualified to provide care during aeromedical retrievals in times of crisis. Approximately 70 percent of RFDS retrievals are nurse-only flights.

RFDS nurses complained that they are currently paid less than their colleagues employed in Queensland Health.

Wine estate workers in South Australia strike for pay rise

A total of 125 United Workers Union (UWU) members at Treasury Wines Estates winery and packaging facilities in South Australia's

Barossa Valley struck for 24 hours on Wednesday for a pay rise and improved conditions.

The UWU said it wants a 14 percent pay rise over three years, five percent in the first two years and four percent in the third. The September quarter consumer price index for South Australia was 5.9 percent, meaning the union is negotiating a real pay cut.

Workers rejected Treasury's pay rise offer of 11.5 percent over three years saying it failed to make up for a pay freeze agreed to during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under pressure from the union and management, workers previously accepted a below-inflation increase of 5.5 percent over three years even as annual inflation hit a peak of 7.8 percent.

The wine estate workers want improved leave arrangements and better conditions for labour hire workers. The company is facing an unfair dismissal suit by former labour hire workers who were abruptly terminated after company-mandated medical examinations. One worker was told he was medically unfit to work despite being a marathon runner and long-distance cyclist.

V/Line regional public rail commuter workers in Victoria strike

Train controllers, station officers, customer service staff and authorised officers from Victoria's state-owned regional public rail transport operator V/Line walked off the job for four hours at 3 a.m. on Wednesday. The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and V/Line have been in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement since June. The agreement covers over 1,300 RTBU members who on November 29 approved taking strike action for up to 48 hours.

Outstanding issues are for guaranteed regional job security, a grievance clause, a 36-hour week and no forced redundancies. Workers are opposed to V/Line's proposal to use ticketless technology to split a full-time job into two part-time jobs and give each eight-hour weekly contracts.

The union wants a 17 percent pay rise over a four-year agreement. The current CPI in Victoria is 5 percent, which means the union is negotiating a real pay cut.

Melbourne Airport contract cleaners approve strike action

United Workers Union members employed by cleaning contractor IKON at Melbourne Airport have unanimously voted to take strike action in their drive for wage increases above the minimum. Of the 120 IKON cleaners at the airport, 47 are union members. The workers are paid the minimum wage of \$24 per hour, in accordance with the Cleaning Services Award. Demands include a 5 percent pay rise above the minimum, drastic improvements to safety guidelines and protections, and for the company to pay for parking.

Workers said their low wages meant that employment turnover is high, shifts often left unfilled and those who remain faced with higher workloads. As a result, toilets are left uncleaned, and bins not emptied.

On December 11, UWU members approved the union calling industrial action, which includes bans on cleaning toilets and working overtime and 24-hour strikes. The union, however, has not called any action.

New Zealand early childhood workers protest low pay

Early childhood workers across New Zealand held a day of action on December 8 for pay increases and better working conditions. The NZ Educational Institute (NZEI) has restricted the action to out-of-work-hours protests in several cities and regional centres.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) workers want better teacher-to-child ratios, pay parity with kindergarten teachers and a funding system to support equity across the sector.

While ECE centres draw their funding from the Ministry of Education, the same source as kindergartens, the funding model is different and so is the pay. Although their qualifications are the same, ECE workers are paid \$10,000 to \$15,000 less a year than their kindergarten counterparts.

Kindergartens are not-for-profit organisations that have been treated as part of the state sector, whereas ECE is typically private or community-based. Pay parity with primary teachers was won by kindergarten teachers some time ago, but not extended to those working in ECE, which is a fragmented sector with thousands of employers.

NZEI is using the issue to promote union protests against the incoming coalition government's scrapping of Labour's Fair Pay Agreements. These industry-wide agreements were falsely promoted as a mechanism to raise the pay of low-paid workers. In fact, they were designed to cement the role of the unions in policing the working class, including banning strikes.



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