

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.

Childcare workers across India continue fight for a living wage

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers have been taking industrial action over the last four months in several Indian states over poverty wages.

In Bihar state Anganwadi workers organised by the Bihar Anganwadi Karamchari Sangh have been protesting since October to demand an increase in their monthly honorarium and to be given government employee status. They are currently paid a monthly honorarium of 5,950 rupees (\$US72) and helpers a meagre 2,975 rupees.

The protesting workers were suspended on November 7 resulting in all 2,357 Anganwadi Centres in Banka district remaining closed for over two months.

In Andhra Pradesh around 100,000 Anganwadi workers and helpers have been on strike since December 11 demanding wages be lifted to 26,000 rupees for all anganwadi workers. The strikers have been harassed by police and many have been taken into custody and charged.

The Andhra Pradesh government has invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) against the striking workers, forcing them not to strike for six months, or face heavy fines.

About 200,000 Anganwadi workers in Maharashtra have been on strike since early December demanding their honorarium be increased to 26,000 rupees and 20,000 rupees for helpers.

India: Andhra Pradesh ambulance workers issue strike notice for job security

Contract 108, 104 emergency ambulance workers issued a strike notice to the Andhra Pradesh government on Monday demanding promises made before the 2019 election be honoured, to make them part of the Andhra Pradesh Corporation of Outsourced Services. They are currently employed by Aurobindo Emergency Medical Services, a private company.

Workers condemned the government for overlooking them while it recruited people into 108 Emergency Medical Technicians posts from other states. A union spokesperson said some 108 workers had 18 years' service but had not received any formal professional training from the state.

The workers are represented by the 108, 104 and Thalli Bidda (mother-daughter) Express Workers' Union, which is affiliated to Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Indian railway workers demand reinstatement of old pension scheme

On Tuesday, Indian Railways workers in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka held protests at several railway stations as part of a long-running campaign by public sector workers to demand reinstatement of the old pension scheme. South Western Railway Mazdoor members protested outside the division railway manager's office and the Central Railway Workshop in Mysura, while in Shimla workers protested at several railway stations.

The old pension scheme was replaced by India's central government in 2004 with a new contributory scheme as a cost-saving measure. Under the NPS (new pension scheme) workers are paid a pension as per their contribution to the provident fund. This is well below what they would get under the old benefits scheme, which paid a pension based on their last pay drawn.

Tamil Nadu bus drivers' union ends two-day strike

The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and Anna Thozhirsanga Peravai (ATSP) closed down a two-day strike by Tamil Nadu government bus drivers on Thursday after a request from the government. It complained that the strike clashed with the state's festival season. The unions claimed the strike was "deferred."

The overworked and underpaid drivers and conductors were demanding higher wages, filling of vacant posts for drivers and conductors and dearness allowance of 6,000 rupees (\$US72) for retired workers.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand pay rise as per new salary scale

Garment workers from Pacific Jeans and Jay Jay Mills Private at the Chattogram Export Processing Zone stopped production and held a street demonstration on Tuesday to demand the minimum monthly salary be increased to 12,500 taka (\$US114) as decreed in the minimum wage agreement between the government and garment factory owners in November.

Workers complained that their wages were increased by only 400 taka, instead of the required 4,000 taka. Workers ended their protest after an hour when factory managers agreed to pay the full 12,500 taka.

On January 4, several hundred workers from the Newtex Group of Industries in Tangail blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway at Gorai to demand a minimum monthly salary increase in accordance with the agreed minimum wage. The protest caused a 15-kilometre line of traffic on both sides of the highway.

Workers from Khan Garments and some other factories joined the

protest. The demonstration ended after factory authorities assured protesters that the salary increase would be paid.

Sri Lankan health sector workers strike for “special” allowance

A new government “special” monthly allowance only granted to hospital general practitioners triggered a national strike by other hospital health workers on Tuesday. The strike was joined by health workers at the Colombo National Hospital, Galle Teaching Hospital in Southern Province and several district hospitals: Gampaha in Western Province, Kurunegala in North-Western Province, Matara in Southern Province, Badulla in Uva Province, and Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital in Central Province.

The Paramedic Practitioners union, Interim Medical Services Integration Front, and Public Health Inspectors, including ten health sector unions, held a 48-hour strike on Wednesday to demand the special allowance.

New South Wales power transmission workers strike for better pay

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from Transgrid walked off the job for an hour on January 5 after 83 percent of union members rejected the electricity transmission management company’s latest pay rise offer. Control room operators implemented an indefinite overtime ban.

The ETU is demanding a pay increase of 17 percent over a three-year enterprise agreement. Transgrid offered 13 percent over three years and increased superannuation contributions. The official annual inflation rate for New South Wales (NSW) is 5.6 percent, meaning that any increase under 16.8 percent over three years is a real pay cut.

Transgrid operates transmission lines, high-voltage underground cables, substations, switching stations and digital infrastructure to transfer electricity to more than three million households and businesses across NSW and the Australian Capital Territory.

Coca-Cola dispensing machine mechanics locked out in regional Queensland

Thirteen members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), who maintain Coca-Cola dispensing machines at fast food outlets in regional Queensland, were locked out of their Coca-Cola depot on Monday after protesting outside Hungry Jack’s restaurants in three regional cities.

In a protected action ballot on December 18 the workers unanimously approved taking strike action for a pay rise in a new enterprise deal. The regional workers want pay parity with their counterparts in southeast Queensland, saying they are paid \$5 an hour or \$200 a week less.

Tram drivers on Queensland’s Gold Coast strike for better pay offer

G:Link tram drivers on Queensland’s Gold Coast have taken five two-hour strikes since December 22 in their dispute with transport operator KDR Gold Coast Trams. The workers are members of the Rail Tram and

Bus Union which is in dispute over the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. While KDR has offered 4 percent annual pay increases, the official inflation rate in Queensland is 5.2 percent.

KDR has refused to meet with a delegation of workers while they are striking. The union has not made public any of its demands.

Industrial action by mental health nurses in Tasmania closed down by industrial court

Nineteen nurses who are members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) at the Hobart Clinic, a mental health hospital, were ordered by the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to stop low-level industrial action. The FWC claimed the action posed a risk to patient safety. The action involved handing out leaflets explaining their dispute and wearing a union badge while on duty.

The nurses are demanding a higher pay rise than the 3.5 percent currently offered. A union spokesperson alleged that nurses at the clinic are paid less and receive fewer entitlements than nurses doing the same work in the public system in other states. Nurses are also demanding double pay for Sunday work.

On December 22, the nurses voted near unanimously to take protected industrial action, which included bans on some administrative work and work stoppages between 15 minutes and four hours. Nurses said they will now consider taking strike action. There are about 50 nurses employed at the clinic, 19 of whom are members of the HACSU.

DP world electricians at Port Brisbane strike for improved pay offer

Fifteen members of the Electrical Trades Union at DP World’s Port Brisbane terminal stopped work on Thursday afternoon and rallied outside the terminal to demand an improved pay offer in the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. Workers unanimously voted in November to take protected industrial action and have been taking action for the past six weeks. DP World offered annual 4 percent pay increases, well below the current consumer price index for Brisbane, which is 5.2 percent.



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