

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: Hospital cleaners protest in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Contract conservancy workers at the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital in Tamil Nadu downed tools and protested low pay and unsafe working conditions on Monday.

Workers said injuries at work are ignored by doctors, like when a co-worker slipped in the hospital and fainted from being forced to use poor quality cleaning materials like acids used to clean toilets. The worker received no medical treatment and was told not to “pretend or act.” Workers want quality cleaning materials and a daily wage of 721 rupees (\$US8.7) fixed by the district collector.

Chandigarh social health workers protest low pay

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers held a sit-down protest outside their hospital in Mohali, Chandigarh, on Monday. The protest spilled onto the road and blocked traffic for over an hour. Workers demanded wages be increased to 21,000 rupees (\$US253), retirement benefits and improved travel allowances.

Assam childcare workers in Chachal demand pay increase

About 3,000 Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers, and mini Anganwadi workers, demonstrated in Chachal on Monday demanding a pay increase. They called for wages to be increased to 12,000 rupees (\$US144) for Anganwadi workers, 10,000 rupees for mini Anganwadi workers and 7,000 rupees for helpers. These are long pending demands. The Assam State Childcare Workers and Auxiliary Organisations trade union coordinated the protest.

The majority of these workers are paid an honorarium of just 6,500 rupees (\$US78) a month and are facing a hostile work environment. Protesters declared they will go on a permanent strike if their demands remain ignored.

Assam ASHA workers demand pay increase and threaten to strike

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Guwahati, Assam, are demanding an increase in their monthly pay. They are currently paid a poverty wage of 3,000 rupees (\$US36) per month and are among the lowest-paid community healthcare workers in the country. The workers threatened that if the health department failed to raise their salaries, they would face non-cooperation during the upcoming pulse polio immunisation drive and the Lok Sabha (parliament) polls.

The pulse polio drive is scheduled to begin on March 3, with a target of immunising approximately 4.5 million children under the age of five.

Maharashtra resident doctors' unions call off strike after four days

Around 8,000 striking Maharashtra resident doctors returned to work on Monday after the government agreed to their demands. Members of the Maharashtra Association of Resident Doctors walked out on February 22 demanding unpaid stipends, a 10,000-rupee pay increase and improved hostel facilities.

Assam tea estate workers in Baksa protest

Tea estate workers in Baksa protested on Monday over long overdue wages held by the estate owner Rajesh Jhalan. Workers demonstrated on the road and outside the police station. Workers accused the state authorities of ignoring their plight.

Haryana municipal sanitation workers protest for permanent jobs

Sanitation workers demonstrated in Bhiwani, Haryana state, on February 22, with several demands. They assembled at the Mini-Secretariat and submitted a memorandum of demands to the deputy commissioner. The protest was organised by Nagar Palika Karamchari Sangh.

Their most pressing demands included permanent jobs for temporary and contractual workers, equal pay for equal work and proper cleaning equipment. They threatened to escalate their protests if their demands are not quickly granted.

Puducherry government workers demand return of the old pension scheme

Confederation of Puducherry Government Employees' Association members demonstrated at the Swadeshi Cotton Mill complex in Puducherry on Wednesday. They called on the Puducherry government to end implementation of the new pension scheme and reinstate the old scheme. Pensions paid under the new scheme are a lot lower and contributions are higher.

Pakistan: Water utility workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa strike over unpaid wages

Water and Sanitation Services Company (WSSC) workers in the capital of Kohat District in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, walked off the job on Tuesday suspending water supply from all tube-wells to protest the nonpayment of their three-month salaries. Workers said that they had immense regard for the people and their problems, but they had no other option other than to halt the water supply to force authorities to pay them the outstanding salary.

A spokesman from the WSSC employees' union said WSSC had earlier agreed to pay two months of overdue salaries to all 540 employees by Monday, but to no avail, hence forcing the workers to suspend water supply.

Bangladeshi transport workers in Sylhet strike over gas shortage

Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation members began an indefinite strike in Sylhet district on Wednesday morning to demand an end to the gas shortages. The action affected delivery and passenger transport. The vehicles on the strike included CNG-run vehicles as well as CNG-run Auto-Rickshaws.

The federation said there is a severe gas crisis in Sylhet. Transport workers are facing hardships as they are unable to get gas even after waiting for hours at various CNG pumps.

Strikers also called for an end to harassment of workers through "false cases" by some administrative officials. Workers complained that authorities were ignoring their complaint that approved load (quantity) at CNG pumps runs out after 18 to 20 days each month.

The federation called off the strike in the afternoon when they met with the government, without giving any details.

Thousands of Sri Lankan non-academic university workers strike for higher allowance

Non-academic workers from all seventeen public sector universities in Sri Lanka walked out on a two-day strike on Wednesday to demand an immediate increase in allowances, which have been pending for eight years.

Hundreds of Peradeniya university workers marched to the Peradeniya junction in central province chanting slogans like "Lower the cost of living", "Solve the problems of university non-academic staff immediately."

Striking workers from universities in Horana in Western Province, Trincomalee in Eastern Province, Jaffna in Northern Province, Badulla in Uva Province, Balangoda in Sabaragamuwa Province and Matara in

Southern Province protested outside their respective universities.

Workers threatened to hold an indefinite strike if the government failed to solve their issues within a week.

New South Wales public hospital workers protest end of free parking

Over 1,000 Health Services Union (HSU) members at 16 New South Wales public hospitals walked off the job for two hours on Thursday to protest the reintroduction of hospital parking fees for health workers. Strikers included psychologists, scientists, theatre technicians, kitchen staff, cleaners, and security guards among others. In the greater-Sydney area, workers protested outside the Westmead, Westmead Children's, Concord, Liverpool and Campbelltown hospitals.

The fees were reintroduced by the state Labor government on February 1 after being held in abeyance during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the HSU, hospital workers employed full time and holding parking permits are now to be charged up to \$27.20 a week or \$1,300 a year, while others are to be charged \$11 a day, or about \$2,600 extra a year.

The ability to drive to work is essential for many health workers, especially shift workers who need to commute late at night or in the early hours of the morning, when public transport is infrequent or completely unavailable. The HSU is not calling for free hospital parking for health workers and instead has limited its demand for the state Labor government to return to its pre-pandemic parking fee scale.

Parliament House tradesmen in Canberra hold second strike over low wages

Public service tradesmen from the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) in Canberra held their second 24-hour strike in less than a week on Monday during negotiations for a pay increase and improved classifications in a new enterprise agreement. Workers held a protest rally on the front lawn outside parliament.

The workers are represented by three unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Construction, Forestry and Maritime Union and the Electrical Trades Union, which claim that some fulltime tradesmen are paid about \$30,000 a year below the industry average.

The unions say wages are so low, positions are left vacant, yet the department is willing to outsource the roles at a much higher rate of pay. They claimed that contracted apprentices are paid higher than some permanent tradesman.

DPS has refused to increase its pay rise offer above 11.2 percent over three years, or 3.7 percent annual increases. This would maintain wages at a rate below industry standard.

Transdev bus drivers in southeast Queensland strike for better pay

Bus drivers from the Transdev depots in Redlands and Capalaba, southeast Queensland, walked out for 24 hours on Monday in opposition to Transdev's proposed enterprise agreement. The strike affected services between Redland and Brisbane.

The Transport Workers Union has been trying to negotiate a deal with

the company for over seven months. The union claimed that Transdev have agreed to only two items from the workers' claims and is refusing to return to the negotiating table. Workers want improved conditions, particularly around safety, and a wage rise to keep up with the cost of living. The drivers are demanding \$35 an hour.

Qantas pilots in Western Australia resume strike action

About 200 pilots from the fully owned Qantas subsidiaries Network Aviation and QantasLink, in Western Australia, went on strike for three days on Wednesday in an attempt to get Qantas back to the negotiating table in their 18-month dispute over the airline's proposed enterprise agreement.

This was the third strike in three weeks by the Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP) and followed the suspension of a four-day strike a week earlier due to a cyclone warning that could have required evacuation of remote communities by air.

Qantas walked away from any further negotiations after pilots voted down its proposed agreement three times. Qantas' last pay offer was for a 25 percent pay increase, as well as yearly three percent increases in a three-year agreement. AFAP claimed that the 25 percent offer only applied to a handful of pilots who are currently paid below the minimum award rate and that Qantas had taken previously agreed terms off the bargaining table.

The AFAP says its members are the lowest paid in the Qantas Group even though they fly the same aircraft on similar routes. Pilots want salaries and conditions improved to match those of other Qantas pilots and in line with the Air Pilots Award. The Qantas subsidiaries cover multiple routes across regional Western Australia, including fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) flights to multiple mines.

Sydney fire fighters protest delay in negotiations for new work agreement

Fire fighters from four fire stations in Sydney's metropolitan area stopped work on Monday and rallied at the front of the New South Wales parliament, condemning the state Labor government's failure to begin negotiations on a new work agreement. Members of the Fire Brigades Employees Union (FBEU) complained that their award expired on Monday but the government had failed to provide Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) with bargaining parameters, leaving negotiations at a standstill.

FBEU have imposed low-level work bans including not wearing regulation T-shirts and for supervisors to not take action against members who participate in industrial action. The union threatened that more action is planned if the government fails to act.

Victoria's mobile-speed camera workers extend strike to include more depots

Following a series of strikes by 200 roadside mobile-speed camera workers employed by Serco in Tullamarine, Melbourne, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has extended strike action to include Serco camera operators in Melbourne's southeast, where they struck for

48 hours on February 24.

The CPSU and Australian Services Union began negotiations for a new enterprise agreement in October but are now deadlocked on wages and safety. The workers have not had a pay increase since November 2022. The CPSU says some of its members are paid as little as \$26 an hour.

Safety is a major concern for these workers. According to the CPSU, roadside mobile camera operators have been attacked 351 times in the last 13 months, prompting Serco to direct workers to report incidents only when thrown objects hit their cars. Operators daily report incidents involving violence, verbal abuse, threats, projectiles, smashed windows and slashed car tires.

CPSU claimed that Serco's latest offer does not include weekend penalties and just shifts money forward from the total amount already offered in years two and three which was previously rejected overwhelmingly by members. According to the union, Serco said they were offering no concessions to any of the unions' claims for improving safety.



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