

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 March 2024

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

India: Maharashtra power utility workers strike for pay increase

Over 20,000 contract workers from the Mahagenco, Mahatransco and MSEDCL power utilities went on strike this week to demand a wage rise and job security. Members of the Maharashtra State Power Contract Workers Joint Action Committee want a 30 percent pay rise backdated to April 1, 2023, job assurance until the age of 60 and annual health insurance for workers and their families of 1.5 million rupees.

Almond factory processing workers in Delhi strike for legitimate rights

Almond processing workers from factories at Karawal Nagar in northern Delhi have been on strike since March 1 over low wages and poor conditions. The strike was called by the Karawal Nagar Labour Union, which represents 500 workers, mostly females and family members, at 60 almond factories.

The women met and drew up a list of demands that included sorting rates and other issues. A worker told the media that “in the narrow and dark streets of Karawal Nagar neither minimum wages nor the laws concerning working hours are enforced.”

Uttarakhand anganwadi workers protest in Delhi for higher wages and pensions

As part of ongoing nation-wide protests, over 100 anganwadi (childcare) workers from Uttarakhand state protested in Delhi on March 4 alongside anganwadi workers from various states demanding higher wages and retirement benefits. The protest was organised by the Uttarakhand Rajya Anganwadi Karmachari Sangh.

Police prevented workers from marching to the Jantar Mantar, a common protest site in Delhi. They were halted near the Palika bus stand, where they held their demonstration. Police intervened and detained local women workers from Delhi and forced an end to the protest.

On February 19, over 35,000 anganwadi workers and helpers across

Uttarakhand stopped work to demand permanent jobs and a pay increase. The majority of anganwadi workers are paid an honorarium of just 6,500 rupees (\$US78) a month and face a hostile work environment.

Punjab teachers and health workers demand permanent jobs

Teachers and workers from several unions attempted to meet with the state’s chief minister at Jalandhar to demand permanent jobs on Monday. The meeting was delayed and twelve union representatives were forced to remain in the Jalandhar Sports College for close to five hours waiting to see the minister.

Unions involved were the Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and Mid-day Meal Office Employees’ Union, the Aam Aadmi Clinic Staff, Contractual Multipurpose Health Workers’ Union, Vishesh Adhyapak Union, and the Pharmacy Union.

The Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan and Midday Meal Office Employees’ Union had been protesting and holding meetings for several days seeking permanent jobs based on a promise from the minister which he failed to implement.

Andhra Pradesh bank workers demand an end to job outsourcing

Bank Employees of India (BEFI) members demonstrated at Dharna Chowk in Vijayawada on March 2 to demand a recruitment campaign and an end to the outsourcing of jobs. Protesters shouted slogans against privatisation. Other demands were for improved customer service, revival of the old pension scheme and the absorption of temporary and casual employees.

Haryana ASHA workers demand increase in pay and retirement benefits

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers protested at the Haryana chief minister’s office on March 1 over several demands. Police intervened and prevented protesters surrounding the office.

The ASHA workers want a 26,000-rupee (\$US314) monthly wage, Employment State Insurance (ESI), and retirement benefits on par with other government workers. They are also demanding strike pay of 4,000 rupees and said they would hold another protest if demands were not met.

Mumbai municipal sanitation workers protest mass job losses

Sanitation workers from the Grand Mumbai Municipal Corporation employed under the Swacch Mumbai Prabodhan Abhiyan (slum waste management program) demonstrated outside the corporation building on Wednesday in opposition to the contracting of work to a private company. Protesters said close to 3,000 workers will be thrown out of work.

Impoverished Punjab farm workers demand government assistance

Impoverished farm workers from 13 districts in Punjab protested outside the offices and residences of Aam Admi party ministers and parliamentarians in Bathinda on March 3 to demand social and economic assistance. They want the waiver of loans for farm labourers and poor farmers, assistance with education and health benefits and permanent government jobs.

The protest was coordinated by the Sanjha Mazdoor Morcha and Keth Mazdoor unions.

Tamil Nadu power loom workers on strike in Sankarankoil

Power loom workers in Sankarankoil have been on strike since February 26 for a pay increase. There are 18,000 power loom workers employed directly and indirectly on 6,000 power looms in Sankarankoil. Workers were given a contract with a 10 percent increase in wages in 2021, but employers failed to honour that contract.

Bangladeshi garment workers in Gazipur strike for pay increase

Garment workers from the Zamzam Spinning Mills in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for two hours on Tuesday demanding a salary increase as decreed in a November agreement between the government and garment factory owners.

The protest, which created a long traffic jam, ended after a discussion with factory authorities. While factory owners have been approached several times about the new pay structure there has been no response.

Bangladeshi water transport workers' union calls off planned strike

The Bangladesh Shipping Workers Federation called off their planned indefinite strike 24 hours before it was due to commence on Tuesday. Union leaders suspended the strike after a closed door meeting with the state minister for labour, the Employment Shipping Owners' Association and senior officials from several government departments. They have not revealed to the media whether any deal was negotiated.

Workers want establishment of a contributory provident fund through the Directorate of Seamen and Emigration Welfare and Trustee Board, implementation of the decision to provide appointment letters, identity cards and service books, and one million taka (\$US9,130) compensation

in case of a worker's death or accident at the workplace.

Sri Lankan public sector workers demand pay rise

Hundreds of state administrative services workers protested outside the ministry of public administration on Wednesday to demand a pay increase. Workers want public service wages based on a national policy, elimination of pay disparities, promotions for doing administrative service in approved special works and open examinations for promotions.

Council workers at Fraser Coast, Queensland protest for pay increase and job security

Over 100 workers from the Fraser Coast Regional Council, 250km north of Brisbane, demonstrated on March 2 at Harvey Bay Seafront Oval to demand a "fair" pay offer and job security in the council's proposed enterprise agreement. The workers are represented by the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union and the Australian Workers Union.

The unions and council management began negotiations for a new agreement in November. Workers rejected a management pay rise offer of 14 percent over the life of the agreement. They want an increase that compensates for inflation, improved conditions, no outsourcing of jobs, an increase in the workforce and adequate equipment.

Coca-Cola dispensing machine mechanics in regional Queensland strike for pay increase

About a dozen members of the Electrical Trades Union, who maintain Coca-Cola dispensing machines at fast food outlets in regional Queensland, struck on Monday to demand pay parity with their metropolitan counterparts in southeast Queensland. They said they are paid \$5 an hour or \$200 a week less than workers in Brisbane.

Workers travelled from Toowoomba, Sunshine Coast and Townsville to protest outside Hungry Jack's locations in Brisbane, Rockhampton and Cairns. They held placards saying, "Same job, same pay" and "15 percent less pay for regional workers." The workers were temporarily locked out in January when they took similar action.

New South Wales Ambulance emergency call centre workers impose bans

NSW Ambulance Emergency Medical (000) call takers implemented work bans at all NSW Ambulance control rooms from Monday. United Services Union (USU) members voted to take industrial action following the state Labor government's failure to deliver on a promise on reclassification and allowances supposedly meant to compensate them for the highly skilled, technical and clinical functions of their role.

The call takers are classified and remunerated as clerical and administrative assistants, earning less than their counterparts in other

states in similar roles. The union claimed that team leaders who can be responsible for the support and supervision for up to 20-plus call takers at any one time are only paid between \$0.50 and \$2 per hour more than those they are supervising and \$13 less than other uniformed staff working in the same room with a similar function.

USU members have placed bans on reskilling or upskilling, including training on data recording upgrades and training contained in shift and operational alerts. Bans have also been placed on the wearing of uniforms. Team leaders have banned the ordering of uniforms, managing sick leave and other administrative duties until they are properly classified in the award.

Otis and KONE elevator electricians in Tasmania strike for pay parity

Electrical Trades Union members who install and maintain lifts and elevators for Otis and KONE in Tasmania walked off the job for half a day on March 1. They have imposed a ban on attending after-hours calls. The electricians are fighting for pay parity with workers doing the same job in the mainland states.

The ETU claimed the Tasmanian technicians are paid 20 percent less than workers interstate. It alleged that a third multinational company recently entered the industry in Tasmania and is paying its workers interstate wages.

Industrial action by DP World electricians at Port Brisbane enters fourth month

Fifteen Electrical Trades Union members at DP World's Port Brisbane terminal are maintaining ongoing ad hoc strikes and work bans begun in December in their dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. DP World is refusing to resume negotiations until the workers end industrial action.

The highly skilled workers maintain and repair the terminal's container handling equipment, including the automatic stacking cranes. The dispute is disrupting Queensland's logistics chain, lengthening turnaround time for trucks picking up and dropping off containers.

Workers rejected the company's last agreement offer, which included pay increases of 6, 4, 4 and 4.5 percent, and removal of existing conditions like closed port days and public holiday payments. Workers want a pay rise on par with the deal done with Maritime Union of Australia members, which included an 8 percent increase in the first year, followed by 7, 4 and 4.5 percent in subsequent years.

Victoria's regional rail workers hold eighth strike in long-running pay dispute

Over 1,000 V/Line operations staff, including conductors, train controllers, station and customer service staff and authorised officers, stopped work for 13 hours between 3 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Friday in their dispute with the Victorian government for a new work agreement. The strike is an escalation from their previous seven three-hour strikes since November.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) has been attempting to do a deal with the government owned V/Line for a new agreement since June. Workers rejected V/Line's wage rise offer of 4 percent per annum, that included bonuses and allowances. The offer was in keeping with the state Labor government's wage increase cap for government sector workers of 3.5 percent without additional payments.

The RTBU's wage rise demand is the same as the one it negotiated with Melbourne's Metro rail operator. That was just 17 percent, spread over four years, or 4.25 percent per annum. Workers are demanding increased staffing levels to meet staff shortfalls and higher consumer demands, improved job security as new technologies are introduced, and higher wages to meet cost-of-living pressures.

New Zealand science staff protest grievances at national research institute

Staff at New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) are protesting a gender pay gap and what they say is the unfair treatment of union members.

The Public Service Association (PSA), which has been bargaining since August last year, has organised two stoppages in the past fortnight, the latest on March 6. In Wellington, the hour-long strikes saw around 50 people protesting outside NIWA's main office.

The strikes began days after 180 PSA members lodged personal grievance claims against NIWA, saying they are being discriminated against because they are union members. Their main grievance is a significant gender pay gap, which PSA assistant secretary Fleur Fitzsimons said was 13 percent. "No pay gap is acceptable in 2024," Fitzsimons said.

Unionised scientists, technicians and support staff have also been denied access to health insurance that NIWA had given its non-union staff as a "wellbeing initiative." PSA members won't be offered it until the collective agreement is settled. A picketer told Radio NZ that workers are "currently delaying their surgeries [or] paying out of pocket and we think that's unfair."

PSA national secretary Duane Leo said NIWA had refused to give access to insurance, as a bargaining chip. She appealed to NIWA to return to the bargaining table with "a fair offer so we can resolve this dispute" and get back to work.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact