

# 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: Oil refinery workers in Assam protest two-tier wage system

About 200 contract workers and drivers at the Numaligarh oil refinery in Assam stopped work on Monday and demonstrated inside the plant in opposition to the current two-tier wage system. A contract worker working a 12-hour day is paid only 400 rupees (\$US4.58) compared to permanent workers who get 775 rupees for 8 hours. Their union said that they would begin an indefinite strike on February 19 if its demands were not granted.

## Kerala State Road Transport Corporation workers strike for outstanding wages and allowance cuts

Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers stopped work for 24 hours from midnight on Monday to demand on-time wage payments and to protest a 31 percent cut in Dearness Allowance payments. They also want an end to the privatisation of national routes and for the provision of new buses. Management employed temporary workers as scabs during the strike.

The Transport Democratic Front, affiliated with the Congress Party in Kerala, called the strike.

## Anganwadi workers in Karnataka on state-wide strike

Thousands of Karnataka Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers began an indefinite state-wide strike on Monday and protested at Freedom Park in Bangalore to demand higher pay.

The strike followed a protest by thousands of Anganwadi workers at Freedom Park on January 28. They want permanent jobs in the state public service for both workers and helpers and the monthly wage for Anganwadi workers increased to 25,000 rupees (\$US288) and 12,000 rupees for helpers.

The strike, which was coordinated by the All-India Trade Union Congress, affiliated to Communist Party of India, won support from the Accredited Social Health Activists and the Karnataka Trade Union.

## Swiggy and Zomato delivery workers strike for higher wages in Mangalore

Swiggy and Zomato delivery workers in Mangalore walked out for three days this week, starting Tuesday. They were demanding higher wages, fair treatment and better working conditions. They protested out the Swiggy office at Kuntikan pointing out that they needed increased pay to compensate for higher operating costs.

The delivery workers want their current per-kilometre delivery rate raised from 4-6 rupees to at least 10 rupees (\$US0.11) to cover the increased cost of fuel. Similar protests were recently held in Mumbai where Swiggy workers protested against changes to rate cards and for an increase in delivery radius.

## Festival rowboat workers in Uttarkhand protest police fines

Boat workers at Varanasi in Uttarkhand stopped work on Monday to protest police fines imposed on co-workers. The workers row boats on the Ganges River for devotees during the religious Maha Kumbh Mela pilgrimage.

An accident involving two boats resulted in passengers falling into the river. While no one died during the incident the police scapegoated some of the boat workers, alleging they overloaded the boat, and fined them. Angered by the provocative police action, the rowboat workers decided to strike.

## Pakistan: Educators demonstrate over tax rebates

Thousands of teaching and non-teaching staff from over 422 schools and colleges run by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) demonstrated in Islamabad on Tuesday. The protesters were against the government's abolition of a 25 percent tax rebate and called for an education allowance for all employees working in Islamabad's FDE-run institutions.

The protest was called by the Joint Action Committee headed by the president of the Schools Heads Association. Teachers from various universities, including QAU, IIUI and Arid Agriculture University, participated in the action. Protesters demanded the government resolve their issues within a week or they would boycott classes.

## More protests by Bangladeshi garment workers over outstanding pay

Over 1,000 garment workers from the Anwara Dress Makers and Frank Apparels plants in Chattogram held an all-day protest on Monday from morning to evening. They suspended the action after being told by factory authorities that wages would be paid. Protesters blocked the Bayazid Bostami Polytechnic crossing, causing traffic congestion, in defiance of an intervention by the army and police.

Anwara Dress Makers workers held protests in December over the same issues, alleging that the factory authorities had been delaying wage payments for a year.

An operator at Anwara Dress Makers said they had not received their wages or overtime payments for the past two months, adding, "We held a meeting with the company owners, and they assured us that the dues would be paid by January 29. But we still haven't received our salaries, and we don't even know why."

### **Canberra Airport security workers protest cuts in wages and conditions**

Over 50 Canberra Airport security workers demonstrated outside the facility on Monday protesting proposed cuts to wages and conditions by MSS Security, the new contracting company.

MSS will take over security operations from existing contractor Certis on March 1. MSS is refusing to transfer workers from Certis under existing wages and conditions. The United Workers Union (UWU), which covers the security guards, said workers were told that they would have to reapply for their current jobs and, if successful, undergo a probation period.

MSS has refused to give a guarantee that all Certis workers will be offered a job and advised that it will not be employing any visa holders.

The UWU alleged that MSS Security, an international conglomerate, is notorious for its exploitative practices, use of dodgy sub-contractors, high turnover of HR personnel, aggressive approach to industrial relations, and its general anti-union attitudes. The union has not initiated any campaign of industrial action but is appealing to the Canberra Airport Group, who awarded the new contract to MSS.

### **Launceston General Hospital nurses and support staff demand air conditioning**

Nurses and health support staff, covered by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), rallied outside the Launceston General Hospital (LGH) on Monday to protest the lack of air conditioning in the hospital. Workers complained that some wards were experiencing temperatures as high as 30 degrees Celsius.

Tasmania is in the middle of a heat wave with Launceston, the state's second largest city, experiencing a string of days above 30 degrees Celsius. The hospital is relying on portable air conditioning units to provide some relief.

According to the ANMF Facebook page, LGH administration claims that permanently fixing air-conditioning woes is a long-term strategy that would require beds to close and patients to be moved to other wards.

The government has released a master plan for a major redevelopment of LGH, but most of the work will not be completed until 2034. The ANMF and HACSU have not indicated if a campaign of industrial action is planned to force the state Liberal government to resolve the issue.

### **Glenelg Shire Council workers impose bans in pay dispute**

Over 80 Australian Services Union (ASU) members at Glenelg Shire Council (GSC) in Victoria have begun protected industrial action to secure a pay rise in a new enterprise agreement. On Tuesday they imposed a wide range of work bans including on telephone communications, the use of council vehicles, street sweeping, gardening, mowing and rubbish collection.

On Wednesday, ASU members stopped work for an hour at three council depots and placed additional bans. Over 95 percent of ASU members voted in December to take industrial action after rejecting GSC's proposed enterprise agreement.

The council's offer included a 3 percent pay rise or \$50 per week in year one, 3 percent or \$45 per week in year two and 3 percent or \$45 in year three, modest improved allowances, redundancy payments, trade leave and other allowances. Workers want a higher pay offer to keep pace with the increasing cost of living.

### **Vocational teachers at Victoria University demand pay rise**

About 130 vocational education teachers at the Victoria University (VU) in Melbourne have started industrial action for a decent pay increase. Australian Education Union (AEU) members voted in November to take action that could include work stoppages of up to 24 hours, and bans on overtime, teaching more than 21 hours a week, audit processes and other administrative tasks.

Teachers want reduced workloads and wage parity with other dual-sector universities in Victoria, such as RMIT and Swinburne. These universities currently offer comparatively better pay and conditions to vocational educators and managers, leading to low recruitment and increased resignations at VU, causing excessive workload.

### **New Zealand medical laboratory workers strike**

Major surgical cases have been delayed at many New Zealand medical centres because of a strike by medical laboratory workers at public hospitals in Wellington, Palmerston North, Tauranga, Rotorua, Whakatane, Nelson and Dunedin. Hundreds of workers walked off the job for 24 hours on February 5 and 7.

Pickets were established at Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Whakatane by Apex union members who are demanding parity with public sector lab workers, who are paid between 28 and 32 percent more. The strike follows repeated walkouts to protest pay and conditions by private sector lab workers in the last two years.

Apex advocate Sammy Heimsath said there had been no change in the bargaining positions of the three employers, Pathlab, Awanui Labs and Medlab Central. 'We have already seen a significant reduction in hospital laboratory services in many regions, and in the case of some community collection centres, we have seen a halting of services all together,' he said.

The three private labs are largely funded by Health NZ to provide vital hospital and community services to the country's public health system. The labs provide a third of hospital pathology services. Meanwhile, an

unresolved pay dispute with the country's 30,000 nurses, which saw a series of nationwide strikes before Christmas, continues.

### **Fiji union calls off planned hospitals strike**

A strike at Fiji's Lautoka and Ba hospitals was cancelled last week after a deal between the Construction Energy and Timber Workers Union of Fiji (CETWUF) and Aspen Medical was reached on Tuesday

Some 200 CETWUF members employed at the two hospitals had voted to go on strike on February 6. The workers, including cleaners, ward assistants, grounds staff, laundry hands, kitchen hands and laboratory staff, were seeking improvements in salary, wages and working conditions.

The parties had been in negotiations at the Fiji Mediation Centre for two days. An agreement has been reached where Aspen has agreed to 13 issues on the union's Log of Claims. Six other items remain in dispute.

CETWUF national secretary John Paul said further mediations will be held in Suva within the next two weeks to settle the outstanding claims, "and we hope for the dispute to be resolved soon." Paul further expressed the union's appreciation for "the intervention of the Arbitration Court and the Fiji Mediation Centre in attempting to avert the strike in the best interest of everyone."

The union claimed the previous Fiji government gave Aspen Medical a 23-year contract to upgrade Lautoka and Ba Hospitals under a Public Private Partnership arrangement, but nothing has happened.



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