

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: Samsung whitegoods factory workers in Tamil Nadu strike over sackings

Around 500 workers at Samsung India's Tamil Nadu household-appliance manufacturing plant are maintaining a sit-in strike begun on February 5 against the suspension of three union officials for their newly formed Samsung India Workers Union (SIWU). A union spokesperson said the strike would continue while the workers remained suspended.

There are 1,800 workers at the plant. Management told the media that contract workers were maintaining production.

Even though formal registration of the SIWU was done by the Labour Ministry, the workers had been asked to join the management-formed worker committee. Interest free loans of 300,000 rupees (\$US3,455) had been offered to workers as a bribe if they joined the company's committee. Workers accused management of attempting to destroy the workers' unity and their newly formed SIWU.

Tamil Nadu unemployed graduate teachers demand jobs

A group of unemployed graduate teachers who had cleared the Tamil Nadu Teacher Eligibility Test (TNTET) protested in Salem on February 7 demanding to be placed in existing vacant posts. Some teachers said they had completed extra degrees hoping to secure a post.

On February 4, a group of TNTET qualified teachers protested at the District Collectors office in Tiruchi with the same demands. Protesters said the Teachers Recruitment Board had released the provisional selection list, and they were selected for the posts of Graduate Teachers and Block Resource Teacher Educators seven months ago but they have not been given postings.

A protester said most of the candidates who have qualified are over 45 years of age. "Our livelihood has been affected because of lack of income as we had resigned our jobs to prepare for the test," the protester said.

Chikkanna Arts College lecturers in Tamil Nadu on strike

Guest lecturers at the state-run Chikkanna Arts College in Tirupur are on strike, forcing the college to close since February 5. The lecturers are

demanding permanent jobs and better wages on par with permanent lecturers, and equal opportunity and proper teaching aids.

Dehradun city sanitation workers continue strikes over non-payment of wages

Sanitation workers from the Dehradun Municipal Corporation, Uttarakhand state, held another strike on February 8 over the non-payment of wages. The workers, including drivers and helpers, said they had not been paid for three months and five months' pending wages were outstanding to managers and supervisors.

Garbage was piling up in the streets, adding to heaps of garbage that still had not been cleared following a series of strikes that commenced on January 30 over the issue.

Contract workers at Mumbai civic body demand equal pay for equal work

Around 8,000 contract workers from the Navi Mumbai (New Mumbai) Municipal Corporation struck work on February 10 demanding equal pay for equal work. The workers are employed in vital services such as sanitation, water supply and healthcare.

These workers have been protesting wage disparities for several months, with some participating in a relay hunger strike outside the municipal headquarters since December. The corporation said it had approached the Maharashtra government regarding wage parity, but no additional funds were to be allocated for this purpose.

The Samaj Samata Kamgar Sangh union called off the strike "temporarily" after 12 hours, claiming the municipal commissioner had given assurances. Workers vowed to resume the strike if their demand was not soon met.

Bangladesh: Protesting candidate teachers in Dhaka assaulted by police

A protest in Dhaka by about 150 candidate teachers was brutally attacked by police using batons, water cannon and sound grenades on Monday. Nearly 30 protesters were arrested. They were later released to their families after signing bonds promising not to block roads again.

Despite police intervention, the candidates for assistant teachers in

government primary schools continued their sit-down-protests in front of the National Museum in Shahbagh, Dhaka on Wednesday. They were opposing the cancellation of their appointments.

Protesters said the recruitment process was conducted in three phases, with the first two phases completed and appointments made. However, no decision has been taken regarding the third phase. A total of 6,531 candidates were included in the final merit list but have yet to receive their appointments. “We urge the authorities to resolve this issue immediately,” they said in a statement.

Bangladeshi garment workers in Gazipur demand unpaid wages

Hundreds of garment factory workers from Self Innovation Fashion staged a protest by blocking a section of the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Gazipur on Sunday night to demand payment of two months’ unpaid salaries. Traffic congestion occurred on both sides of the highway. Workers decided to take action because their repeated demands have been ignored by factory authorities.

Opal paper mill lockdown in Victoria continues

Over 300 production workers at the Opal Australian Paper mill in Maryvale, Victoria have been locked out since January 16 in a dispute over the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. The lockdown was management’s response to rolling strike action by seven Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) members. More than 100 contractors remain stood down due to the lockdown.

Opal workers and supporters have been holding daily protests outside the plant. On February 6, 150 mill workers travelled to Melbourne and protested outside the company’s head office at Richmond where union officials condemned the company and the “harshness” of the lockdown but made no call for industrial action by other CFMEU members.

Opal is a subsidiary of the Nippon Paper Group, one of the world’s largest paper manufacturers, with annual revenue of more than \$10 billion. All production at the Maryvale mill has ceased but Opal is using warehoused stock to maintain customer demand.

Opal’s proposed enterprise agreement contained annual 3 percent pay increases with sweeping cuts to working conditions. These include a move to increase ordinary weekly hours from 35 to 38 in order to avoid paying double-time overtime rates. According to the CFMEU, Opal employees now work an average of 37.1 hours a week, so this change would mean a substantial hit to workers’ take-home pay. The union claimed wages would be slashed by 10 percent.

The CFMEU has called for annual pay increases of 5 percent in the first year, 4.5 percent in the second and 4 percent in the third. According to a locked-out worker, the union told them negotiations with Opal have intensified over the last week with substantial agreement on peripheral matters like car leasing, but a deadlock over wages and rostering remains.

St Vincent’s Private hospital nurses in Victoria resume industrial action

Over 600 Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)

members at four St Vincent’s Private hospitals in Melbourne have resumed full industrial action after a partial two-week pause to allow negotiations to continue for a new enterprise agreement. ANMF members on February 7 rejected St Vincent’s revised proposed agreement and said they will resume full industrial action on February 18, which includes the closure of one in three beds, rolling stoppages and theatre closures on top of ongoing work bans put in place on November 18.

ANMF is demanding wage and working conditions on par with those now being paid to Victoria’s public sector nurses. Nurses want St Vincent’s to end its chronic short staffing and exploitative working conditions. According to the ANMF the hospital has the worst staffing levels and highest casual employment rates in Victoria’s hospitals.

St Vincent’s revised pay rise offer was 11.5 percent over two years, which ANMF claimed brought St Vincent’s nurses and midwives on par with public sector nurses. However, ANMF said the offer fails to address workloads, staffing concerns and safe patient care issues that underlie the hospitals inability to retain and recruit enough nurses and midwives. Nurses and midwives also want a simple proactive rather than reactive staffing mechanism to provide workload relief in response to short staffing across a wide range of areas, particularly for night duty.

Disability support workers in South Australia begin industrial action for a living wage

More than 1,100 disability support workers from South Australia’s Department of Human Services (DHS) began low-level industrial action on February 8 and held protests in various locations throughout the state. They are fighting for a “living wage.” Action includes chalking signage on DHS vehicles saying, “Safe Support Services NOW,” as well as bans across 240 houses targeted at management, with workers restricting administrative tasks and limiting communications during unpaid time.

According to the United Workers Union (UWU), DHS is claiming from the federal government’s National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) the maximum federal award wage of \$34.46 an hour but are paying workers only \$30.49 an hour. UWU claimed DHS has trouble attracting staff due to low pay, leading to DHS relying on agency workers to meet minimum staffing levels.

The union is appealing to the state Labor government to direct DHS to pass on the full NDIS wage allocation to workers.

Brisbane City Council bus drivers apply work bans for pay rise

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) bus drivers at Brisbane City Council (BCC) are maintaining work bans begun on January 30. Bans include working to rule and not wearing the BCC uniform. Workers are concerned about the long delay in reaching a pay deal in a new work agreement. Their current agreement expired on October 7, 2024. It has been over a year since their last pay increase.

Wilpinjong mine workers in New South Wales escalate industrial action in pay dispute

About 250 Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members at Peabody’s

Wilpinjong mine in New South Wales' western coalfields have escalated current industrial action to include a week of full shift stoppages from Tuesday in response to Peabody's refusal to make an improved pay offer. Workers put in place work bans on September 24 after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement deadlocked. Ongoing action includes bans on overtime, training and performing higher duties.

The MEU claims that Peabody is refusing to compromise on any of the workers' key demands. These are for an improvement to the base wage rate to bring them in line with other mines in the area, long-service leave, parental leave and laundry services so they are not forced to wash their two supplied uniforms between every shift change.

Australian Clinical Laboratories workers in Victoria vote on taking industrial action

Health Workers Union (HWU) members in Victoria are voting to take Protected Industrial Action under Australia's Fair Work Act. The ballot was delayed after the employer, Australian Clinical Laboratories (ACL), disputed wording in the ballot application at the Fair Work Commission.

The HWU is advising its pathology collectors, specimen reception workers, clerical staff, and courier members to approve industrial action and not accept ACL's Enterprise Agreement proposal. ACL's initial offer included provocative wage "increases" of just 0.24 percent or 7 cents an hour, an amount that when compared to current cost of living constitutes a major wage cut.

The previous agreement negotiated by the HWU with ACL expired last June and ACL workers last had a pay rise was in April 2023. That EA's last wage increase was just 2.24 percent, an amount that was also well below the then cost of living. The current ACL offer will put its workers pay rates just 1 to 1.5 percent above the Award rate.

The union says its negotiations with ACL started before the previous agreement ended, went on for 13 months but are now deadlocked. ACL is refusing to advance on its wage rise offer, pay full back pay, improve roster and leave allowance, end its anti-worker termination policy or improve safety.

ACL has claimed it cannot offer a fair wage and has threatened closure of some services and job losses. The HWU asserts ACL made almost \$500 million in pre-tax profits during the period of the last agreement and gave its CEO a \$2 million bonus last year.



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