

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.

South Korea: Industrial Bank of Korea workers to strike over pay cap

The union representing workers from South Korea's state-run Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) announced on January 4 that it will hold a general strike at the end of January. In a ballot, 91 percent of union members approved taking strike action in their campaign for improvements to the "total personnel cost system."

On December 29, workers rallied outside IBK's headquarters in Seoul protesting unpaid wages and the wage limits of the total payroll system. The union says overtime pay and performance bonuses are not paid under the total personnel cost system.

The total personnel cost system allows public institutions to confine wages and allowances to the annual cap on total personnel costs set by the government. The union claimed that about 10 million won (\$US6,902) in overtime pay per employee is outstanding. It is also demanding payment of special performance bonuses for excess performance. The union has not announced a date for the strike.

India: Tamil Nadu Anganwadi workers arrested for protesting low pay

More than 4,000 Tamil Nadu Anganwadi (childcare) workers and assistants protested on January 6 in five districts—Tiruchi, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Ariyalur and Madurai—with several demands. Protesters were arrested by police in Tiruchirappalli city when they held a road blockade.

Demands were for 9,000 rupees (\$US100) as a family pension, disbursement of one million rupees as gratuity for anganwadi workers at the time of their retirement and half a million rupees gratuity for assistants and filling of vacant posts. The protest was called by the Tamil Nadu Anganwadi Workers and Assistants Association, affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Tamil Nadu school nutritious meal workers demonstrate in Ramanathapuram

Tamil Nadu nutritious meal workers employed in a scheme that provides lunch to students in government schools protested in Ramanathapuram district on January 7. The Tamil Nadu Nutritious Meal Employees Association were demanding a wage of 6,750 rupees (\$US75) per month, which was an election promise. Another demand was for the filling of 60,000 vacant posts across the state to ensure the scheme functioned in a smooth manner.

Tamil Nadu secondary grade teachers demand equal pay

Tamil Nadu secondary grade teachers have been on strike since December 26 to demand equal pay for equal work. The teachers joined the workforce after June 2009 on a meagre monthly wage of only 5,200 rupees (\$US57.90), while teachers employed prior to that date received 8,370 rupees a month. They alleged that there was a 25,000 to 30,000-rupee wage gap between them. Teachers in Ramanathapuram held a solidarity sit-down protest in support of these teachers on Wednesday.

Maharashtra Public Sector General Insurance workers demand wage rise

Public Sector General Insurance (PSGI) workers protested in Nagpur, Maharashtra on Tuesday, demanding wage revision and an increase in PSGI's contribution to the National Pension System (NPS) to 14 percent. Protesters included retired workers and pensioners who have threatened a nationwide strike if their demands are not granted.

Odisha government doctors and health professionals defy essential services law

About 6,000 doctors of the Odisha Medical Service Association, which includes health professionals, have been protesting since December 26 in support of their demands. On Wednesday they boycotted Out-Patient Department services for two hours from 9 a.m. The government responded by invoking the Odisha Essential Services Act, which made their action illegal and bans strike action by doctors, nursing officers, pharmacists, paramedics and technicians for six months. Workers said they will continue their protest.

The protest is part of a campaign for fulfilment of their 10-point charter of demands. These include parity in pay with central government employees, proportional restructuring of cadres across all grades, additional financial incentives for super-specialists and performance-based incentives.

Bangladesh: Hotel and restaurant workers plan national strike over wages and work hours

Bangladeshi hotel and restaurant workers have announced a nationwide strike for January 14. Their demands are for implementation of the government-gazette minimum wage, a legally mandated eight-hour working day, and the enforcement of all previously signed agreements, including the issuance of appointment letters. The Minimum Wage and Labour Law Implementation Struggle Council made the announcement in a press conference at the National Press Club on Monday.

A spokesman said sharp increases in the price of essentials had drastically impacted on workers and accused the government and industry owners of neglecting workers' legally recognised rights.

Employers were not even paying the minimum wage, he said, and were failing to issue appointment letters and identity cards or paying double wages for work performed beyond eight hours a day, as required by labour law. Workers were being forced to labour for up to 13 hours daily.

He said several tripartite and bilateral agreements had been signed at various times between the government, employers and workers' representatives but none implemented. This failure has created intense frustration and anger among the workers, he said.

Zinfra power infrastructure workers in Tasmania prepare to strike

The Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU), representing 38 power infrastructure construction workers from Zinfra Tasmania, announced on Tuesday that its members would commence protected industrial action next week in support of their "same job, same pay" campaign.

The CEPU is in negotiations with Zinfra for a new enterprise agreement saying it wants the agreement to reflect the work its members perform, particularly when compared to equivalent roles

elsewhere in the industry.

Workers voted on December 23 to approve taking industrial action that could include 14 separate work bans and unlimited one-hour stoppages. The union has not announced what action members will take.

New Zealand firefighters continue nationwide strike action

About 2,000 New Zealand firefighters have continued a series of one-hour nationwide strikes on Fridays across the Christmas-New Year period, including on January 2. They have been striking regularly since October over plans to drive down their wages, as well as understaffing of the fire service and the failure of successive governments to invest in new fire trucks and equipment.

Drawn-out negotiations between the NZ Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) and state agency Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) have repeatedly broken down. Firefighters rejected a pay offer of 5.1 percent spread over three years. FENZ has reportedly increased the offer to 6.2 percent, which is still well below the rate of inflation of 3 percent, with food prices up by nearly 5 percent.

Neal, a firefighter for 25 years, told the WWSWS that the pay offer and safety conditions were major sticking points. He explained that the strike was about "the same issues" that triggered multiple strikes in 2022 during the then Labour-led government.

"Nothing's been sorted out since then," he said. "They gave us promises on paper that they were going to change things, and they haven't." He also criticised a FENZ restructure which could lead to 140 job losses among "non-firefighter" staff.



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