

# Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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

## India: Delhi commuter bus workers demand overdue wages

About 16,000 Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) contract workers and pensioners demonstrated outside various Delhi bus depots on Tuesday to demand the payment of salaries and pensions for November. The DCT Workers Unity Centre coordinated the action.

Workers threatened to halt the bus network if their demands were not met. A large number of protesting contract workers called for permanent jobs.

## Lucknow Municipal Corporation workers strike over unpaid wages

About 400 financially destitute contract workers from the Lucknow Municipal Corporation (LMC) who check street lighting struck work on December 9 demanding payment of six months of outstanding wages. Strikers picketed the corporation's administration building.

Workers are also demanding permanent jobs and benefits such as Employment Provident Fund pension and other benefits, and State Provided Health Insurance. These low-paid workers, along with sanitation workers, were outsourced by the LMC and paid much lower wages, even though they do the same jobs as permanent workers.

## Protesting Bihar student teachers attacked by police

Young student teachers demonstrating in Bihar's state capital Patna were violently attacked by police on Tuesday leaving at least ten seriously injured. The young students, who qualified after completing the state Teachers' Eligibility Test and Central Teachers' Eligibility Test, have been protesting for the past three years to demand jobs and appointments to schools. They were also attacked by police in August when they demonstrated.

The students condemned the state government for not fulfilling their promise to provide jobs for one million youth after coming to power.

## Punjab school midday meal workers hold protest march

School midday meal workers in Punjab's Tarn Taran district marched in

Patti on December 12. The Mid-Day Meal Workers Union organised the protest, during which workers condemned the ruling Aam Admi Party state government, which falsely promised to double their honorarium to 18,000 rupees (\$US218) per month once elected to power.

The workers are demanding an insurance policy of one million rupees, two uniforms a year and two workers for every 50 students.

## Tamil Nadu retired utility workers protest

Retired workers from the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board protested in Tirunelveli on December 14 with several demands. Workers carried banners which held slogans demanding the state government treat utility board workers fairly and equally.

They want a 14 percent increase in the dearness allowance, payment of nine months of arrears pending since January, and a job for the children of deceased workers who died while at work.

## Doctors and nurses at major Kerala cancer hospital walk out

Doctors and nurses at the Regional Cancer Centre (RCC) in Kerala's state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, stopped work at 9 a.m. on December 15 to demand rectification of anomalies that occurred while implementing the seventh pay commission recommendations. The limited strike was called by several unions, the Doctors' Association of RCC, the RCC Staff Association, the Nurses' Association of RCC and the RCC Employees' Congress.

Unions want corrections to the pay matrix, restoration of the House Rent Allowance without capping, implementation of a pay revision with effect from January 2016 and payment of salary arrears since 2016. They also want an amendment to the pension scheme.

## Bangladesh: Gazipur police attack protesting garment workers

At least ten workers and several shop owners were injured when police, using batons and tear gas, attacked protesting apparel workers from the New Line Clothing factory in Gazipur on Tuesday. The workers had blocked the Dhaka-Tangail highway to demand unpaid wages.

The workers had not been paid for three months and other staff employees for five months. They were provoked into protesting after management failed to honour repeated assurances that wages would be paid.

## **Sri Lankan university teachers hold national strike over increased taxation**

The Federation of University Teachers Union members held a one-day strike and protest march on December 13 to demand the lowering of taxes to help alleviate unbearable living conditions. Teachers at universities from around the country joined the action. They demonstrated in front of their respective universities holding placards condemning the Wickremesinghe government's income tax policy.

Under the government's new policy taxes on workers earning 100,000 rupees (\$US273) a month will increase from 6 percent to 30 percent, starting on January 2023. While President Wickremesinghe has threatened to counter mass opposition to his austerity budget by employing a state of emergency and deploying military and police, his government relies on the unions to betray workers' demands.

## **Visy paper recycling plant workers in Western Australia strike for pay rise**

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members at Visy's paper recycling plant in Perth walked out for 48 hours on Thursday demanding an improved enterprise agreement (EA) offer. The AMWU is demanding a "decent" wage rise and for new starters to be put on the same rates as other employees in the plant.

The AMWU has over 420 members at Visy, which alongside the Perth facility has plants across Australia and the world. It is the largest privately owned recycled paper packaging company in the world.

## **Bhagwan Marine offshore divers in Western Australia strike**

Oil and gas offshore divers from Bhagwan Marine began seven days of 24-hour rolling stoppages at Barrow Island in Western Australia this week. The eleven divers are members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) who are in dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers voted unanimously on December 1 to approve protected industrial action. This can include bans on remote travel, diving below two metres and work stoppages ranging between 1 and 24 hours. The MUA claimed that Bhagwan Marine had refused to agree to the workers "most fundamental" demands.

The strike has already halted dive work decommissioning old sub-sea pipelines from nearby Thevenard Island. Bhagwan Marine is contracted by Chevron to inspect and maintain its underwater assets servicing its Barrow Island production plant 50 kilometres off the Pilbara coast of Western Australia.

## **Apple store workers in Australia to strike before Christmas**

The Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU), representing about 200 of Apple's 4,000 employees in Australia, announced this week that its members would strike ahead of Christmas in their dispute for an improved enterprise agreement. RAFFWU members intend to walk out of

retail outlets at 3 p.m. on December 23 and remain out through Christmas Eve.

The decision followed Apple management's refusal to negotiate until February. The action will be nationwide but have the greatest impact at stores in Brisbane, Adelaide and Newcastle where RAFFWU has the highest coverage.

RAFFWU members walked out of Apple stores across Australia on October 18, after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement, which offered annual pay increases of only 2.6 percent, a massive wage cut compared to inflation above 6 percent. The workers' wages have been frozen since 2018 and the pay increase will only apply to workers currently on the minimum rate for their classification.

Apple also wants to retain conditions in the existing agreement which enable it to roster any employee on any shift, seven days a week, with no set days of work from one two-week roster period to the next.

Other unions involved in negotiations with Apple are the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association and the Australian Services Union, who have isolated the RAFFWU members by not backing industrial action. Some 35 non-union workers' representatives are also involved in negotiations with Apple.

## **Queensland public health ancillary workers strike for better pay and conditions**

Operational health workers employed in catering, cleaning, housekeeping, administration and security at state-owned Queensland Health stopped work for one hour across the state on December 10 to demand a pay increase and improved conditions.

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members want a new enterprise agreement that will resolve issues such as not being paid the correct rate at the right time, backfilling issues so employees are not doing the work of two or three people and the guaranteed conversion of casuals and part-timers to permanent full time after two years of service.

The previous agreement expired in August and workers are still waiting for a pay offer from the government. The AWU claimed that the majority of claims put to Queensland Health have been rejected.



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