

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 November 2024

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

South Korea: Seoul Metro workers begin industrial action for pay rise

Members of the Korean Railroad Workers' Union began "work-to-rule" industrial action on Monday as part of their campaign for a 2.5 percent pay rise and increased staffing. The action is causing delays at peak travel times on Korail's Metro Line No.1 to 8. The union threatened to call an indefinite strike next month.

The union claimed that the government is planning to cut the number of Korail workers by 1,566 despite ongoing staff shortages. As well as a pay increase, the union wants a fairer promotion system and an improved shift arrangement that would ensure workers do not work the night shift for two days in a row.

India: Anganwadi workers in Punjab protest contract employment

Around 5,000 Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers protested the contract system of employment in Ludhiana on Tuesday. The workers are paid a poverty wage of 2,600 rupees (\$US30) a month and helpers 1,300 rupees. The workers also act as paramedics, pre-nursery teachers, programme coordinators and community workers.

The protest was organised by the Anganwadi Mulazim Union, affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU). The union threatened that if demands for permanent jobs and higher wages were not met, they would march to Delhi during the current budget session.

On September 30, Anganwadi workers from rural areas in Punjab protested outside the District Administrative Complex in Tarn Taran demanding jobs protection and the provision of nutritious food for children under their care, as per established standards in suburban Anganwadi centres.

Puducherry Road Transport Corporation contract workers demand higher wages and permanent jobs

Contract workers from the Puducherry Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) began a hunger strike on Monday demanding permanent jobs and higher wages. Strikers included drivers, conductors and mechanics. The

PRTC Employees Union and PRTC Daily Wage and Contract Employees Union organised the protest.

Workers complained that after 10 years of service they remain contract workers. The PRTC Employees Union alleged that although the government accepted that contract workers above six years of employment had to be made permanent, this is yet to be implemented.

Delhi Transport Corporation contract workers strike for higher pay

Contract workers from the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) began an indefinite strike on November 16 to demand permanency. The workers, consisting of 4,000 drivers and 18,000 conductors, complained that they are paid only 21,000 rupees (\$US248) a month while permanent employees are paid between 50,000 and 60,000 rupees a month. The workers want equal pay for equal work and permanent jobs.

Other demands include job security until the age of 60, access to medical benefits, travel allowances instead of bus pass identity cards, and confirmation of conductors hired on compassionate grounds since 2010. They have also voiced concerns over arbitrary transfers to distant locations.

The strike caused major traffic congestion in the city forcing the chief minister to call for the DTC Karamchari Ekta Union to enter talks on Tuesday evening. DTC management said it formed a committee to discuss the workers' grievances.

Retired Anganwadi workers in Coimbatore demand higher pensions and improved funeral entitlements

Around 50 retired Anganwadi (childcare) workers and noon meal pensioners protested outside the Collector's office in Coimbatore on Monday demanding that their current monthly pension of just 2,000 rupees (\$US23.6) be raised to a minimum of 6,750 rupees. They also demanded payment of 25,000 rupees for funeral entitlement and medical insurance, which had been promised by the government.

Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation workers protest over unpaid wage increase

Workers at the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (Pakistan Radio) headquarters in Islamabad locked the perimeter gates and protested on the

premises on Monday after their union failed to reach agreement with the government on payment of overdue pay increases.

Management called police who cordoned off the building to prevent workers protesting on the street, which is also where the High Court and the Prime Minister Secretariat are located. The union claims police entered the building and arrested some workers.

The union said that last year the government awarded a 25 percent salary increase for all government employees and this year 20 percent, but Radio Pakistan had not paid the increases. They also demanded the outstanding dues of regular employees and the arrears of pensioners, including medical bills, housing and hiring allowances.

Bangladeshi workers continue protests for unpaid wages and the reinstatement of laid-off workers

Garment workers from the Beximco Industrial Park in Gazipur have been demonstrating for over a week, including blocking the Dhaka-Tangail and Chandra-Nabinagar highways, demanding payment of their outstanding October salaries.

Factory management has failed to honour several promises to meet workers and set a date for payment. Beximco Industrial Park has 41,000 workers in its garment and ceramic factories.

One worker said, “We will continue our protests until we receive our due salaries. We cannot pay house rent, school fees for our children, or even afford basic necessities. Some landlords are pressuring us to vacate our homes, and shopkeepers are refusing to extend credit,” he said.

On Tuesday, workers from Zirani’s Doreen Factory blocked the Chandra-Nabinagar highway to demand the reinstatement of 13 laid-off workers and for the reopening of the closed factory.

Western Australian power utility workers strike to demand higher pay

About 700 electricians from the state-owned power utility Western Power walked off the job on November 15 and again on Tuesday for 24 hours after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement failed to reach a deal. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) accused the state Labor government of “showing minimal effort” in resolving key concerns raised by workers.

Workers are protesting stagnant wages, reduced working conditions and lack of job security and want a 36-hour week in line with power utility workers in other states. Their current work agreement expired in August and their last pay increase was September 2023. Due to the Labor government’s freeze on public sector wages Western Power workers did not get a pay increase in 2020 and 2021. In 2022 they were paid a miserable lump sum of \$2,000 as compensation for lost wages.

Nurses and midwives at Healthscope hospitals in Newcastle walk out

Nurses and midwives from the Newcastle Private Hospital and Hunter Valley Private Hospital walked off the job and held a roadside rally in Newcastle on Thursday to demand higher pay and improved conditions. They held signs saying “Are you joking? We’re not coping,” “Called

Heroes Treated Like Zeros” and “Healthscope, your free coffee voucher isn’t paying my bills.”

The New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) is in dispute with the Canadian-based health provider Healthscope which owns the hospitals. The action followed a walkout by NSWNMA members at Healthscope hospitals in Sydney early this month over the same issues. Negotiations for a new enterprise agreement have been ongoing since May. Nurses and midwives rejected Healthscope’s pay increase offer of just 13.55 percent over three years.

NSWNMA claims that nurses and midwives at Healthscope hospitals in NSW are paid 16 percent less than their colleagues in Queensland-based Healthscope hospitals. They also receive less annual, maternity and personal leave than if they were working in public sector hospitals. Healthscope is Australia’s second-largest private hospital group with 38 hospitals across every state and territory.

The NSWNMA is calling for an immediate 15 percent pay rise in line with the union’s public sector pay claim, mandated nurse/midwife to patient ratios across all wards and units, night shift penalty rates increased from 15 percent to 30 percent and improved leave entitlements. Nurses and midwives said they will continue striking until demands are met and will consider further action such as banning overtime and non-clinical duties and refusing to change rosters.

Westrac warehouse workers in New South Wales strike for pay rise

About 80 members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) from Westrac warehouses at Tomago in Newcastle and Casula in Sydney stopped work on November 14 to demand an improved pay offer from the company. The Tomago workers walked out for several days in October over the issue.

AWU claimed that Westrac made over \$600 million in profit over the last financial year at a time when its employees were paid increases 4 percent below the inflation rate. Their current agreement expired in June last year and their last pay increase, of 2 percent, was in July 2022. The CPI (consumer price index) rate at the time was 6.1 percent.

Westrac is an Australia-wide dealer and service provider of Caterpillar earth excavation equipment.

Canberra bus drivers win improved safety

Hundreds of bus drivers in Canberra, Australia’s capital, held a snap strike on Tuesday and protested outside their depots. They refused to return to work until the Australian Capital Territory’s Labor-Greens government responded to their demands for improved safety.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) members said the ACT government had ignored their complaints about driver safety. The TWU said there have been more than 40 assaults on drivers in the last month, including having had bags of rotten fish and other refuse dumped on them and verbal and physical attacks.

The government had said it would commit to installing cabin safety screens in all buses, provide de-escalation training and increase the number of transit officers who will maintain a visible presence on buses and at interchanges.

Metro Tasmania bus union calls off strikes in return for talks

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), representing bus drivers at the government-owned Metro Tasmania, called off 2-hour strike action planned for Wednesday and Thursday at Burnie and Launceston respectively, after the state Liberal government agreed to re-enter wage negotiations.

Bus drivers in Metro's northern and southern networks are opposed to the government's proposed enterprise agreement which they said would see them working longer for a sub-inflation 2 percent pay rise. The current consumer price index (CPI) rate is 2.8 percent.

The RTBU wants the government to address the chronic driver shortage, increase wages, improve driver safety and give an assurance that the public-owned bus system will not be put in private hands.

Drivers have imposed various work bans, including working in full compliance with policies and procedures, not attending meetings with operations supervisors, not attending meetings in personal time and not completing various types of paperwork.

Jane Franklin Hall college non-academic workers in Hobart strike

Fifteen United Workers Union (UWU) members who are non-academic workers at the Jane Franklin Hall residential college of the University of Tasmania, in Hobart, stopped work for an hour on Wednesday to demand a pay rise before the end of the year. The workers, who are responsible for catering, cleaning, maintenance, grounds keeping and transport, are paid a minimum award wage.

The UWU has been in negotiations with the college management since January for a new enterprise agreement. The workers voted in a ballot on November 6 to approve taking protected industrial action, including an unlimited number of one- and two-hour strikes, wearing union clothing, writing union slogans on college vehicles and a ban on driving college vehicles.

New South Wales public hospital psychiatrists threaten to resign over funding crisis

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists announced this week that 145 of 295 salaried psychiatrists in the New South Wales (NSW) public hospital system are currently threatening to resign over workforce shortages and low pay.

The Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF), who represent the doctors, claimed that one-third of specialist psychiatry positions across the NSW public hospital system are unfilled, forcing hospitals to fill vacancies where they can with temporary and locum staff. It said the staffing crisis has meant rationalising and delaying services to very ill people.

ASMOF said the effect on medical staff is demoralising. "Psychiatrists just can't provide the care required and trained to do because of a decade of under resourcing," it said.

ASMOF said that although it gave a commitment to the Industrial Relations Commission that it would not seek resignation letters from psychiatrists as part of its industrial campaign, resignation letters have continued to come into the federation. According to the ASMOF, public hospital psychiatrists working in other states and territories can earn up to

30 percent more than those in NSW.

The NSW Labor Government indicated it is in no rush to resolve the staffing crisis. It claimed it is listening to the doctors' concerns and is running a "Gap Analysis of service and demand" that will be completed in 2025.

Tip truck drivers in Victoria strike for minimum rates

Hundreds of tip truck owner-drivers walked off construction sites across Victoria on Monday and rallied outside the Victorian parliament to protest "dangerous" pay rates and conditions. They are organised by Victorian Tippers United (VTU), which called on the state Labor government to lift minimum standards across the industry.

A VTU spokesman said the issue has escalated to the point that rates for tipper drivers are about half of what they were 18 months ago, meaning drivers are struggling to make a wage after expenses. A major demand is for an eight-hour minimum to be instilled to ensure drivers aren't called out for a full day, only to work four or five hours.

"The state government has powers under the Owner Driver and Forestry Contractors' Act to enforce minimum standards for owner drivers and we'd like them to do so," the VTU spokesman said.

New Zealand nurses to hold nationwide strikes

Nurses employed by Te Whatu Ora – Health NZ (HNZ) have voted to strike on December 3 and began rolling strikes across the country in the following two weeks. The NZ Nurses Organisation (NZNO), which represents 56,000 nurses and health workers, is in a pay dispute with HNZ.

NZNO chief executive Paul Goulter said HNZ had capped any pay increase at 1 percent of total employee costs, which would mean 0.5 percent in the first year because it would not come into effect until April 2025, and up to 1 percent in the second year. That is effectively a highly provocative pay cut.

Nurses are also alarmed at plans to pause a digital staffing system used in hospitals to indicate how many full-time staff are needed on duty at any given time. That would leave few safeguards on staffing levels and result in fewer nurses, midwives and assistants on duty.

"Nurses all around New Zealand working in the public hospitals are tired, they're frustrated, they keep being promised things, they keep being told 'we value your work,' but in fact when it comes down to it there's no evidence their work's being valued," Goulter declared.

In fact, the situation facing nurses is the product of sellout deals imposed by the NZNO over recent pay rounds. After calling off a nationwide strike in August 2023, the union pushed through a widely opposed settlement which Goulter admitted didn't meet the cost of living and failed to address a critical nurse shortage.

The forthcoming strikes will bring nurses into direct confrontation with the National Party-led government which has recently appointed former private hospital chief executive Lester Levy as health commissioner tasked with making \$1.4 billion in cuts.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact