

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.

Japanese nurses strike nationally to demand higher pay

Over 200 nursing members of the Japan National Hospital Workers' Union and other staff at 119 medical institutions across the country held a one-hour strike yesterday to demand a 40,000-yen monthly wage increase for salary workers and a 250-yen hourly wage rise for part-time workers.

Yesterday's walkout included nurses from three Tokyo hospitals, three hospitals in Kanagawa Prefecture and other health facilities, including hospitals in Chiba and Hasuda.

While wages at national hospitals are supposed to follow pay standards set by the National Personnel Authority for all government workers, hospital management refused grant any pay rise to nurses and hospital employees during 2024 negotiations.

A spokesperson for the union told the media, "While wages in other industries are rising, a zero-wage increase will only exacerbate ongoing staff shortages, leading to a further outflow of personnel and ultimately causing the collapse of regional health care."

The Japan National Hospital Workers' Union is affiliated with the Japan Federation of National Service Employees and part of the National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenren).

India: ASHA workers in Kerala remain on strike after two weeks

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers in Kerala are maintaining their indefinite strike for higher pay and better conditions begun on February 10. The continuing strike is in defiance of the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), which is affiliated to Kerala's current ruling party the CPI (M). CITU called off the strike at a protest outside the State Secretariat last week following a vague assurance from the health minister that wages would be increased.

The workers want their monthly wage increased from the meagre 7,000 rupees (\$US80) to about 21,000 rupees and a 5,000-rupee pension and withdrawal of the compulsory retirement age of 62. Workers complained that they only receive 4,000 to 5,000 rupees of the current monthly pay.

These crucial workers are involved in the vaccination of children from marginal and poor families, care for patients in outpatient wings, assisting pregnant women, recording births and deaths and are involved in many health awareness programs.

Panjab University "C" grade and field workers demand permanent jobs

About 500 Panjab University "C" grade and field workers protested outside the Vice Chancellor's Office on February 21 to demand permanent jobs. Many of these workers have been employed at the university since 1991 but are still contract workers. Repeated representation and letters to the university have been ignored. The workers, who are organised by the Panjab University Class "C" Staff Association, said they won't back down until they get an assurance of permanency in writing.

Anganwadi centre workers in Haryana demand adequate rations and better conditions

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers held a sit-down protest in the mini secretariat at Jhajjar in Haryana on February 20 to demand an increase in ration items for Anganwadi centres and job promotions at mini Anganwadi centres. Anganwadi workers said politicians had failed to fulfil election promises after joining the new government. The protesters threatened to begin statewide agitation if their demands are not granted.

Lucknow sanitation workers protest delayed wages

Sanitation workers from Zone 8 in Lucknow Municipal Corporation, Uttar Pradesh stopped work on February 19 to protest the delay in wage payments. All cleaning activity in the zone was brought to a halt. A corporation official refused to accept responsibility for their wage payments saying the dispute is the responsibility of the contractor, not the corporation.

Workers said the corporation would only take notice when the garbage begins piling up. They said they can't feed their families properly because of the low wages and untimely payments by the contractor.

Tea garden workers in Assam protest to over wages and land permits

Hundreds of tea garden workers protested this week in Silchar, Assam for higher wages and patta (a government-issued permit for a landowner who stays in his land or house). The protest was organised by the All-

India Tea Workers Union, which is affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

The workers have been leaving the area, which borders the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys, to escape frequent flooding and other life-threatening natural calamities in the region. The workers, who said their wage was only 228 rupees (\$US2.6) per day, are demanding 661 rupees and land pattas for the places where they settle. They have threatened to expand their struggle with a mass rally in Guwahati if their demands are not granted by March 3.

Pakistani hydro-electric utility workers protest nationally against privatisation

The All-Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Hydro Electric Workers Union held a nationwide protest on February 19 to oppose privatisation of the power distribution companies. The workers reject the federal government's International Monetary Fund-dictated plan to privatise profit-making power distribution companies.

Workers demonstrated outside the Lahore Press Club to demand the prime minister review the government's decision to privatise the three profitable electricity distribution companies—the Islamabad Electric Supply Company, the Gujranwala Electric Supply Company and the Faisalabad Electric Supply Company. National Transmission and Dispatch Company power-house workers joined the protest.

Workers said that they had been performing double duties and other increased workloads for the last seven-and-a-half years because management refuses to recruit new workers. They also demanded that their current pensions be retained.

Pakistani government workers protest pension reforms

On February 19, hundreds of government workers in Islamabad blocked both entrances to the Secretariat Chowk, demanding the government withdraw recently introduced pension reforms.

A heavy police presence, including senior officers, was deployed, provoking violent clashes against protesters. Workers called for an end to what they described as discriminatory policies, including the abolition of dual pensions and changes to the pension calculation formula. They demanded a 10 percent increase in the disability allowance.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand reinstatement

Garment workers from the Hamim Group's That's It factory blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Gazipur on Sunday to demand reinstatement of 76 dismissed colleagues. The protest caused heavy traffic congestion for about two-and-a-half hours. The strike erupted when workers came to the factory on Sunday morning and were confronted with a list of 76 dismissals.

Gazipur industrial police and other law enforcement agencies intervened but workers suspended the protest following a discussion with factory owners who claimed they would solve the problem. Some workers who did not trust management said they would resume the protest if their reinstatement demands were not met.

Bangladeshi coal miners demand permanency

Over 200 temporary workers from the Barapukuria Coal Mining Company in Dinajpur began an indefinite strike on Sunday to demand permanent jobs, an end to wage discrimination, implementation of annual salary increments, reinstatement of festival bonuses, payment for overtime work and access to paid leave, including maternity leave.

The workers are organised by the Central Outsourcing Workers' Welfare Council. Many have worked for up to 20 years without being made permanent, depriving them of benefits paid to their permanent colleagues. They receive lower wages and do not receive salary increments, festival allowances and other financial incentives.

Candidate teachers in Dhaka continue recruitment protest

Despite police intervention, 150 candidates for assistant teachers in government primary schools have continued a protest they began in Dhaka on February 5 to oppose cancellation of their appointments. Their protest was brutally attacked by police using batons, water cannon and sound grenades on February 10, 13 and 16. About 30 protesters were arrested.

Protesters said the recruitment process was conducted in three phases. The first two phases had been completed and appointments made but no decision taken on the third phase, which affects 6,531 candidate teachers.

Thousands of mental health workers in Victoria escalate state-wide action

As part of statewide industrial action, mental health workers at Northern Health and St Vincent's hospitals in Melbourne stopped work for two hours in separate actions on Wednesday and Friday respectively against low wages and chronic understaffing. Those involved included mental health nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, health professionals, lived-experience workers, administrative staff and other employees.

About 3,900 nurses and non-medical staff at 19 Victorian mental health facilities imposed over 40 work bans on February 18 in their dispute with the state Labor government over their proposed enterprise agreement. The workers are covered by two unions, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU).

Negotiations for a new agreement have been ongoing for over seven months. A HACSU spokesperson said workers want the agreement to include urgent measures to embed staffing profiles across the state, imperative measures to combat acute and persistent wage inequality, unworkable conditions, dangerous understaffing and interventions to reduce the severe escalation of occupational violence and aggression.

The Victorian Labor government claimed in December that its total pay offer would lift mental health nurses' wages and allowances by 28.4 percent and bring them in line with general nurses in the public health system. Wages and allowances offered for non-nursing staff were 3 percent annual increases over the four-year agreement, with a lump sum

of \$6,232 per FTE (full time equivalent).

The ANMF rejected the offer, saying there were 70 union claims that had not been addressed, including conditions related to general nursing and designed to recruit and retain mental health nurses in the public mental health system. This week's stoppages were the first of a series of stoppages planned to include all facilities.

Public hospital health support workers in South Australia fight for better wages and conditions

Over 1,000 health support workers at 10 government hospitals and medical facilities across South Australia have imposed work bans to demand higher pay and ongoing commitment by the South Australian Labor government to same job, same pay, and the insourcing of hospital support services.

United Workers Union (UWU) members imposing bans include theatre orderlies, patient service assistants, central sterilised stores department technicians, menu monitors, chefs, cleaners and kitchen services workers.

About 300 workers at Flinders Medical Centre imposed bans from 7 a.m. Monday, adding to existing state-wide bans by approximately 700 workers on February 22. The action includes bans on cleaning management offices, performing duties above their classification, changing in and out of scrubs only during paid time and other work-to-rule measures.

The health support industrial action runs parallel with action by 1,100 disability support workers from South Australia's Department of Human Services (DHS) who are demanding a "living wage." The workers, who are members of the UWU, put in place bans at 240 DHS houses targeted at management, 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. The UWU says DHS has difficulty attracting staff because of low pay and a reliance on agency workers to meet minimum staffing levels.

Court blocks Healthscope nurses' strike in New South Wales

A 26-hour strike planned for February 21 by the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) at Healthscope hospitals in NSW was suspended by the Fair Work Commission the day before it was due to go ahead. Responding to an application from Healthscope, the commission suspended planned strike action at the birth suite in Healthscope's Newcastle Private Hospital. Under the Fair Work Act 2009 any suspension order means all industrial action is "unprotected," therefore making stop-work action illegal at all Healthscope hospitals.

Hundreds of NSWNMA members—from Northern Beaches Hospital, Prince of Wales Private, Norwest Private, Nepean Private, Campbelltown Private, Sydney Southwest Private, Newcastle Private and Hunter Valley Private—were scheduled to walk off the job for up to 26 hours over stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

Negotiations with the Canadian-based health provider have been ongoing since May. Nurses and midwives rejected Healthscope's pay increase offer of just 13.55 percent over three years. They took strike action in November and December at several hospitals.

The 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.

Nurses and midwives are 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.

Tomago Aluminium smelter workers in New South Wales hold more strikes

Following a series of limited strike actions that began with two-hour work stoppages on January 19, about 580 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members from the Tomago Aluminium smelter in Newcastle stopped work for six hours on Sunday, causing a complete stoppage of the plant, and again for three hours on Tuesday. The industrial action by pot line, cast house and carbon workers are in opposition to the company's low pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement.

The AWU is demanding 4 percent annual pay increases over three years, back pay to December 31 and \$1,000 sign-on bonuses. The company has refused to budge from its offer of a 4 percent pay rise in the first year, followed by 3.5 percent increases in each of the next two years, along with a one-off \$1,000 sign-on payment, but no back pay.

An AWU spokesman admitted that previous union/management deals to "support the company's viability" meant workers' wages over the past three years were below inflation and effective pay cuts. The union's current wage demand is only one percent above the current inflation rate of 3 percent.

Cleanaway garbage collectors in Noosa, Queensland strike for pay rise

About 30 garbage collection truck drivers employed by Cleanaway at Noosa Shire Council in southeast Queensland, walked off the job on Tuesday to demand higher pay in a new enterprise agreement. The Transport Workers Union admitted that since its last wage deal with Cleanaway was made three years ago its members' wages have not kept up with inflation and have gone backward by more than 3 percent in real terms. Cleanaway has rejected workers' demand for a 7 percent pay increase and improved workplace rights.

Brisbane City Council administrative workers strike for pay rise

On Thursday, 1,000 Brisbane City Council (BCC) administrative workers stopped work for two hours to demand higher wages. Strikers included librarians, call centre staff, IT workers, environmental health officers, supervisors, clerical and technical workers and network coordinators in business operation units. The workers are covered by The Services Union (TSU).

After four months of negotiations, TSU members voted to approve

taking industrial action after rejecting the council's latest pay offer of 3.5 percent annual increases in a two-year agreement.

Workers say they want increases that will bring them into parity with BCC's bus drivers who are demanding annual wage rises of 4.35 percent. Workers are also demanding better redundancies and any wage rise backdated to the end of the previous EA.

Possible strike action is being threatened by BCC workers who are members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and the Australian Workers Union (AWU). One union spokesperson warned that all of BCC's 8,000-strong workforce could walk off unless there was progress in negotiations.

A planned two-hour strike yesterday by RTBU bus drivers was called off after TSU claimed it had "a breakthrough" in wage negotiations with BCC on Thursday.

Pathology workers in regional New South Wales oppose transfer of pathology services

Pathology workers employed by NSW Health Pathology at regional facilities in Cootamundra and Young Hospital walked off the job on Wednesday and were joined by members of the community protesting the NSW government's plan to transfer pathology services "along with willing staff" from Cootamundra to Young Hospital, some 50 km away. One worker said the strike was their first in 50 years.

Pathology workers said the transfer will have a cascading and devastating effect on the availability and immediacy of urgent pathology services across NSW's Murrumbidgee region. A Health Services Union (HSU) spokesperson said the closure and transfer of Cootamundra's pathology services to the already overworked Young Pathology unit would result in increased wait times, delayed emergency department responses, delayed surgical schedules and increased pressure on pathology workers at Young and Wagga hospitals.

HPS Pharmacies workers in Tasmania walk out over low pay

HPS Pharmacies workers at the Hobart and Launceston hospitals stopped work for two hours on Tuesday to protest slow enterprise agreement negotiations, low pay and increased exploitation. Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) allege that its members at HPS are being paid substantially less than the national average wage for pharmacists and up to 30 percent less than pharmacists working in Tasmania's public health system.

Following nearly 12 months of negotiations for the new work agreement, PPA members voted overwhelmingly in November for a campaign of industrial action. PPA members had already rejected the company's proposed agreement saying it was totally inadequate and failed to address the staffing crisis at the facilities. PPA says further industrial action will follow if HPS fails to soon address their members' demands.

Immigration detention workers hold national stoppage

About 1,000 United Workers Union (UWU) members at nine immigration detention centres in Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane, walked off the job on Monday for four hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon.

The detention centres are managed by British security and defence multinational Serco, which lost its contract to manage the centres to American prison operator Secure Journeys late last year. Serco claimed Secure Journeys rejected an offer to transition employees, along with lump sum payments equivalent to each individual employee's leave entitlement.

Rather than pay redundancy, Serco notified its 850 immigration centre workers that if they wanted to take up employment with the new contractor they would have to resign from Serco. The UWU claims that not one Serco worker had been offered a position with the new operator and that if they resign Serco, they will not be paid any redundancy/severance benefits.

Workers are maintaining paperwork bans at all nine immigration detention centres. The Fair Work Commission said it will decide on whether to order an end to further strike action within five days.

New Zealand social welfare staff take partial strike action

Staff at New Zealand's child welfare agency, Oranga Tamariki, began partial strike action this week over workloads and a zero-pay offer. About 2,800 social workers, staff in care and protection residences and youth justice residences, residential homes and support workers are involved.

While the Public Service Association (PSA) described the government's offer during collective agreement bargaining as "insulting," it has restricted industrial action to bans on overtime, double-shifts, and on-call and after-hours duties. Other action includes not using work-related systems and software outside of paid work. The limited action is due to run until April 18. On March 7, there will be a "total withdrawal of labour" for two hours.

PSA assistant secretary Fleur Fitzsimons said the pay offer doesn't meet the rising cost of living and eliminate unmanageable workloads. Fitzsimons said they wanted to see a "fair pay offer" and workloads that allow staff to give those needing aid adequate time and support. "This strike is aimed at the government," she said.

Thousands of core public service workers are covered by agreements currently under negotiation, as are those in education and health. Expecting escalating struggles, the government's workplace relations minister, Brooke Van Velden, has introduced legislation to dock workers' pay if they take "partial strike action," including working to rule.



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