

# Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

4 November 2022

## Asia

### India: Tamil Nadu conservancy workers in Erode on strike

Over 1,500 conservancy workers from the Erode Municipal Corporation, in Tamil Nadu, have been on an indefinite strike since October 31 protesting the outsourcing of their jobs. Around 500 workers staged a sit-in protest inside the corporation office on Wednesday in support of the strike.

A law passed by the state government on October 20 has allowed all municipal corporations, except Chennai Municipal Corporation, to outsource the majority of their workers. Workers affected are conservancy workers, office assistants, night duty watchmen, supervisors and tax collectors.

### New Delhi government hospital nurses strike over excessive workloads

The Delhi Nurses Foundation called a three-day strike at government hospitals on Wednesday to protest excessive workloads. Emergency ward and Intensive Care Unit nurses stayed on the job, hoping to avoid the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act being enacted against strikers.

The union condemned the ruling Kejriwal's Aam Admi Party saying that there were 8,000 vacancies for nurses but only 6,000 are being recruited.

### Andhra Pradesh sanitation workers demand overdue wages

Sanitary workers from 29 villages in the capital region of Andhra Pradesh stopped work and demonstrated in front of the Capital Region Development Authority office in Tulluru on October 31. The impoverished workers, organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), demanded three months of overdue wages. Protesters said they would hold an indefinite strike if wages were not paid and other pending issues not resolved.

### Andhra Pradesh medical teachers at ayurvedic hospital protest

Teachers and students at the Ananta Laxmi Government Ayurvedic Medical College in Warangal demonstrated outside the hospital on

October 29. Protesters complained of the lack of proper infrastructure and absence of teaching and non-teaching staff in the college.

The National Commission for Indian System of Medicine claimed that the lack of proper infrastructure and staff forced it to cancel the 63 seats in the first year Bachelor of Ayurvedic (alternative) Medicine and Surgery.

Students locked the gates of the hospital and staged a sit-in protest demanding the government end its neglect of alternative medicine and provide adequate resources for the college.

### Punjab: Sacked municipal workers in Amritsar demonstrate

Some 130 sacked workers from the streetlight wing and 20 sewer-men of the Amritsar Municipal Corporation demonstrated at the corporation's head office on October 28. They said that their services were terminated on September 30 without any reason given. The union said that despite an earlier assurance from the local government and corporation authorities that the workers would be reinstated this had not happened.

### Bangladesh: Garment workers in Kamalapur protest factory closure

Several hundred Bangladeshi apparel workers from the Olio Apparels factory at Kamalapur protested on Tuesday to demand unpaid wages and reopening of the factory. They blockaded roads in Motijheel and Kamalapur areas, a neighbourhood of Dhaka.

Workers said that when they arrived for work on Tuesday morning, they found a notice indicating closure of the factory and its relocation to Uttarkhan, in Dhaka district. The factory, which is owned by a ruling party, Awami League lawmaker, employed about 3,000 people.

The workers demanded four-months wages, service benefits, two festival bonuses, and maternity leave payments.

## Australia

### Over 2,000 BHP mine workers in Queensland strike over pay and job security

Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union members at BHP's four central Queensland coal mines are taking protected industrial action in their dispute for an improved enterprise agreement (EA) offer.

Bans on overtime and step-up duties were put in place at the company's Blackwater, Saraji, Peak Downs and Goonyella Riverside mines on Thursday and workers at Peak Downs and Goonyella Riverside stopped

work for five hours on Friday.

The dispute also involved members from the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union who, along with the CFMMEU, cover over 2,000 workers at the mines.

The unions have been attempting to reach a deal with BHP for a new EA for over 15 months. Four months of mediation in the Fair Work Commission reached deadlock in September. A CFMMEU spokesperson claimed the drawn-out negotiations had not even begun discussing wage increases because the focus was on conditions and job security.

The unions have allowed an increasing number of BHP's workforce to be drawn from labour hire companies. BHP has its own in-house labour hire provider Operations Services. Workers are concerned about job security and want job protections built into the agreement, redundancy protections and career progression.

BHP is part of the Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) with BHP holding 50 percent and Mitsubishi Development the other 50 percent. It is the largest metallurgical coal producer in Australia and operates seven mines in central Queensland's Bowen Basin as well as the Hay Point Coal Terminal.

### **Foster Plastics factory workers in Victoria strike**

Twelve workers from Foster Plastics manufacturing plant in Mickleham, an outer Melbourne suburb, walked off the job for eight hours on October 28 in a fight for their first negotiated enterprise agreement. Their old work agreement expired in 2012.

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members voted unanimously on August 31 to take protected industrial action, after rejecting the company's proposed agreement. The AWU said that after six months of negotiations the company had failed to make a wage offer that kept pace with inflation. The AWU put forward a counter offer to management following the strike, and has threatened to call further industrial action if its demands were not met.

Foster Plastics is a large plastics compounding and extrusion company based in Melbourne with factories in Mickleham, Perth, Western Australia and Newcastle, New South Wales.

### **Macedon Ranges council workers take industrial action**

About 90 members of the Australian Services Union (ASU) from the Macedon Ranges Shire Council, north of Melbourne, have implemented low-level work bans in their dispute for an improved enterprise agreement offer. Workers have stopped mowing lawns, banned attending management meetings and are ignoring non-urgent requests from managers, among other bans.

A majority of workers in early September voted to authorise the union to take protected industrial action but the union delayed calling any action until mid-October. An ASU spokesperson claimed that management was yet to make a pay offer that kept up with the increasing cost of living.

### **Queensland government construction workers walk off**

Hundreds of tradesmen employed in three Queensland government

building maintenance and construction departments walked off the job and demonstrated outside state parliament in Brisbane on October 27. Workers from QBuild, QHealth and Transport and Main Roads (TMR) were protesting in a long-running campaign against low pay and lack of training for apprentices. QBuild workers in Cairns walked off on Thursday and demonstrated outside the QBuild office.

Workers from four unions, the Construction Forestry Mining Maritime and Energy Union (CFMMEU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Plumbers Union and Electrical Trades Union (ETU), held placards saying "Apprentices are living in poverty" and "Fair pay for government trades" among others.

ETU members from TMR walked out for a day across Queensland on September 12 after ETU members at Mackay were locked out for applying low-level work bans in support of their demands. Apprentices at QBuild walked out for 24 hours on October 14 last year to demand access to proper trades training. CFMMEU members at QBuild struck for three days in solidarity with the apprentices and pushed their pay increase demand.

### **QAL refinery workers in Queensland hold second strike**

Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL) refinery maintenance workers in Gladstone, struck for 24 hours on Tuesday and picketed the refinery entrance after rejecting management's proposed enterprise agreement for the third time. ETU and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members struck for two hours on October 18, after rejecting QAL's pay offer in September and again on October 6.

The ETU and AMWU, covering over 130 workers at the refinery, have been in negotiations with QAL since February. Workers want "fair and equal" pay and shift allowances proportional to the base salary, rather than the current arrangement which is a fixed loading. A union spokesperson said QAL workers want pay lifted to be on par with similarly qualified positions in the industry across Queensland.

### **Tasmanian public sector workers to strike over low pay and inadequate resourcing**

Thousands of public sector workers across Tasmania plan to hold one-hour stop work meetings on November 9 over low pay and grossly inadequate staffing levels. Workers from six unions covering teachers, firefighters, allied health workers, child protection, nurses and others will stop work and attend rallies at 1.30 p.m. in six locations across the state.

Many of the unions, including the Australian Education Union (AEU), Health and Community Sector Union (HACSU) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, have been attempting to reach pay deals with the state Liberal government for 12 months. Workers are demanding their wages keep pace with inflation and increased resourcing and staffing levels.

Tasmanian Child Safety Services employees walked out on October 5 for two hours to protest chronic under resourcing. The HACSU said that two meetings with the premier Jeremy Rockliff in September had failed to resolve chronic recruitment and retention issues.

On September 28, public school teachers and support staff across Tasmania stopped work for two hours over low pay and a critical teacher shortage. The AEU had been in negotiations with the state government for a new enterprise agreement for over 14 months without reaching a deal.

The latest pay offer to Tasmanian State Service (TSS) workers on September 28 has not been accepted. In the offer, the government increased its annual 2.5 percent pay increase cap to 3.5 percent in the first year and 3 percent annual increases for the next two years. Included was a \$1,000 payment to all TSS employees in the first year, \$1,000 in the second year and \$500 in the third year. Other one-off payments were to apply to different grades. Similar offers were extended to teachers, nurses and ancillary health workers.

### **Pfizer pharmaceutical manufacturing workers in Victoria strike**

Over 100 members of the United Workers Union (UWU) at Pfizer's pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in Mulgrave, a suburb of Melbourne, walked off the job for 24 hours from 10.30 p.m. on Wednesday, after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The union said it included a real pay cut and reduction in conditions. The company reported a record \$25 billion profit last financial year.

Pfizer's pay offer included a 3 percent increase in the first year of the agreement, 4 percent in the second year and 3 percent in the final year. The company has offered cash sweeteners in addition to the yearly increases but these sweeteners are subject to a number of conditions, including workers having to pay the "bonus" back if they leave, get sacked or are made redundant.

In addition to the subpar wage offer, Pfizer wants to drastically alter workers' shift times and remove the fortnightly rostered day off (RDO) for new recruits. A UWU spokesperson claimed the union was seeking a wage increase closer to current and projected inflation percentages and would consider Pfizer's offer if the bonuses were rolled into annual increases. Workers at a picket line meeting called for nothing less than a 17 percent pay increase over the three-year agreement. This is still less than inflation which is predicted to reach 8 percent by the end of 2022.



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