

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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## South Korea: Hyundai shipbuilding workers give notice of strike

The union representing workers at three Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) offshore and marine yards in South Korea has issued notice that its members will begin coordinated strike action in December as part of a long-running dispute over wages and working conditions.

Workers plan to stop work for four hours on December 6, and again down tools for some time the following day, with strike action escalating to a walkout on December 13 if their demands are not met. Shipyards affected are Hyundai Mipo Dockyard and Hyundai Samho Heavy Industries' yards, which are part of the Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering Company.

Their demands include an increase of 142,300 won (\$US106) per month in base salary, a guarantee of 250 percent of wages in bonuses and job security as the shipbuilding industry goes through restructuring. Another demand is for abolition of the peak wage system that cuts the wages of older workers.

A union spokesperson claimed members were fighting to correct the distorted wage structure system, including low wages and long working hours, and recover a wage cut which it allowed during an industry recession.

The union met with HHI more than 20 times between July and October, but management rejected the union's demands, claiming they would cost the company upwards of \$175 million annually. In late October, workers at the three Hyundai yards voted to strike.

## Seoul Metro workers end strike after 14 hours

The Seoul Transit Corporation Labor Union and affiliates representing 13,000 workers, or 80 percent of Seoul Metro's workforce, called its members out on strike on Wednesday in a dispute over the firm's plan to slash more than 1,500 jobs by 2026. The strike disrupted services on subway lines 1 through 8.

The union shut down the strike in the early hours of Thursday morning, claiming to have secured a promise from management that it would not proceed with its downsizing plan, which would have slashed its workforce by 10 percent.

## India: Power company workers in Uttar Pradesh on indefinite strike

Workers and engineers from the state-owned Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) began an indefinite strike on Tuesday with a charter of 15 demands. The strike follows four months of protests in Lucknow and an indefinite sit-down protest begun on November 19 by around 500 UPPCL workers.

The workers are covered by the Uttar Pradesh Vidyt Karmchari Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti. Demands include scrapping the New Pension Scheme, time-bound pay scales, the appointment of chairman and managing directors strictly according to established rules, cashless payment for all employees, making outsourced workers permanent and withdrawal of the order to privatise transformer workshops.

## Striking Swiggy food delivery workers in Kerala harassed by police

About 5,000 Swiggy Global delivery workers in Kochi are maintaining a strike that began on November 14 to demand higher wages. Police have intervened in peaceful protests and have brought charges against at least four strikers.

The gig-economy workers said they had begun the strike because they have not been receiving incentives and pay checks from Swiggy. They complained that a worker who made 40,000 rupees (\$US491) including incentives two months ago, saw his wages take a steep downward spiral as all incentives were eliminated by Swiggy.

Workers are demanding a 35-rupee (\$US0.43) payment for deliveries within a 2.5 kilometre radius, compared to the current rate of 20 rupees for a 4 kilometre radius. Most of the current pay is spent on fuel, with the remainder barely enough to feed workers and their families.

These highly exploited workers are called "delivery partners" by the company to avoid labour laws and hide the oppressive conditions they are forced to endure. The All India Trade Union Congress organised the workers but has kept their strike isolated and not campaigned amongst other exploited delivery workers to extend the industrial action.

## Tamil Nadu rubber plantation workers strike for better wages and job security

Kanyakumari district rubber plantation workers from the Arasu Rubber Corporation (ARC), with plantations that span the borders of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, have been on strike since November 7 in a struggle for better wages and job security. The district police have intervened and denied

permission for the workers to hold a hunger strike.

The workers' contract expired two years ago. The Kanniyakumari District Estate Workers Union (KDEWU) claimed that talks with management had failed to reach agreement. A strike was held in February 2020 after talks failed and workers got a wage raise of only two rupees against their demand of 17 rupees.

The KDEWU is affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), a trade-union wing of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist).

### **Tamil Nadu medical college teachers demand pending wages**

Teaching staff at the Government Cuddalore Medical College in Cuddalore district held a protest march to the Annamalai University in Chidambaram on November 28 to demand the release of pending wages. At least 250 teaching staff had not been paid their October wages. The protesting teachers submitted a memorandum to the university vice chancellor with their demand.

### **Odisha state primary school teachers demand pay increase**

Odisha state primary school teachers demonstrated at the Mahatma Gandhi Marg in Bhubaneswar on November 27, demanding a wage increase in line with central government pay scales. They demanded annual raises and abolition of contract appointments. Contract teachers must currently work for six years before being eligible for a permanent position. Although they have similar qualifications, their wages are much lower than those of permanent teachers.

### **Pakistan: Islamabad health workers strike against privatisation**

Workers at the state-run Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad launched a strike on November 21, forcing the hospital to shut down its outpatient department and other non-emergency services. The strike is the latest in a series of actions by health workers to demand the Shehbaz Sharif government repeal the Medical Teaching Institution Ordinance, adopted in 2020.

The ordinance will force hospitals and other state-backed facilities to fund their own teaching institutions. Health workers fear the reforms are aimed at slashing federal government expenditure, winding back services and paving the way for privatisation. Their benefits as employees of the government are also at stake. The refusal of the country's president to sign an act sent to him in October that was purported to repeal the ordinance, ignited the strike.

The Imran Khan government that introduced the ordinance was defeated in parliament by a no-confidence vote in April. Facing growing opposition to the privatisation drive, the new government grudgingly passed an act to repeal the ordinance, pending the president's signature.

The Federal Health Alliance, a union representing government sector health workers, called the strike but continues to keep it isolated from the rest of the health sector. The unions, including those in the Grand Health Alliance, an umbrella organisation of several unions, have shut down strikes at the first opportunity and sought to divert workers' strong opposition to privatisation into appeals for compromise with the

government.

Under constant threat of defaulting on foreign debt payment, the government is implementing brutal cuts to public expenditure and dismantling the state sector, including health and education, to meet revenue and expenditure targets demanded by the International Monetary Fund.

### **Airport firefighters across Australia to strike for better pay and staffing levels**

Firefighters at 27 airports across Australia have given notice that they will stop work from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. on Friday, December 9. Members of the United Firefighters Union-Aviation Division (UFUAV) are in dispute with the government-owned Airservices Australia over its proposed new enterprise agreement.

More than 90 percent of around 800 UFUAV members voted last month to take industrial action, including strikes of between 2 and 24 hours as well as work bans.

Negotiations between Airservices Australia and the UFUAV began nearly a year ago. Firefighters rejected Airservices' pay increase offer of 11.5 percent over three years. This represents a massive pay cut in real terms, with official annual inflation currently at 7.3 percent.

The UFUAV is demanding a meagre 15 percent pay "rise" over three years, an increase in the employer's superannuation contribution and for minimum staffing level clauses to be written into the enterprise agreement.

The union said members had concerns over a national shortage of aviation firefighters which meant some airports were dangerously understaffed. During the COVID-19 pandemic Airservices slashed the jobs of 94 firefighters.

### **Queensland private hospital nurses protest low wages and unsafe workload**

Nurses and midwives at private hospitals owned by Uniting Health Care (UHC) in Brisbane walked off the job for one hour on November 25, at Wesley Hospital and St Andrew's hospital on Tuesday, demanding higher pay and increased staffing levels.

Members of the Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union (QNMU) are demanding wage parity with their counterparts in public hospitals, and pay increases that keep up with the increasing cost of living. They also want minimum nurse-to-patient ratios to address ongoing unsafe workloads.

QNMU members at St Vincent's Private Hospitals in Brisbane and Northside held two days of protests outside their hospitals in August to demand higher pay and safe ratios. This was followed a few weeks later by nurses and midwives from Greenslopes Private Hospital in Brisbane, owned by Ramsey Health, who demonstrated outside the hospital to demand a pay increase in line with inflation and nurse-to-patient ratios in line with safe staffing laws applied in Queensland's public hospitals.

Although these nurses and midwives at the various private hospitals are under different enterprise agreements, they are covered by the same union, the QNMU, which has isolated workers and prevented the development of a united campaign by private- and public-sector health workers for improved pay, conditions and staffing levels.

## **Queensland government construction and maintenance department workers strike**

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members at the Transport and Main Roads (TMR) RoadTek Carseldine depot in Brisbane walked off the job Monday and protested outside the depot. This is part of a long-running campaign by workers from three government construction and maintenance departments, demanding pay increases and better training for apprentices in a new enterprise agreement. ETU members in Townsville demonstrated in front of the Qbuild department office on November 25.

In October, workers from Qbuild, Qhealth and TMR demonstrated outside state parliament in Brisbane and Qbuild workers in Cairns walked off the job to protest low pay and lack of training for apprentices. The workers are covered by four unions, the Construction Forestry Mining Maritime and Energy Union (CFMMEU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Plumbers Union and the ETU.

ETU members from TMR walked out for a day across Queensland on September 12 after TMR workers 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.

## **Aged care provider Southern Cross Care Tasmania moves to sack enrolled nurses**

Southern Cross Care (SCC) Tasmania has moved to make 50 enrolled nurses (ENs) redundant across its nine Tasmanian aged care facilities. SCC ENs in South Australia also face the same fate.

The move by SCC follows the passing of two aged care bills by the federal Labor government in July, which delivered changes to the mix of direct care staff in aged care. The legislation mandates that a registered nurse (RN) be on duty for every shift at aged care facilities, and requires 40 minutes of care per patient, per day by RNs. However, the remaining 160 minutes of required care can be provided by personal care workers (PCWs), rather than ENs.

Southern Cross intends to replace its ENs with less qualified and lower paid PCWs under the supervision of a RN. SCC also plans to change the employment conditions of another 125 of its workers. They will now be required to obtain a Certificate III in Aged Care and provide direct care to residents in addition to continuing to work in their current specialist area.

The workers are covered by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU). The ANMF claimed that the new aged care laws have allowed aged care providers to “game the system to dilute the skill mix” boosting their top end profits at the expense of aged care workers’ jobs and patient care.

Following protests last week by angry ANMF and HACSU members, who are distressed about losing their jobs, the unions have attempted to put a lid on any further protests and have announced that the Albanese government is “highly concerned” about SCC’s planned staffing arrangements and was willing to meet the unions to discuss the staffing mix.

## **Industrial action by Woodside gas production workers in Western Australia enters sixth week**

Contract maintenance and construction workers employed on Woodside’s Pluto offshore LNG platform and the associated on-land Karratha Gas Project (KGP), in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, are entering their sixth week of low-level protected industrial action. The workers are in a dispute with contracting company UGL-IASIS over a new enterprise agreement.

The workers are covered by the Australian Workers Union, Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, under the banner of the Offshore Alliance (OA). Union members are currently voting in a protected action ballot to approve escalating their industrial action.

According to OA, UGL last year purchased IASIS with the purpose of employing workers under its “dodgy” non-union enterprise agreement, allowing UGL-IASIS to pay offshore workers just \$29.08 per hour—well below the industry standard.

Workers have overwhelmingly rejected a proposed agreement from UGL-IASIS on two occasions. The OA claims that the offer would see Fly-in Fly-out employees paid less at UGL than at rival contractor Monadelphous, and that UGL is seeking to reduce real wages and undercut site standards.

OA added that the proposed agreement would leave KGP workers thousands of dollars worse off than other KGP contractors and that UGL wants to unilaterally change their income protection policy however they like, severely affecting injured or sick workers in the process.

## **Coca-Cola plant workers in Victoria hold third strike over wages**

Twenty-six members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) at Coca-Cola’s Moorabbin factory in Melbourne walked off the job Thursday in their third 24-hour strike in as many weeks. Workers are seeking improved wages and conditions and the inclusion of on-site and workshop employees in a single new enterprise agreement.

Service technicians are currently employed under a separate non-union agreement, which expired in August. The company has similar agreements with its technicians at plants across Australia.

## **New Zealand journalists begin industrial action**

Journalists at New Zealand publisher Stuff have rejected a pay offer from the company and began taking industrial action this week. About 185 journalists who are members of the E T? union voted overwhelmingly in a secret ballot to stop work two hours before their shifts normally end over two days this past week, and to hold a 24-hour strike next week.

The company’s stable of mastheads includes the Stuff news website, the *Dominion Post*, *Sunday Star-Times* and the *Press*. It also publishes several regional and community newspapers. About half the workforce are members of E T?.

The union has been seeking minimum pay of \$55,000 a year, a switch to a system that would normally see journalists automatically progress to a higher level on a pay scale each year, and a minimum 7.25 percent pay rise to match inflation, except on any sum earned over \$100,000 a year.

The company has agreed to the first two demands and offered a pay rise that for union members would average out at 7 percent, with larger rises weighted towards those on lower pay.

## New Zealand primary school teachers reject government pay offer

Primary and area school teachers across New Zealand have rejected pay offers from the Labour government. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) said teachers had “unequivocally voted” against settling the collective agreements at a series of stop-work meetings held over the past two weeks.

NZEI president Liam Rutherford described the meetings as “robust and frank and pretty much unanimous” in rejecting the offer. However, Rutherford said that the Ministry of Education’s (MoE) offer simply “needs improvement,” indicating that the union is seeking to divert widespread opposition among teachers and aiming for a negotiated settlement.

The NZEI claim includes non-committal measures to reduce student-teacher ratios and increase non-contact time. On pay, there is only a vague and meaningless call for a “fair increase that recognises the current cost of living situation.”

The MoE offered primary and secondary teachers a flat \$4,000 rise with no backdating and \$2,000 next year. For most this is below 7 percent over two years, less than half the rate of inflation. The NZEI said it also failed to address reducing classroom ratios, fixing funding for learning support, reducing work demands and giving teachers “time to teach.”

The union declared that if the MoE offer does not improve in further negotiations, future action will include meeting with members of parliament and more union meetings in Term 1 next year, but it has announced no plans for strikes.

Secondary school teachers represented by Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) have begun a series of nationwide meetings this week to discuss their offer from the ministry.



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