

# 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.*

## China: Electronics factory workers in Guangdong province strike

About 1,100 workers from the Zhongshan Eurotec Electronics factory in China's Guangdong province went on strike on September 11 over more than 20 demands. The principal demands included a pay increase and an end to repeated security checks. Workers complained that they are forced to queue without pay for long periods each morning in order pass through security checks and to their workstations.

Workers said their wage has not increased in five years and that temporary workers often make more than full-time workers. They said the average wage for full-time workers is less than \$US500 a month and said that year-end bonuses were not paid.

Management opened extra lanes for security checks and announced that striking workers would be "written up," and after three marks on their employment record they would be terminated. A company notice on September 14 stated that 269 workers had been written up.

Zhongshan Eurotec Electronics produces electronic music recording and mixing equipment for Behring, in Germany.

## India: Bus conductors in Thane, Maharashtra strike over low pay

More than 300 contract bus conductors from Thane Municipal Transport (TMT), in Thane, Maharashtra, walked off the job without notice on September 15 over low pay. They did not resume work until Monday, following a meeting with municipal authorities. Details were not reported to the media.

The workers are employed by transport operating contractors Eagle Infrastructure and Apurva Mahila Sahakari Sanstha. Conductors, including 206 males and 125 females, demanded better wages and facilities. One female worker said that she was supposed to receive 22,000 rupees (\$US265) a month but after deductions she was only paid 10,000 rupees.

The conductors called off a strike planned for August 21 after TMT said it would take their demands to the Thane Municipal Corporation. Corporation authorities, however, wiped their hands of responsibility for the extremely low wages and lack of facilities, saying the issues were the responsibility of their employer.

## Rajasthan ambulance workers' strike enters fourth week

About 6,000 ambulance workers employed by EMRI-GHS, a private company that runs the government's 108 and 104 emergency ambulance services in Rajasthan state, have been on strike since September 1. Over 1,300 ambulances are off the road.

Workers are picketing depots to prevent newly appointed scabs doing their duties. EMRI-GHS has responded by terminating over 630 strikers and lodging police complaints against strikers in many districts.

Workers are demanding the government change their employment status and end the prevailing middleman system under which EMRI-GHS is paid hundreds of thousands of rupees per ambulance per month to cover fuel, maintenance and other expenses. The drivers, however, are only paid a paltry 8,000 rupees (\$US96) per month.

The workers' want to be put in the regular employment category which has increased job security and wages under contract labour law. Two rounds of talks with the government have failed to reach a consensus.

## Punjab long-distance bus workers strike for better pay and conditions

Contract workers from the state-owned bus companies Punjab Roadways PRTC and PUNBUS stopped work on Wednesday over delays in receiving an annual 5 percent pay rise. The 7,000 workers also want better working conditions. Workers refused to man all government buses for two hours in the afternoon and burned an effigy of the state's chief minister.

## Punjab rural health workers strike for higher pay and allowances

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers stopped work and held a protest march in Patiala from the Sirhind road grain market to the residence of the health minister on September 15. They ended the protest after getting an assurance from the minister that a meeting would be held next week.

Workers want an increase in their incentive as well as the implementation of the minimum wage. A union spokesperson demanded that ASHA workers also want maternity leave, state government life insurance up to 500,000 rupees and inclusion in the pension fund.

## Bangladeshi land port workers at Burimari strike over pay

Labour hire workers at the Burimari land port walked off the job on September 15 demanding that they not be paid through intermediaries who they claimed exploit them. The strike brought trade activities between India and Bangladesh to a halt.

The workers have repeatedly protested against labour intermediaries for their alleged misconduct, including failing to pay wages, payroll deductions, and unelected appointments on labour organisation committees.

Workers said wages must be paid directly through labour hire contractors, or their representatives, rather than through intermediaries. When the workers clashed with intermediaries over payment of wages and other issues on September 12 police used rubber bullets and tear gas, injuring 15, including two journalists.

When talks between their union, the Burimari Land Port Union of Sramik League, and authorities on September 17 failed, workers decided to continue their industrial action.

### **Sri Lankan development officers demand cost of living allowance**

Hundreds of development officers protested on Monday with several demands, including cost of living allowance of 20,000 rupees (\$US61), promotions and full payment of pensions which was stopped in 2016. Workers protested in Galle and Matara in the Southern province outside the respective district secretariats, and divisional secretariats. This included at Nochchiagama in Anuradhapura district.

The action followed protests held on August 30 in Matale and Dambulls in Central Province, as well as in Labuduwa, Southern Province over the same demands.

### **Inghams poultry processing plant workers strike**

About 1,000 United Workers Union (UWU) and Australian Manufacturing Union (AMWU) members from Inghams poultry processing plants in Western Australia (WA) and South Australia (SA) walked off the job for 24 hours on Friday to demand higher pay in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Inghams offered below-inflation wage increases in a three-year agreement of 3.9, 3.5 and 3.5 percent for its SA workers, and 3.85, 3.45 and 3.5 percent for its WA workers. The unions are demanding modest annual pay increases of 6 percent, which will not compensate for years of below inflation increases.

The unions also want the right for casual workers to convert to permanent employment after 6 months, which Inghams rejected. Other demands include full back-pay to the expiry of their previous agreement in January.

According to the UWU, many of its members at the company's Osborn Park plant in WA and Burton plant in SA are paid around \$25 an hour. This is just above Australia's minimum poverty wage of \$23.23 an hour. The union's pay demand would lift wages by \$1.50 an hour.

Inghams is Australia's largest poultry and feed processing company with operations in every state and in the Northern Territory. More than 8,000 workers operate 260 farms, eight hatcheries, eight feed mills, and twelve processing plants. It supplies processed chicken to Woolworths, Coles, Aldi, KFC, McDonald's and Subway. The company last month reported that revenue for fiscal 2023 rose 12.2 percent to \$3.04 billion and net profit lifted 72 percent to \$60.4 million.

### **Power generating workers in Queensland take industrial action**

About 200 workers from the Kogan Creek power generating station and associated mine, in the Darling Downs, west of Brisbane, began a series of industrial actions on Thursday in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The government-owned CS Energy plant provides 10 percent of Queensland's power generation capacity.

Members of the Mining and Energy Union (MEU), a division of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, shutoff conveyer belts feeding coal to the plant and put bans on working at height and in confined spaces. An MEU spokesperson said action next week would include running the plant at lower capacity in peak periods.

Workers, including operators, fitters, electricians and others, are seeking guarantees that they will not be replaced by contractors. The union wants CS Energy to report on the use of contract labour at its plants and to remove the current 75-week cap on redundancy payments. The Queensland Labor government plans to close all the state's coal fired power plants by 2035.

### **Infrabuild factory workers in New South Wales strike in pay dispute**

The Rail Tram and Bus Union, representing over 2,800 workers from Metro Trains Melbourne (MTM), has notified the company that its members will be taking strike action in October that will shut down Melbourne's commuter rail network.

Over 96 percent of rail signallers, train controllers, station and customer service staff and authorised officers have voted to approve taking industrial action. They will stop work between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Friday, October 6 and on Wednesday, October 11.

MTM and the rail union have been in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement since March. The current agreement expired in June. The union has rejected two offers by Metro Trains, labelling them "subpar."

MTM's last offer included a 4 percent pay rise each year over the four-year agreement. Although Melbourne's current inflation rate stands at 5.6 percent and MTM'S offer is a real pay cut, the union insisted that negotiations were not just about money but job security. Although train drivers are not involved in the action the rail network will still grind to a halt without other operational staff.

### **Australian Workers Union drags out Airbus Pacific wage dispute in New South Wales**

Despite 80 aircraft maintenance workers employed by Airbus Pacific at the RAAF air base at Richmond indicating their willingness to take action for a wage rise, the Australian Workers Union (AWU) has dragged out the dispute for over six months. The workers have not had a pay increase since August 2021.

An AWU spokesperson claimed that Airbus workers at RAAF bases in Brisbane, Townsville, Darwin and Sydney receive higher pay than their counterparts at Richmond.

Negotiations between the union and Airbus for a new enterprise agreement stalled in February when the company's sub-inflation 7.5

percent wage increase offer over three years was rejected by workers. The offer represented a real pay cut compared to the annual CPI rate which was over 7 percent at the time.

On March 1, workers unanimously approved taking industrial action and the AWU called for ad hoc one-hour stoppages and bans on overtime and work-to-rule with little effect on the company. The frustrated workers decided to walk off the job for 24 hours on September 15 in a desperate move to get an acceptable agreement. The union has not indicated if industrial action will be ratcheted up.

### **Woolworths supermarket workers begin nation-wide industrial action**

A group of workers from the supermarket giant Woolworths began the first ever national industrial action in a fight for higher wages and better conditions on Friday. The 276 workers are members of the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU). Woolworths has over 100,000 supermarket employees at 1,450 stores.

The industrial action includes bans on unloading trucks, attending management meetings, use of personal devices for work purposes, filling freezers, among others. Workers have endorsed taking strike action up to indefinite 24-hour stoppages. Bargaining between RAFFWU and Woolworths for a new enterprise agreement began on August 9 in the Fair Work Commission.

### **Cruise Whitsunday tourist boat workers in Queensland strike for pay increase**

About 60 workers employed by North Queensland tourist boat operator Cruise Whitsundays, a subsidiary of multinational cruising company Hornblower, have entered their second week of industrial action in their pay dispute. Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members stopped work on Wednesday and are refusing to charge passengers for alcohol or clean the vessels. Strikers have been picketing the company's offices.

Their previous enterprise agreement expired in March 2022. Workers rejected the company's draft replacement agreement that included a sub-inflation 3 percent wage increase for 2023 and no increase in 2024. The union claimed the offer amounted to between \$1 and \$1.50 per hour for a small percentage of staff, and that a lot of the company's employees are currently paid just one cent an hour above the minimum wage.

The workers' pay was frozen during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are now demanding a 30 percent pay rise to bring them on par with other operators doing the same or similar runs and charters. Cruise Whitsundays have refused to match the pay on offer by other companies.

### **Sunshine Coast University Hospital security staff strike**

Twenty-five protective service officers (PSOs) at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, in southeast Queensland, held a two-hour strike on Tuesday to protest dangerous understaffing, low wages and salary irregularities. The workers are members of the United Workers Union (UWU) and are employed by integrated services company Spotless.

PSOs alleged that Spotless runs crisis-level staffing below what is

needed to deal with ever increasing acts of violence putting at risk the safety of themselves, medical staff, patients and visitors.

The UWU has been trying to negotiate a new agreement with Spotless for nearly a year. Union members voted unanimously on August 29 to approve taking protected industrial action after rejecting the company's proposed agreement.

PSOs said they are determined to continue to escalate strike action until their wages and conditions are brought in line with government workers in other Queensland hospitals.



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