

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.

Protesting Bangladeshi apparel workers killed in brutal police attack

On Tuesday, two apparel factory workers were killed in Dhaka when police, allegedly backed by ruling Awami League party thugs, killed two workers and wounded 80 in an attack on thousands of apparel workers protesting for a wage rise. While the police fired teargas shells and sound grenades and charged with batons, the thugs attacked workers with bamboo and iron sticks.

The dead worker, Rasel Hawlader (26), was an electrician at Design Express Ltd in Gazipur. The cause of death of the other worker is yet to be established. Fearing equipment could be damaged in the spreading unrest, factory authorities shut down 200 factories under police supervision.

Workers from Gazipur, Savar, and Dhaka's Mirpur industrial zones began protesting on October 23 after factory owners at the Minimum Wages Board said they would lift the minimum monthly wage above 10,400 taka (\$US94.23). Workers are demanding a monthly minimum wage of 15,000 taka (\$US136), nearly double their current 8,000-taka rate, which was set in 2018.

The government and factory owners are determined to keep Bangladeshi garment workers' minimum wages below the poverty wages of garment workers in competing countries.

According to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, the minimum wage for garment workers is \$307 in Turkey, \$262 in China, \$250 in Malaysia, \$244 in the Philippines, \$194 in Cambodia, \$168 in Vietnam, \$137 in Indonesia and \$128 in India.

India: Haryana sanitation workers' strike in Gurugram city enters sixth week

Sanitation workers from the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) have been on strike since September 18 to demand cancellation of contract tenders and for the corporation to directly employ sanitation workers hired by existing agencies. The corporation has stopped paying strikers and is acting against those disrupting work.

The corporation sacked 3,480 workers in September and outsourced work to new private agencies. Strikers include permanent workers on corporation rolls and contract workers hired by agencies. MCG has hired six new agencies but their employees have joined the union and are on strike over the non-payment of salaries.

MCG has identified some of the protesting workers through photographs

and said it would soon be issuing termination letters to them for disrupting work. It has also hired private agencies, additional manpower, tractors, and trolleys to remove garbage that is piling up in the streets, without success.

Karnataka state school midday meal workers strike for better pay and conditions

Over 450 Karnataka school midday meal workers began an indefinite strike on Monday over long-pending demands. The strike has affected the supply of midday meals to schools in Koppal and Kolar districts. Their union, Akshara Dasoha Naukarara Sanga, said workers from Bagalkot will protest next and no food will be served in district schools.

They want a wage increase, 100,000-rupee (\$US1,201) pensions for those who were laid off after they turned 60 and compensation of 2.5 million rupees in case of death at the workplace. The union threatened that if the government does not fulfil demands by Diwali, the entire state's midday meal workers will stop their work post the festival.

Maharashtra social health workers strike for permanent jobs

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers have been on a state-wide strike since October 18. They want permanent jobs, a festival bonus of 5,000 rupees (\$US60), minimum wages, social security and withdrawal of compulsory online work.

Around 200 workers protested outside the Pune Municipal Corporation building on Monday as a part of the strike.

New Delhi government doctors protest

Doctors from the Indian Medical Association held a protest march from the Maulana Azad Medical College to Rajghat in Delhi on Sunday. They held banners saying, "End the silence, stop the violence," "No fight just treat us right," for better working conditions and a reduction in house tax by hospitals.

Agriculture produce distribution workers in Puducherry strike

Puducherry Agro Products and Civil Supplies Corporation (PAPSCO) employees stopped work on Monday and protested near the state legislature assembly. Workers raised slogans calling for the revival of the closed PAPSCO units and payment of pending wages. A spokesperson from the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) alleged that hundreds of workers had been working without salary for several months.

West Bengal tea plantation workers demand overdue wages

Dooars region tea plantation workers in West Bengal stopped work and demonstrated on October 26 demanding payment of long pending wages. Workers surrounded the manager's office entrapping him for several hours in support of their demands. Workers restarted their wage protest after the Durga Pooja, a Hindu festival in Bengal region held in September-October.

Pakistan: Punjab University teachers strike for service structure

Punjab University teachers held a sit-down demonstration outside the Higher Education Commission (HEC) building in Islamabad on Tuesday. They were protesting non-issuance of a service structure and promotion policy for teachers serving under the Basic Pay Scales in public sector universities. Protesters said the HEC had falsely promised to issue the notifications.

Teachers said they would maintain their actions until they get the notifications. They resumed the protest on Wednesday morning.

Pakistan Railway workers threaten nation-wide “wheel-jam” over unpaid salaries

Pakistan Railway workers on Tuesday stopped trains from departing from Rawalpindi for over two hours in protest over the non-payment of salaries for two months. They threatened that if salaries were not cleared by November 2 trains across the country will be stopped.

The action was called by the Carriage and Wagon Staff Association of Pakistan Railways and Labour Alliance. Workers said they were facing poverty and unable to meet their kitchen expenses like school fees, electricity and gas bills, or purchase daily use items.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government health workers protest

Health workers of the Class-IV Employees Union established a protest camp at the Government City Hospital at Lakki Marwat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on October 28 to demand health professional allowance for Class-IV employees like doctors and paramedics. Other demands were for time scale promotions, service structure and restoration of “son's quota”, enabling the children of Class-IV employees to get employment in the health department.

They held a protest march on the Old Kutchery Road holding banners and placards inscribed with their demands.

Filipino gig food delivery riders strike against rate cut

About 200 Grab food delivery riders held a one-day strike and “unity” ride around the Quezon Memorial Circle in metro Manila on October 25. They displayed signs on their motorcycle delivery boxes demanding higher fares and genuine compensation. Riders also are seeking comprehensive insurance coverage, social protections and union recognition.

The National Union of Food Delivery Riders called the strike to protest a fare decrease scheduled to start that day. Grab's new rate will reduce the base fare from 45 to 35 pesos per order and with the per kilometre compensation cut from 10 to 7 pesos.

The rally is the second in a week, with more than 80 drivers protesting on October 19 at the Boy Scout Circle in Metro Manila. Some riders who took part in the rallies reported that their Grab accounts were suspended or terminated.

Taiwan government childcare workers protest low pay and long work hours

About 10,000 childcare workers from government-owned day-care centres and supporters demonstrated outside the Presidential Office in Taipei on October 28 in opposition to the high number of privately-run centres which they said is contributing to poor working conditions, low pay and long work hours.

The Childcare Policy Alliance demanded better working conditions and urged the government to play a larger role in the industry. The alliance alleged that private day-care centres outnumber public centres by a ratio of seven to three making it difficult to elevate the quality of care, as commercial operators are incentivised to cut corners for profit. The Alliance also alleged that private centres accept more than the maximum number of children allowed by the law, hire people who lack professional credentials and maintain phony teacher-to-child ratios.

Sydney Water maintenance workers apply bans in pay dispute

Australian Services Union (ASU) members at state government-owned Sydney Water applied work bans on Monday in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Bans, which include refusing paperwork needed for development applications, and stopping work needed to connect sewer and water mains at major housing and industrial developments, are affecting services in the Sydney, Blue Mountains and Illawarra regions. Workers are also refusing to do maintenance work, help or support contractors, and stop repairs arising from contractor work.

Negotiations for a new agreement covering over 1,000 Sydney Water workers began in August. Workers want 6 percent annual pay increases. They rejected Sydney Water's initial offer of an 11 percent increase over three years, which included a 4 percent rise in the first year, plus a one-off cost-of-living payment of \$2,000.

Woolworths supermarket workers hold Australia wide strike

Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) members at nine Woolworths' supermarkets across Australia walked off the job for four hours on the weekend in their fight for improved safety, a "living wage" and job security in a new enterprise agreement.

The industrial action followed nationwide bans by about 300 RAFFWU members in September. These included bans on unloading trucks, attending management meetings, use of personal devices for work purposes and filling freezers.

Bargaining between RAFFWU and Woolworths for a new agreement began on August 9 in the Fair Work Commission. RAFFWU claimed that Woolworths are refusing to agree on a meeting date.

Industrial action by B&D Doors workers in Victoria in 13th week

Thirty Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members at the Kilsyth workshop of B&D Doors in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs, have been holding ad hoc 24-hour strikes since August 2 in their fight for an improved pay offer. The workers walked off the job again on Wednesday.

The union claimed that management is refusing to negotiate after workers rejected a pay rise offer six months ago of 9 percent over three years.

Workers' last increase was in July last year and only 2.5 percent, well below the annual consumer price index. The AMWU has indicated it would settle for a sub-inflation pay raise of 12 percent over three years with a sign-on bonus.

Submarine manufacturing workers in Western Australia strike for pay rise

Workers from the submarine builder ASC Tradeplanners Group at Henderson, in Western Australia, walked off the job for 24 hours on October 26 to demand improvements in the company's enterprise agreement offer. Members of the Electrical Trades Union and the AMWU want a higher pay offer, a better redundancy package, including next of kin payments, and extended sick leave.

South32 alumina refinery workers in Western Australia locked out

About 90 members of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union and AMWU employed by maintenance contractor SRG at the South32 Worsley Refinery in Western Australia were locked out on Monday after striking against the SRG's proposed agreement. Workers voted down the company's initial offer on October 24 and at a stop work meeting endorsed taking further strike action.

The unions said workers want a more comprehensive agreement that recognises the work they undertake onsite, cost of-living increases and fairer allowances and conditions.

Canberra Hospital radiographers extend industrial action to three weeks

Following several rounds of short duration industrial action beginning on October 11, Canberra Hospital Services' Medical Imaging Department radiographers began three weeks of industrial action on October 27. Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members will not do any overtime work as part of the action.

The health professionals are fighting against the chronic understaffing in all departments. The union claimed that after 18 months of negotiations, the Australian Capital Territory Labor-Greens government and Canberra Health Services have not offered any improvements to pay and conditions that would keep allied health workers in Canberra.

The CPSU alleged that the medical imaging service, as well as the broader health service in Canberra, are losing staff because they are unable to compete with the pay and conditions of public health service workers in other jurisdictions.

Radiologists in Victoria strike for improved pay offer

This week 36 medical imaging workers employed by Lake Imaging Ballarat in Victoria began a campaign of protected industrial action with a two-hour work stoppage, bans, and a rally outside the St John of God Hospital in Ballarat.

The strikers are members of the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA) and are in dispute over wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement, including low staffing levels. The VAHPA said negotiations had stalemated.

In July, more than 91 percent of VAHPA members approved a campaign of protected industrial action, including bans on overtime and wearing uniforms and strike action from 5 minutes to 24 hours. The workers' last pay rise was in March 2022 when the VAHPA approved a sub-inflation wage rise of only 3 percent.



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