

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.

South Korea: Seoul Metro workers strike over job cuts and outsourcing

Workers at Seoul Metro held a two-day “warning” strike on Seoul Subway Lines 1 to 8 from 9 a.m. Thursday to 6 p.m. Friday in opposition to management’s plan to downsize and outsource safety personnel. Following more than ten rounds of unsuccessful negotiations that began on July 11, 81 percent of union members who participated in a ballot approved taking strike action.

The workers are represented by a collective negotiation team, comprising representatives of the Korean Public Service and the Transport Workers’ Union under the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Korean Public Trade Unions.

The unions did a deal with management to minimise the effect of the strike which will effectively drag out the dispute. They agreed not to strike during peak hours and to maintain 82 percent of services. The Federation of Korean Trade Unions did not participate in the strike, although they took part in the negotiations.

Seoul Metro claims it has suffered massive deficits for years and must cut at least 2,211 jobs, or 13.5 percent of its total labour force by 2026 to reduce costs.

The unions alleged that the cost-cutting plan includes outsourcing safety-related duties and will directly jeopardise safety. They said that, out of 383 outsourcing duties, 75 percent are related to personnel at the subway’s general control centre, which is crucial for maintaining safe operations.

This is not the first time these workers have taken strike action over the job cuts. In November last year, the unions shut down a strike by Metro workers after 14 hours, claiming to have “secured a promise” from management that it would not proceed with its downsizing plan.

India: Strike by 10,000 Bihar state childcare workers enters seventh week

About 10,000 Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers from 5,000 childcare centres in Bihar state have been on strike since September 29 demanding a pay increase. Police used water cannons and batons in an attempt to break up their demonstration in front of the Bihar state assembly in Patna on Tuesday. Several protesters were arrested.

Anganwadi workers are fighting for a charter of five demands, which

include a salary instead of the honorarium, the status of government employee and increase in their retirement age. Another demand is that the monthly wage for both workers and helpers be increased to 27,000 rupees (\$US324) and 18,000 rupees respectively. Currently they are paid a poverty wage of 5,900 and 2,700 rupees a month respectively.

Retrenched General Motors India workers in Pune maintain hunger protest for reinstatement

About 1,000 retrenched workers from General Motors India’s shuttered plant at Talegaon near Pune in Maharashtra state, are continuing a hunger protest begun on October 2. They want reinstatement at the plant which has been sold to Hyundai Motor India. Hyundai refused to absorb the existing GM workers as part of its deal to acquire the Talegaon plant.

The workers’ health is deteriorating, and they are facing harassment and intimidation from the police and plant management. They have appealed to the public and the media to support their cause and pressure the authorities to act.

The General Motors Employees Union (GMEU) has been ineffective in its attempt to get the government to intervene and has abandoned the workers. The workers hope the Maharashtra state government will intervene and ensure their employment at the plant, which is expected to start production by 2024.

Tamil Nadu Salt Corporation workers strike for increased bonus

Tamil Nadu Salt Corporation (TNSC) workers at Valinokkam, in Ramanathapuram district, walked off the job on Monday on indefinite strike demanding the government increase their bonus from 10 to 20 percent.

The workers are affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), which argued that other public sector undertakings received 20 percent bonuses and TNSC workers should be entitled to the same. CITU threatened that workers would resort to road blockades if the government continued to ignore their demand.

The TNSC operates three salt works at Valinokkam, Vedaranyam and Tuticorin. It produces iodised salt, double-fortified salt, refined salt and industrial salt.

Women Emergency Helpline workers in Uttar Pradesh demand better pay and conditions

Around two hundred contract workers from the 112 Women Emergency Helpline demonstrated for a second day in Lucknow on November 7 over low pay and other issues. Police intervened and arrested the protesters and removed them in police vans.

Demands were for a wage increase from 12,000 rupees (\$US144) to 18,000 rupees a month, two paid holidays per month, one government holiday per month and job security. Protesters said they had not had a pay increase for seven years.

Uttarakhand state forest workers protest overdue wages

Around 500 forest department workers, including guards, demonstrated in Dehradun on Monday protesting the non-payment of wages for the past eight months and failure of the government to honour a previous commitment to provide promotions. The Uttarakhand Forest Guard Union organised the protest.

Sunshine Coast University Hospital security staff hold second strike against low wages and unsafe staffing

Protective service officers (PSOs) at the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, in southeast Queensland, stopped work for one hour on Monday to protest dangerous understaffing, low wages and salary irregularities. The 25 workers are members of the United Workers Union (UWU) and employed by integrated services company Downer/Spotless.

PSOs alleged that Downer/Spotless' crisis-level staffing is below what is needed to deal with ever increasing acts of violence, putting at risk the safety of themselves, medical staff, patients and visitors.

Negotiations for improved conditions in a new enterprise agreement have dragged on for a year. Union members voted unanimously in August to approve taking protected industrial action after rejecting the company's proposed agreement. The union has not indicated what percentage pay increase it wants, except to say that workers want a pay increase that puts them on par with security officers in the public health system.

Downer, which bought out Spotless, is listed on the Australian Stock Exchange 200. It recorded a profit after tax of \$174 million last financial year.

Australian Public Service workers hold strike again for improved pay offer

Over 200 members of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), namely meat inspectors and vets supervising abattoir operations, struck for the last one hour of their shift on Wednesday. The strike impacted mainly on the meat export sector.

The limited action was part of broader industrial action by CPSU members after they rejected the federal government's pay offer of 11.2 percent over three years in September. The union wants a 20 percent pay rise over three years. The government has offered 4 percent, 3.8 percent in the second year and 3.4 percent in the third year. The offer is a below inflation offer meaning workers would need a pay increase of 16.2 percent just to keep pace with inflation.

On October 9, CPSU members from Services Australia, with a 32,000 strong workforce, struck for 24 hours affecting welfare, health insurance and pharmaceutical benefits services. After rejecting the government's initial pay offer in August of 10.5 percent over three years, CPSU members at Centrelink, which processes welfare payments, imposed a two-week ban on administrative procedures. That action was followed by a one-hour strike on August 15 demanding an improved pay offer.

CPSU members at five Australian Public Service agencies are in dispute for a higher pay offer and against cuts to conditions such as rights to nominate start and finish times and lunch breaks.

RWC factory workers in Queensland strike for better pay

About 60 workers from Reliance Worldwide Corporation (RWC), a plumbing equipment manufacturer, walked out of the company's plant at Eagle Farm, a suburb of Brisbane, on November 1 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members want a "fair" pay offer and new work categories that compensate them for taking on additional skills and responsibilities.

Cleanaway liquid waste collection workers at Padstow, New South Wales strike

Following two 24-hour strikes in September, Transport Workers Union (TWU) members from the Cleanaway Liquid Waste Services depot at Padstow, an inner-west Sydney suburb, walked off the job for 48 hours on November 4 in opposition to the company's attempt to strip back pay and conditions in its proposed enterprise agreement.

The action followed strikes by hundreds of Cleanaway waste collection workers in most state capital cities this year in opposition to the company's proposed cost-cutting agreements. The TWU is negotiating new agreements at Cleanaway depots which has contracts with 130 local councils and 150,000 business customers across Australia. It runs 5,000 waste collection trucks. Cleanaway depots are all covered by separate agreements.

The TWU has kept each dispute isolated and dragged them out by minimising strike action to between 24 and 48 hours.

New Zealand early childhood teachers strike

Over 100 early childhood education (ECE) centres across New Zealand closed on Wednesday after teachers voted to strike for the first time, seeking better pay and support from the government.

The teachers are part of the Early Childhood Education Collective Agreement (ECECA). Negotiations with the Ministry of Education have stalled, with the government not offering the level of funding needed for non-profit ECEs to function.

A spokesperson from the New Zealand Educational Institute, said the current funding model is a "one-size-fits-all" that is not fit for purpose. ECE funding and policy settings have been unstable through successive governments, which has had a disproportionate impact on ECE centres. ECE teachers' pay lags by up to 52 percent behind kindergarten and primary teachers with the same skills, qualifications and responsibilities.



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