

# 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.*

## India: Andhra Pradesh contract tourist workers strike for permanent jobs

Over 260 contract workers from the state-owned Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation began an indefinite strike on November 11 to demand permanent jobs, better wages and incentives. Workers at tourist sites in Araku, Borra Caves, Anantagiri, Tyda and Lambasingi also held protests.

The strike was called by the AP Tourism Contract, Manpower, Daily-Wage Employees and Workers Union after corporation management claimed they could not resolve workers' grievances until March 2024. Workers demanded that their grievances be resolved immediately.

## Bangalore Municipal Corporation sanitation workers protest

Bangalore Municipal Corporation contract sanitation workers (pourakarmikas) held a state-wide protest on November 15. The workers were demanding that they be made permanent and for the contract system to be abolished. Workers, including drivers, helpers, loaders and cleaners who collect, transport and dispose of waste, demonstrated outside of the office of the district minister-in-charge in all districts.

The sweepers, after years of struggle, were placed under the direct payment system in 2017. Other sanitation workers, however, are still hired under sham contracts. The protest was organised by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions.

## Tamil Nadu TASMAC warehouse workers demand wage rise

Headload workers at the alcohol warehouses of Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) demonstrated across Tamil Nadu on Wednesday to demand a pay increase. The TASMAC Head Loaders Association, which is affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, want their wages increased from 5.5 to 9 rupees (\$US0.11) and from 4 to 8 rupees for every carton loaded and unloaded between the trucks and warehouses.

The workers are directly employed by the state-run corporation but are not government employees and do not have job security or benefits.

TASMAC has a monopoly over wholesale and retail vending of alcoholic beverages and controls the Indian Made Foreign Liquor trade throughout the state.

## India: Women Emergency Helpline workers in Uttar Pradesh end strike without resolution

On Tuesday, about 700 hundred contract employees from the 112 Women Emergency Helpline in Lucknow ended a strike they began on November 7 after accepting a verbal assurance from Ahhilesh Yadav, the opposition leader in the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly. Yadav promised that the workers' grievances would be raised in the assembly.

The workers wanted their monthly wage increased from 12,000 rupees (\$US144) to 18,000 rupees, two paid holidays per month, one government holiday per month and job security. They said they had not had a pay increase for seven years.

## VSP steel workers in Andhra Pradesh continue anti-privatisation protests

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) workers held a protest bike rally from the steel plant to Vijayawada on Tuesday to demand the Modi government revoke its plan to privatise the steel plant. The workers rallied at a Praja Rakshana Bheri public meeting in Vijayawada the next day. The protest was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

The government has approved a 100 percent disinvestment of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited, VSP's corporate entity, and for private management of the steel plant. Widely supported demonstrations against privatisation have been ongoing since February 2021.

## Train sanitation workers strike at Puri railway station in Odisha

Hundreds of sanitation workers who clean and wash trains at the Puri railway station in Odisha stopped work on Tuesday and held a sit-down protest outside the office of the chief depot officer to demand payment of the minimum wage and a bonus.

The 365 striking workers are employed by a private company and have been working at the station for several years. They said they will maintain the protest until demands are met.

## **Sri Lankan public health inspectors boycott dengue control activities**

Members of the Public Health Inspectors' Union across Sri Lanka stopped carrying out dengue control activities on Wednesday, citing the government's failure to respond to their grievances. All dengue control activities, including tracing patients and fogging, have ceased.

One of the workers' demands is for an increase of the mileage and transport allowances for field duties. They said that the rising cost of fuel and motorcycle maintenance had drastically eroded the allowances they are paid.

The island is facing a significant dengue outbreak with cases soaring. Sri Lanka has so far logged a total of 71,800 dengue cases and 44 deaths. According to health authorities, cases are expected to further increase owing to prevailing rainy conditions.

## **Maritime workers continue industrial action at DP World**

Over 1,500 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) at DP World container terminals in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle have been holding rolling two-hour stoppages and work bans since October 6. They are opposing cuts to pay and conditions in DP World's proposed enterprise deal.

The MUA notified DP World last week that its members will be holding 35 separate strikes at its terminals from November 13 to 27. Action will range from one-hour work stoppages to a full-day strike in Sydney on Friday. Bans have been put in place on the working of a number of ships belonging to major shipping lines.

Negotiations for a new agreement covering the four ports began in April. According to the union, the company wants to cut wages by up to 32 percent, undermine job security, and introduce a flexible rostering system that will require its members to work 65 Saturday or Sunday shifts a year, up from the current 52.

Workers want cost-of-living pay rises of at least 7.3 percent this year, which they say is the same granted to Patrick Stevedores employees in January. The union claims that DP World is already paying 10 percent less than other stevedores.

The MUA's industrial action is designed to cause minimum disruption to DP World's operations, with the company still able to process at least 4,000 containers per day during the industrial action, compared to 6,000 during normal operations. DP World has refused to return to negotiations until industrial action is called off.

Shipping Australia has written to Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke urging him to order the MUA members back to work, claiming that the industrial action is causing an estimated direct economic loss to the wider economy of \$10.1 million a day.

## **Australian Public Service workers extend strike for improved pay offer**

Australian Public Service (APS) employees who are members of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) have extended ongoing strike action to include a two-hour strike by over 750 workers at the Fair Work Ombudsman and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on Tuesday.

The action followed a strike by 200 members from the Department of

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries last week and work bans and limited strikes in October at Services Australia, which handles welfare, health insurance and pharmaceutical benefits services.

CPSU members rejected the federal Labor 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 annual increases of 4, 3.8 and 3.4 percent. The below-inflation offer would mean that workers would need a pay increase of 16.2 percent over three years just to keep pace with inflation.

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. In a protected action ballot that closed on Monday, 85 percent of members at the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission approved taking industrial action that includes strikes from 1 to 24 hours and a ban on working overtime.

## **Virgin Australia cabin and ground crew to vote on striking action for higher wages**

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), representing a portion of Virgin Australia's cabin crew, applied on Monday to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to ballot members on whether to take strike action for higher pay. It follows Virgin's cancellation of negotiations over the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

In February, Virgin offered its staff a below-inflation pay rise of only 2.5 percent, which was rejected, with workers saying the offer was an insult. On November 5, TWU reported back to members that at its last meeting Virgin did not have a revised wage offer or improved classification structure, with no guarantees or real improvements on any key issues for cabin crew.

TWU Virgin ground crew members have received approval from the FWC to hold a protected action ballot. The union claimed that in negotiations with its ground handlers last month, Virgin offered 3 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement.

Fatigue is a major issue for Virgin cabin crew, as well as pilots and ground crew. Cabin crew complained about the poor rostering system, unrealistic turnaround times and high staff turnover which have led to crew missing breaks. They claimed that successive pay freezes and cuts have caused many to seek second or third jobs to pay the bills. Other issues workers raised were job insecurity and unsafe conditions.

## **B&D Doors factory workers in Victoria remain on strike**

Thirty Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) 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 Monday and have not returned to work.

The AMWU claimed that management is refusing to negotiate after workers rejected a pay rise offer six months ago of 9 percent over three years. The company has refused to improve on the offer unless workers accept dictated productivity increases.

The workers' last pay increase negotiated by the union was in July last year and only 2.5 percent, which was a real pay cut compared to Melbourne's CPI at the time of 6.1 percent. The AMWU has indicated it would settle for another real pay cut offer of 4 percent annual increases

with a sign-on bonus. Current CPI for Melbourne is 4.9 percent.

### **RWC factory workers in Queensland hold third strike for higher 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. It was their third strike to demand higher pay. AMWU members struck on November 1 and 9 over the issue.

The workers' last pay increase in June 2022 was a 3.75 percent below-inflation rise. The AMWU has not given details of what it will settle for, except to say members want a "fair" pay offer and new work categories that compensate them for taking on additional skills and responsibilities.

### **Hinchinbrook Shire Council workers in Queensland strike**

About a dozen outdoor workers from the Hinchinbrook Shire Council (HSC), on Queensland's north coast, stopped work on Tuesday and demonstrated outside the mayor's office in Ingham to demanding an improved pay increase offer. Council locked the workers out for one day last week when they began industrial action. Some workers were left stranded 11 kilometres out of town.

The council has refused to negotiate with the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and is attempting to force the dispute into the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for mediation. In September, members of The Services Union (TSU), which represents administrative workers, rejected the council's offer of annual pay increases in a three-year pay agreement of 4, 3.75 and 3.5 percent. The current inflation rate for Queensland is close to 6 percent.

### **New Zealand senior doctors' union agrees to pay deal**

The union covering New Zealand's senior hospital doctors and dentists, the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS), has reached agreement to settle a long-running pay dispute after mediation.

In September 5,500 doctors and dentists took unprecedented strike action, walking off the job three times for two hours each. It was the first national strike by these health workers. Further strike action planned for October was cancelled after the union and Te Whatu Ora Health NZ agreed to facilitate bargaining in the Employment Relations Authority (ERA).

ASMS executive director Sarah Dalton and president Julian Vyas told members in a newsletter last week they had agreed to settle in accordance with the ERA's recommendation. Neither party would comment publicly on the details until ASMS members had seen them. An indicative ballot is currently being held over the proposed terms of settlement.

The ASMS had sought pay increases of 6 to 8 percent over the coming year, which is barely in line with current inflation and does not make up for what ASMS says was an 11 percent pay cut, in real terms, over the last two years.

A separate health sector pay dispute by medical laboratory workers against private provider Awanui labs remains unresolved. Wellington-based lab workers struck for two hours and picketed outside the capital's regional hospital on Friday.



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