# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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**Protesting Bangladeshi factory workers attacked by industrial police**

Tens of thousands of garment workers, joined by pharmaceutical and shoe factory workers, have been protesting since the beginning of September with multiple demands. Over 100 factories in Ashulia and Gazipur industrial areas have stopped production. Protesters are being attacked by industrial police supported by the army and border guards.

On Tuesday, authorities of garment factories in Gazipur declared a holiday at 25 factories and production was halted in 74 garment factories in Ashulia area. Workers who came to the factories refused to work and staged demonstrations inside their facilities.

Demands include a wage rise, improvements in working conditions, maternity leave payments, an annual wage increase, quality foods, stopping of authorities' abuses, stopping unjustified terminations and removal of certain managers.

Factories affected were Amtranet Group in Tongi, Pinaki Group, Dress Man Limited, Noman Group, SM Knitwear Limited, Asrotex Limited, Meghna Group's High Fashion, among others.

**Bangladesh: National Tea Company workers demand unpaid wages**

Hundreds of tea garden workers from the state-owned National Tea Company have been holding one-hour strikes and protests since September 5 demanding unpaid wages.

The Bangladesh Tea Workers Union said that wages are not being paid in any of the National Tea Company's tea gardens. One worker said that most employees had not been paid for 21 days, that their ration and medical services had stopped and that their provident fund had not been paid for 15 months.

A tea garden manager in Kamalgani told the media that the management board of the company was dissolved due to the change of government. The board was headed by a relative of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

**India: Samsung workers in Tamil Nadu strike for better wages and union rights**

Workers from South Korea's Samsung electronics factory at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, began an indefinite strike on Monday with a charter of 33 demands that included higher wages and the right to form a union.

The 1,700 workers are members of the Samsung India Workers Union, which is affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions. It is the first strike in 16 years at the factory, which produces air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines and other consumer goods.

Workers say that conditions at the plant violate labour practices, including being in isolated dimly lit rooms for whole shifts that can lead to loss of sight in broad daylight. They accused Samsung of victimisation by forcibly transferring workers and union leaders.

The Sriperumbudur factory contributes between 20 and 30 percent of Samsung's annual $12 billion revenue in India.

**Tamil Nadu fishing net factory workers protest poor wages and conditions**

Workers from a privately-owned fishing net factory in Ponneri, near Chennai, Tamil Nadu, demonstrated outside the village administrator's office on Wednesday, supported by family members. The protest was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

The action followed a 48-hour strike last month for better working conditions and the right to form a union. Workers complained that the company forces employees to sign statements pledging not to join a union or report accidents at the plant, even if they are fatal.

**Maharashtra road commuter transport workers' union ends strike**

The unions representing striking workers from the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) called off their strike after only 24 hours on September 4 without fully winning workers' demands.

Thousands of MSRTC workers, including conductors, drivers and workshop mechanics, walked off the job on September 3 after talks between the corporation and the Maharashtra State Transport Union's joint action committee failed to meet their demand for a 7,000-rupee pay rise. In talks with management the unions accepted a lesser pay increase of 6,500 rupees and abruptly ended the strike.

**Australian Qube Ports workers take action for pay rise**

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More than 380 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) at Qube Ports bulk-handling facilities in Melbourne, Port Kembla and Brisbane banned overtime, work reassignments and other management demands this week.

After negotiations for a new enterprise agreement, which started last October, failed to reach agreement, workers voted unanimously on August 20 to approve industrial action. This includes strikes lasting from 1 to 24 hours, bans on overtime and pre shift starts, call-ins and on nominated shipping lines.

The MUA says its members' wages have declined by 14 percent in real terms while Qube profits have risen by 148 percent over the same period of the previous enterprise agreement.

**BAE Systems aircraft parts manufacturing workers strike in South Australia**

More than 100 workers from the BAE Systems Joint Strike Fighter Advanced Machining Facility in Edinburgh, South Australia, struck for 24 hours on Tuesday for better pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The strike by Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members shut down three shifts that make missiles, rockets and parts for the F-35 fighters.

The AMWU claimed that pay rises over the last four years have been well below current cost-of-living increases and below the government's basic wage rise of 5.75 percent. BAE workers' pay increases over the same period was only 5 percent.

**Australian Clinical Labs workers in Western Australia strike for higher pay**

About 170 Health Services Union-Western Australia (HSUWA) members, walked out for four hours at Australian Clinical Labs (ACL) in Perth on Thursday to demand an improved pay offer in ACL's proposed enterprise agreement. The action by phlebotomists, scientists, laboratory technicians and assistants, couriers and administrative staff followed four months of negotiations and rejection of a sub-inflation wage rise offer. HSUWA claimed ACL has refused to improve on its original offer.

The strike is the first by ACL workers who the union said are currently paid a little over WA's wholly inadequate award rates. HSU threatened that further industrial action is to be voted on if ACL fails to meet its members demands for an above cost of living wage rise.

**Western Australian public hospital pharmacists walk out**

Western Australia's public hospital pharmacists walked off the job on Wednesday morning and held stop work meetings outside their hospitals in their campaign for an improved work agreement that includes career pathway reform and higher wages. The 750 workers involved, including pharmacy technicians and assistants, are members of the Health Services Union WA branch. This is the first time they have taken mass industrial action in support of their demands after twice rejecting new work agreement offers from the state Labor government.

The pharmacists want the current pay scales reformed, in line with their broadened roles and to reverse falling workforce retention rates. Pharmacist managers say they are losing 10 percent of their staff a year as cost-of-living pressures, professional insurance and ongoing training costs rise. The union said further stoppages are being planned.

**CSR fibre cement factory workers in New South Wales demand increased pay**

About 50 workers at the CSR fibre cement factory in Sydney walked off during three shifts on September 6 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. United Workers Union members voted unanimously in July to approve taking protected industrial action saying they want a fair increase, fair rostering practises and a better future.

**Super Retail Group warehouse workers oppose cuts in Victoria**

About 150 warehouse workers at the Super Retailer Group (SRG) distribution centre in Victoria went on strike Monday to oppose the company's attempt to drastically cut conditions and introduce a two-tier wage system in a new agreement. United Workers Union (UWU) members voted in late July by a large majority to take industrial action, including strikes and a ban on the loading of trucks.

According to the UWU, SRG wants to reduce rates for casuals and new starters, increase job insecurity and reduce access to redundancy allowances as the company prepares to relocate and automate its warehouse distribution. The UWU said industrial action is also to be held by SRG workers in New South Wales and Queensland.

SRG warehouses move stock for well-known brands such as Rebel Sport, Supercheap Auto and Macpac. The union claimed that since negotiations began in April, SRG has failed to make a fair pay offer, despite an expansion in its operations and a highly profitable year, with record sales of $3.9 billion and a net profit of $242 million. SRG workers should read how Labor and the UWU are assisting management slash thousands of warehouse workers jobs (see: "Australian prime minister hails opening of highly automated grocery warehouse").

**Tasmanian child safety and youth justice workers strike over staffing**

Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members from Tasmania's Child Safety Services and Youth Justice in Hobart stopped work for four hours on September 4 calling on the state Liberal government to increase wages and fix chronic understaffing. The action followed a state-wide one-hour stoppage on August 14 followed by another one-hour stoppage in Launceston a week later. Workers say they have had to struggle with the staff shortage for years.

Government data shows frontline worker vacancy rates across the state were 22 percent in the north, 32.5 percent in the north-west and 13.3 percent in the south.

The government says it will introduce an emergency workforce plan that includes two $5,000 payments and a 15 percent market allowance for Child Safety Officers, Allied Health Professionals in the Advice and Referral Line and additional Youth Justice jobs in the state's northwest. The commitment, however, excludes child safety support workers, youth

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workers, youth justice workers, unit coordinators and other essential frontline workers.

Tasmania's treasurer handed down the state's 2024/25 budget in parliament on Thursday. He announced that the government is extending its "efficiency dividend" to a fourth year and want departments to find an additional $150 million in savings, above the $300 million expected over three years.

**ASC submarine maintenance workers in South Australia still taking action**

About 350 workers from the government-owned ASC submarine maintenance and sustainment facility at the Osborn Naval Shipyard in Adelaide have been taking industrial action since May in their campaign for a new work agreement. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union have been trying to negotiate a deal with ASC since November.

On September 5, the unions organised a protest by 200 workers on the steps of Parliament House in Adelaide demanding "to be heard." Workers held a four-day strike two weeks ago, preceded by rolling one-hour stoppages each morning and work bans.

The highly skilled workers want pay parity with their colleagues in Perth, Western Australia, who do submarine repair and maintenance but are paid 17 percent more. ASC has only offered a 6.75 percent pay rise.

The AMWU claimed that ASC CEO Stuart Whiley, who recently received a 31 percent pay increase, has refused to negotiate on pay parity. His pay rise lifted his salary to $1,084,725 a year.

**Auriga Aviation maintenance engineers in Western Australia strike**

Helicopter maintenance engineers from Auriga Aviation in Western Australia stopped work for 22 hours on Thursday over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The 12 Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers' Association (ALAEA) members want industry standard pay rates and conditions. ALAEA claimed Auriga Aviation is the lowest paying helicopter company in the industry.

**New Zealand supermarket workers strike nationwide**

Thousands of workers at Woolworths, one of New Zealand's two major supermarket chains, walked out on Tuesday in their first ever national stoppage. The workers struck and protested between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. at 190 stores across the country. A rally of some 20 Auckland Woolworths stores' workers took place outside the Ponsonby store.

A First Union spokesman said the union had negotiated for 13 days but was "still miles apart" from the company on pay, safety and staffing. The company had offered "minimal wage increases below the rising household cost of living" and refused to address "systemic understaffing."

In a survey, 70 percent of union members said their wages were not enough to cover living costs. Michelle McKenzie, a duty supervisor in Christchurch told *Stuff*: "A lot of our team are really struggling week-to-week with the rising cost of living, and if you get an unexpected dentist's bill or car issues, plenty of Woolworths workers would be at a total loss."

The union is claiming the so-called Living Wage of $27.80 as its bargaining standard. The company has offered increases of 6.8 and 10.1 percent over two years following a 19 percent increase agreed in 2022. Official inflation has only recently dropped from 7.4 to under 4 percent while household living costs are rising by 5.4 percent.

Woolworths has paid more than $1 billion in dividends to shareholders in the last five years, while revenue grew by $344m (4.55 percent) in the year to June 2023.

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