

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.

Renault Korea workers strike over wage dispute

Renault Korea union members at the company's Busan auto manufacturing plant in Korea's southeast walked off the job on September 13 over stalled wage rise negotiations. The action followed three days of partial stoppages. A tentative agreement between the union and management was rejected by 64.8 percent of workers on September 6. Renault transferred other workers to the plant to maintain production.

Chennai municipal cleaners protest outsourcing of jobs

Over 1,000 cleaners from the Greater Chennai Corporation, Tamil Nadu, demonstrated outside the Rippon building on Monday to protest the loss of jobs through privatisation. Workers said there were 15 divisions in the corporation out of which 11 had already been outsourced. They said further outsourcing will force them to become contract workers. The workers are organised by the Tamil Maoist Uzhaippor Urimai Iyakkam (Workers Rights Organisation).

Nagappattinam Municipality contract workers protest delayed payment of entitlement

Contract workers from the Nagappattinam Municipality, Tamil Nadu, demonstrated in front of the municipal office on Wednesday over delayed payments of Employment State Insurance (ESI). The payment should be deducted from their wages every month and paid by the contractor. Workers said their deductions were not paid properly, which had led to denial of health care at EDI hospitals.

Workers also complained of being forced to manually scavenge and being abused with caste slur words at work. They ended the protest after municipal officers spoke with the contractor.

Neyveli Lignite Corporation's gardening workers in Tamil Nadu protest

Contract gardening workers from Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) in Neyveli, Tamil Nadu, protested outside Mine II on Wednesday morning to demand higher wages and permanent jobs. The workers were given contract jobs at the mine several decades ago in return for giving up their land for mining. The protesting workers included men and women.

Punjab power utility workers protest low pay and unequal workloads

About 14,000 contract workers from the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited took mass leave on September 10 to demand compensation and jobs for the kin of deceased workers. On the fourth day they were joined by 4,500 complaint-handling contract workers and held a mass rally on day five. They also demanded effective distribution of workloads among employees. The action was an escalation of a protest by linemen one month earlier.

Pakistan: University of Balochistan faculty members on hunger strike

On Monday, University faculty members established a protest hunger strike camp at the campus over the non-payment of salaries and demanded the Shehbaz Sharif government resolve other critical issues facing higher education. About 1,700 staff, including 500 teachers, have not been paid for two months. Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association members are supporting the protest.

Bangladeshi tea garden workers demand higher wages and better conditions

Tea garden workers in Moulvibazar, Sylhet divisions, held protest rallies on Sunday to demand the cancellation of the government gazette which fixed the daily minimum wage to a meagre 178.5 taka (\$US1.49), an increase of only 5 taka. Workers want it increased to 500 taka (\$US4.18).

The Tea Workers Federation members also demanded land rights, educational institutions and childcare centres in every tea garden and establishment of a commission or ministry to address tea workers' issues. The workers also want access to drinking water, safety gear, adequate toilets, advanced medical facilities and extending the current maternity leave for women workers with wage benefits to six months.

The tea gardens employ around 1.5 million workers in 241 tea gardens across the country. Workers said that even though they have lived in the

gardens for around 180 years, they have been deprived of their rights, including any right to land. They have threatened to continue their protests if their demands are not granted.

Qantas maintenance engineers in Brisbane walk out over wages

About 70 Qantas Airlines heavy maintenance workers at Brisbane Airport walked out on September 12, during a company meeting hosted by CEO Vanessa Hudson explaining the airline's latest pay rise offer. Members of the Qantas Engineers Alliance, which includes the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Workers Union, previously rejected Qantas's latest sub-inflation pay rise offer of 3 percent. The current consumer price index (CPI) annual rate is 3.8 percent, meaning the offer is a real pay cut.

A September 11 ballot of the alliance's 440 union members overwhelmingly approved taking industrial action that could include stoppages from 1 minute to 24 hours and various work bans.

Brisbane's Cross River Rail construction site strike enters tenth week

Some 150 striking Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at Brisbane's Cross River Rail construction site have voted to continue industrial action. The workers are maintaining a picket at one of the sites.

CFMEU members, who are directly employed by contractor CBD which manages construction, walked off the job on July 16 as part of an ongoing campaign for higher pay and improved safety in a new work agreement. The CFMEU also wants equal pay and conditions for the 2,500 subcontracted workers at the project's 16 sites. Other demands are for a heat policy and a subcontractors' clause to improve job security, the inclusion of traffic controllers and cleaners, and industry-standard rostered days off.

Heat stress is an ongoing concern for workers. Daniel Sa'u, a 29-year-old labour hire worker, allegedly died of heat stress at the site in late December. The CFMEU claims that 25 workers at various Brisbane construction sites have been hospitalised since December due to heat stress.

Strike action by Essential Energy electricians in New South Wales enters seventh week

Over 1,800 Electrical Trades Union members at more than 20 Essential Energy depots in regional New South Wales are maintaining rolling one-hour stoppages and work bans begun on August 8 after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Other industrial action includes bans on switching for maintenance work, unlocking switch stations and electrical cabinets, and several other bans.

The workers want 8 percent annual pay rises over three years to compensate for previous sub-inflation pay increases. Their last pay rise of only 2.5 percent was in July 2023 when the consumer price index was up 6.6 percent. Essential Energy is a state-owned power utility that builds and operates electricity services to over 1,500 regional, rural and remote communities.

DHL warehouse workers in New South Wales and Victoria to strike

The United Workers Union has called a four-hour strike of 1,200 members for September 23, at 23 DHL Supply Chain warehouses in New South Wales and Victoria.

Workers voted to approve taking protected industrial action on September 3, after rejecting DHL's proposed enterprise agreement. They want a 30 percent pay rise over three years and improved job security. DHL Supply Chain is a division of Deutsche Post DHL, headquartered in Bonn, Germany.

Western Australian offshore natural gas platform workers continue industrial action

About 25 maintenance workers on offshore natural gas processing platforms, including the Pyrenees and Montara floating platform, Wheatstone Platform and Stag CPF, stationed off the north coast of Western Australia, are maintaining low level industrial action begun on July 22. Australian Workers Union members, including painter-blasters, scaffolders, riggers, mechanical and electrical trades, panel operators and supervisors, are employed by contractor UGL-AIS.

The workers are currently employed on a baseline agreement with a minimum pay rate of \$29.80 an hour. UGL has made four attempts to get the workers to accept its new low-pay agreement. The Offshore Alliance (OA), consisting of the AWU and the Maritime Union of Australia, is negotiating for an industry standard enterprise agreement. OA has threatened to step up action to directly affect production.

Marand Precision Engineering workers in Victoria strike for improved pay and conditions

Workers at Marand Precision Engineering factories at Moorabbin and Geelong, suburbs of Melbourne, began a campaign of protected industrial action on September 12 with a four-hour strike and an indefinite overtime ban. Marand makes precision parts for a large range of industries, including aerospace, mining, rail and defence, as well as munitions and jet fighter parts.

Australia Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members decided to take industrial action after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement broke down in the Fair Work Commission.

Workers want wages and conditions on par with other workers in the manufacturing industry doing similar work. This includes a 36-hour week, 9-day fortnight, two years of income protection, career progression, better superannuation, \$56 an hour and double time for overtime. Their current base wage rate starts at just \$37 an hour for a qualified trades person.

Crown Equipment manufacturing workers in Victoria strike for higher pay

Close to 30 Crown Equipment manufacturing workers at Mulgrave, in Melbourne, walked off the job and rallied outside their factory on September 6 to demand an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members voted to approve taking protected industrial action on August 28 after negotiations reached deadlock.

The workers have not had a pay increase since July 2023. They want the same wages and conditions as their Service Tech counterparts who are doing similar work. The AMWU claimed Service Tech workers are paid 15 percent more.

Launceston General Hospital lab workers walk out over staffing crisis

Medical scientists at the Launceston General Hospital pathology laboratory, in Tasmania's north, walked off the job for one hour on Wednesday to demand the Tasmanian government recruit additional workers. The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members held a 30-minute strike on August 14, saying staffing shortfalls had significantly reduced their ability to provide vital test results for operating theatres, emergency department and wards.

A recent business case study outlined the need for an additional 17.54 full-time equivalent staff at the lab to safely meet current demand. HACSU claimed that over the last four years demand for pathology services had increased 20 percent but without a commensurate increase in medical scientists, resulting in critical testing being sent to the private sector and causing delays in getting results.

While the Liberal state government claimed it was "communicating with the union", the union says there has been no funding to resolve the issue since the state budget was handed down last week.

New Zealand ambulance staff to hold second national strike

Ambulance officers and call centre staff across New Zealand will strike for a second time, after rejecting a pay offer from Hato Hone St John. Workers will strike for six hours from the start of their shifts on September 27 and 30. About 2,500 officers took strike action for the first time ever last month.

First Union and the ambulance division of the Amalgamated Workers Union (AWUNZ) have been negotiating on pay and conditions with St John since the collective agreement expired in December 2023. St John presented a "final offer" on August 30, claiming it was an improvement on previous offers.

First Union rejected the offer following online meetings with members. A spokesperson said the offer included minimal pay increases, below the rate of inflation. "They're burnt out, they're underpaid, and they're not being listened to by the government or St John," she said. "They need better working conditions and this is the action that they're having to take to be heard." There is a major funding gap as the government does not fully fund the service.

A separate union, the NZ Ambulance Association (NZAA), is currently conducting its own in-person ratification meetings. NZAA members and workers on individual employment agreements, who make up a majority of the St John workforce, are not participating in the forthcoming strike.





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