

# 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: Strike at Hyundai Transys enters fourth week

Union members at Hyundai Transys, an affiliate of Hyundai Motor Group, have been on strike since October 8 in a pay dispute. The company provides auto transmission units for Hyundai Motor and Kia Corporation. Hyundai announced on Monday that due to the strike it temporarily shut down Line 11 at its Ulsan plant, affecting the Kona model production.

A major sticking point in negotiations in a new pay agreement is the union's demand that 2 percent of last year's total sales—about 230 billion won (\$US168.8 million)—be paid as an incentive bonus. Management argued that the proposed incentive scale is excessive, amounting to twice last year's operating profit, and unacceptable.

Tranix Corp, a powertrain production subsidiary of Hyundai, said it will shut down its plant in Jigok, South Chungcheong Province, because of the Hyundai Transys walkout. Tranix, which employs about 1,700 workers, said the trike had disrupted the supply of parts needed for production.

## India: Tamil Nadu conservancy workers in Thoothukudi hold hunger protest

Thoothukudi City Municipal Corporation daily wage conservancy workers, who are affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), held a relay hunger protest on Monday. Police attempted to forcefully end the action, which led to an altercation. The union told the media that workers were protesting peacefully and had not disrupted employees or prevented vehicles entering or leaving the facility.

The CITU said the workers' wages were very low and fixed at 754 rupees (\$US8.9) and that drivers were only paid 792 rupees (\$9.4) per day. Workers said they will continue their protest until wages are increased.

## Jawaharlal Nehru University sanitation workers strike for pay rise and overdue bonus

Over 200 contract sanitation workers from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, a public research university in New Delhi, have been on strike since October 31. The workers have not been paid the government-

mandated annual bonus of one month's pay for several years. They also want proper equipment for sanitation work, salary slips and the reduction of workloads.

The action was called by the AICCTU (All India Central Council of Trade Unions) affiliated to CPI (Marxist Leninist) party. A union spokesperson said many of the workers have been employed at the institution for over a decade. The contract company is refusing to pay workers the full bonus and has only offered a maximum of 100 rupees (\$US1.19).

## Health workers in Chandigarh win yearly bonus

Doctors, nurses, kitchen workers and office support staff from the Post Graduate Institute for Medical Research in Chandigarh, Punjab state, began an indefinite strike on October 30 to demand payment of their yearly bonus. They returned to work on November 4 after management paid the outstanding bonuses. While the police issued First Information Report charges against the strikers, these were based on false statements from security officers at the hospital.

## Assam Anganwadi workers demand pay rise and extra duties compensation

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers demonstrated outside the Woman and Child's Protection Directorate office in Guwahati, Assam state, on November 4. The Assam Rajyik Anganwadi Karmi Aru Sahayika Santha trade union organised the action.

The protesters were demanding a wage rise above the current 6,500 rupees (\$US77.1) paid per month to Anganwadi workers and more than the current 3,250 rupees paid to helpers. Anganwadi workers want 12,000 rupees a month and helpers want 7,000 rupees. They also want compensation for mandatory extra duties such as election work and polio vaccination campaigns. The workers held a 21-day strike in February over the same demands.

## Pakistan: Balochistan water and sanitation workers strike

Water and Sanitation Authority (WASA) workers in Balochistan province have been on strike since the beginning of the week. Tubewell operators and wall men want a 25 percent ad hoc allowance and other

benefits to compensate for rising inflation. The provincial government has refused their demands, claiming it would cost too much.

“We are facing hardships due to inflation, which is rising with every passing day,” a tubewell operator said. Workers have vowed to stay on strike until their demands are accepted.

The district administration has sent a notice to the Wasa Employees Union claiming that the Balochistan High Court had banned the industrial action and ordered the strikers to immediately return to work.

### **Bangladesh: Strike by workers at state-owned tea gardens in Sylhet enters third week**

Hundreds of workers from 16 state-owned National Tea Company (NTC) tea gardens in Sylhet are maintaining strike action begun on October 21. They are demanding payment of seven weeks of outstanding wages and 13 months’ overdue Provident Fund contributions. Strikers staged a human-chain protest at the main gate of the divisional cricket stadium on Airport Road, Sylhet on Tuesday.

“We’ll return to work when our wages are paid. Otherwise, we’ll keep protesting and may even block roads. If you have to shoot us, go ahead. We have nothing left to lose,” one striker told the media. “How can we survive with our children? We are protesting on empty stomachs, yet the government is ignoring us,” another woman said.

“The company deducts 300 taka [\$US2.5] monthly for a fund, but we don’t even know if we’ll ever get that money. I can’t even afford medical treatment. My debt at the local shop is 6,000 taka (\$US50), and now the shopkeeper is demanding payment,” and protester said.

The Bangladesh Tea Workers Union condemned NTC management for denying workers’ their outstanding wages while noting that garden officials are still being paid their salaries.

### **Bangladeshi garment workers protest with multiple demands**

Workers from two groups of factories, Islam Group and Tushka Group, in Gazipur stopped work and rallied outside their respective factories on November 2 over several basic demands.

Workers from the Islam Group presented 21 demands, including a five percent increase in annual salary, removal of some officials due to alleged misconduct, payment of full-service benefits (63 percent of the basic salary), an attendance bonus of 1,000 taka (\$US8.4), and a 200-taka night shift allowance.

Tushka Group workers presented 16 demands. This included a 10 percent increase in annual salary, breaks for daily prayers, and holidays for Islam and Hindu festivals.

Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies, including the Army, BGB, RAB, Industrial Police and Gazipur Metropolitan Police, were deployed to the factories.

### **Qube Port workers voting to extend action to five other Australian ports**

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members from Qube Ports bulk-handling facilities at Port Hedland, Dampier, Geraldton, Fremantle and

Bunbury in Western Australia are voting on whether to join industrial action by other Qube employees for a better enterprise agreement. They would join with MUA members at Qube terminals in Melbourne, Brisbane, Port Kembla, Port Adelaide and Darwin who began industrial action on September 13 for an improved pay offer.

The current ongoing action includes bans on night shifts, shift extensions, work on ships for the first 8 hours in port, shifts longer than 8 hours, and start times for all shifts apart from 7 a.m., 3 p.m. and 11 p.m. Workers are also holding one-hour daily work stoppages at 5:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

Qube has been trying to renegotiate 19 enterprise agreements covering 21 port facilities and over 1,000 workers around Australia since October last year. As well as a pay increase, workers want earlier notification of shift start times, a 10-hour break between shifts and 48 hours off after maximum consecutive shifts.

Workers rejected Qube’s pay rise offer of 5 percent over each of the first two years of a new agreement, and 4 percent in each of the two subsequent years, as well as back pay for agreements concluded by September 30. The MUA says its members’ wages have declined by 14 percent in real terms while Qube profits have risen by 148 percent since the last agreement.

### **Nurses and midwives at Healthscope’s Northern Beaches Hospital in Sydney walk out**

About 300 members of the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) from the Northern Beaches Hospital, in Sydney’s northern suburb of Frenchs Forest, walked out for over two hours on Tuesday morning. Nurses and midwives rallied outside the hospital holding signs saying, “Invest in life not in property” and “Value Us.”

The NSWNMA is in dispute with the Canadian-based health provider Healthscope which owns the hospital. A union spokesperson claimed that nurses and midwives at the Northern Beaches Hospital are paid 16 percent less than their colleagues in Queensland-based Healthscope hospitals. They also receive less annual, maternity and personal leave than if they were working in public sector hospitals.

The NSWNMA is calling for an immediate 15 percent pay rise in line with the union’s public sector pay claim, mandated nurse/midwife to patient ratios across all wards and units, night shift penalty rates increased from 15 percent to 30 percent and improved leave entitlements.

The Northern Beaches Hospital is unique in that it is a private hospital providing public health services. The operating model implemented by the former state Liberal government replaced the Manly and Mona Vale public hospitals.

### **Frontline community workers protest low pay and excessive workload**

Frontline workers caring for people with disability, women escaping violence and children in out-of-home-care rallied across Australia this past week for improved pay and conditions.

A spokesperson from the Australian Services Union addressed a rally in Newcastle on Monday saying the Social, Community, Home Care & Disability Services (SCHADS) Award had not changed in 30 years, leading to a growing number of systemic failings. He said that at least two-in-three community workers were under-classified, which meant that their

pay did not reflect their duties, skills, experience or qualifications.

“For too long, community and disability support workers have been overworked, undervalued and underpaid,” the ASU spokesperson told the media. He added that workers with more responsibilities, complex workloads, and decades of experience often take home the same pay as entry-level staff.

The union has not called for any concrete industrial action and is directing workers and supporters to post social media appeals to the government. The federal Labor government has released its initial response to the disability royal commission, accepting only 13 of the 172 recommendations in full that it has either primary or shared responsibility for.

### **TasIVF medical scientists strike again in Hobart**

Embryologists at the TasIVF facility in Hobart, Tasmania walked off the job on Tuesday for the second time in three weeks for a better enterprise agreement.

The workers are represented by the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) which has held six rounds of negotiations with Virtus Health, which runs the facility, since May.

Workers want their wages and conditions brought into line with IVF employees doing the same work on the Australian mainland, and for TasIVF to address a chronic staff shortage. Workers have imposed bans on email communications, overtime and data entry. Management has threatened to dock the pay of workers participating in work bans.

### **Metro Tasmania bus drivers strike for higher pay**

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) bus drivers at the government-owned Metro Tasmania’s southern network struck for two hours on November 8 in their dispute with the state Liberal government for improved pay. Their action followed a one-hour strike by their colleagues in the northern network on October 24.

Workers have banned working in full compliance with policies and procedures, and are not attending meetings with operations supervisors, not attending meetings in personal time and not completing various types of paperwork.

The RTBU wants the government to address the chronic driver shortage, increase wages, improve driver safety and give an assurance that the public-owned bus system will not be put in private hands.

In response to previous industrial action, the government in September last year issued a temporary 10 percent pay rise outside the enterprise agreement. This stemmed the exodus of workers but failed to boost the workforce. Workers want last year’s temporary pay rise locked into the new agreement and increased.

The RTBU said work bans will remain in place indefinitely while the government refuses to meet their demands.

### **Hobart City Council management threatens to lock out workers**

Australian Services Union (ASU) members at the Hobart City Council (HCC) are currently in a long running dispute over the council’s proposed

enterprise agreement. ASU members approved taking protected industrial action in September after rejecting council’s sub-inflation pay increase offer of 3 percent for the first two years in a four-year agreement.

The offer was a pay cut considering the June Employee Living Cost Index reported that employees’ annual living costs had increased by 6.2 percent. ASU says council management has rejected workers’ claims and attempted to remove the CPI (consumer price index) uncapped wage protections and make changes to redundancy entitlements.

Workers are planning to impose about 60 work bans. The HCC CEO informed ASU members on October 30 that the council would not accept any work from ASU members who applied the bans—i.e., the council would lock them out.

The ASU has called stop work meetings at most of the HCC depots in anticipation of workers’ voting for industrial action.

### **Sydney light rail workers impose bans in pay dispute**

About 250 Sydney Light Rail workers are taking industrial action in their dispute with light rail operator Transdev for a new enterprise agreement. Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members imposed a 10km/h speed limit on all light rail services from Monday. The RTBU said the speed limit will be lifted if the state Labor government cut passenger fares to 50 cents. The current minimum fare is \$3.20.

The action follows a 24-hour strike in June and peak-hour strikes in July after 18 months of negotiations with Transdev failed to reach agreement. Workers want a 23 percent pay increase over four years and an additional five days’ sick leave. Transdev has offered an 18 percent pay increase over four years. The union has called on the NSW Labor government to intervene, claiming that Transdev has refused to hold further talks.



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