

# 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: Bongaigaon refinery workers demand reinstatement of victimised workers

Bongaigaon refinery workers in Assam protested on November 26 against the sacking of 16 casual daily wage workers. The strikers threatened to hold a 24-hour walkout if the casuals were not reinstated. The protest and strike threat followed management's failure to implement a written assurance that the workers would be reinstated by November 14.

## Karnataka workers and farmers protest for minimum wage and pension

Karnataka workers and farmers held a joint protest at Freedom Park in Bangalore on November 27 over several demands including a 10,000-rupee (\$US118.4) minimum wage and a 35,000-rupee pension. They also want a 600-rupee payment and 200 days guaranteed employment for MNGREGA (government subsidised rural workers).

The protest was organised by the Joint Council of Trade Unions and supported by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and the Indian National Trade Union Congress.

Protests were also held in various places of the country like Srinagar (Jammu) to mark the fourth year of the Farmers' Delhi protest campaign, which was held in opposition to the federal government's "anti-farmer laws."

## Kerala State Co-operative Bank workers strike for pay rise and improved conditions

Kerala State Co-operative Bank (Kerala Bank) workers in Trivandrum began a three-day strike on Thursday. The Kerala Bank Workers Congress wants a 39 percent dearness allowance, promotion for employees in Mallapuram district, which was stalled for three years, and the filling of 2,000 vacant positions. The latest action followed a two-day strike in July, an action of non-cooperation in September and sathyagraha (peaceful protest) for 15 days in November.

## Karnataka public transport workers plan state-wide strike over unpaid wages

The Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) Staff and Workers' Federation, along with other transport unions, have announced plans for a state-wide strike for December 31 to pressure the Karnataka government to resolve long-pending demands. These include unpaid arrears and gratuity payments. Prior to the strike, the unions said they would organise a march to the winter state assembly in Belagavi, called "Chalo Belagavi" on December 8 and 9.

The unions claim that the government owes workers 17.5 billion rupees (\$US207 million) in arrears from a salary hike announced in 2020 and an additional 3.99 billion rupees in gratuity payments. Despite assurances that a new salary hike would be implemented in January 2024, no formal decision has been made, prompting the unions to escalate their protests.

## Bangladesh: National Tea Company tea gardens strike continues Sylhet

Hundreds of workers from 12 state-owned National Tea Company (NTC) tea gardens in Habiganj, Moulvibazar and Sylhet remain on strike after walking out on October 21. They want payment of three months' outstanding wages and rations and overdue Provident Fund contributions.

On November 23, the Tea Workers' Association submitted a memorandum of demands to the interim government's labour adviser. The memo highlighted the suffering of 11,286 workers and 248 employees from NTC's gardens.

The general secretary of the union said that surviving on a daily wage of 178.5 taka (\$US1.50) amid rising costs was already a struggle, and that without wages and rations the situation was unbearable. About 50,000 workers and dependents are facing a "silent famine," he said. Workers vowed they will not return to work until wages are paid.

## Bangladeshi garment workers continue protests over factory closures and unpaid wages

Laid off garment workers from Lenny Fashion and Lenny Apparels blocked the Nabinagar-Chandra road in Savar demanding payment of four years' outstanding salaries on Tuesday. They gathered outside of the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) in the morning, interrupting traffic on both sides of the road.

One worker said, "The factory owes me 44,000 taka (\$US370),

including a month's salary and other dues. Though the factories were closed four years ago, they have not given us any money, violating set dates for payment."

Though the outstanding amounts were supposed to be paid by November 30, the workers took to the streets because they were unsure the payments would be made. Factory authorities admitted that outstanding amounts would be made only after Lenny Fashion is sold. Workers told the Ashulia Industrial Police they would not leave the streets till their dues were cleared.

On Sunday, about 250 garment workers from the Amity Sweater factory in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for 45 minutes to demand the factory reopen. The protest caused traffic to back up for around 10 km. Police intervened, forcing workers to end the protest.

The protest was sparked when a layoff notice was issued saying the factory would remain closed from Sunday due to a lack of orders. Workers said they are desperate following the sudden closure.

### **Western Australian power utility workers threatened with lockout**

About 700 electricians from the state-owned power utility Western Power ended five days of strike action on Wednesday in their dispute with the state Labor government for improved wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. Workers said they planned to immediately impose indefinite work bans. Management responded by threatening to lock out any worker that did not perform all duties.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members are protesting stagnant wages, reduced working conditions and lack of job security and want a 36-hour week in line with power utility workers in other states.

Their current work agreement expired in August and their last pay increase was September 2023. Due to the Labor government's freeze on public sector wages, Western Power workers did not get a pay rise in 2020 and 2021. In 2022 they were awarded a miserable lump sum payment of \$2,000 as compensation for lost wages.

The ETU denounced the Labor government for pushing a restrictive wages policy while running huge surpluses at the expense of workers. It said the government was "showing minimal effort" in resolving key concerns raised by Western Power workers.

### **QUBE offshore logistics workers in Western Australia strike for higher pay**

Six stores/logistics workers employed by contractor QUBE Offshore Services on Shell's Prelude floating LNG processing plant, in Western Australia, stopped work for three days on November 23 and imposed indefinite work bans. They are members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) which is in dispute with QUBE over its low pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement.

The Offshore Alliance (OA), which covers the workers and is comprised of the AWU and the Maritime Union of Australia, claimed QUBE recently picked up the contract to provide logistic services on the Prelude. The Alliance has accused the company of wanting to employ the workers on less than 50 percent of the salaries and conditions previously paid to the Shell workforce.

Work bans in place could include a range of administrative data entering and labelling, restrictions on loading and unloading equipment and a ban on issuing equipment from the stores, among others. QUBE has

transferred logistics workers from onshore LNG plants to the Prelude to act as strikebreakers.

### **St Vincent's private hospital nurses in Victoria to strike for improved pay and conditions**

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members at four St Vincent's private hospitals in Victoria walked off the job for 3.5 hours at 12.45 p.m. on Thursday after rejecting St Vincent's latest proposed enterprise agreement. The ANMF said that while the revised offer included some improved conditions the original pay offer had been reduced by 0.5 percent to 4 percent.

The federation said the revised offer failed to address safe patient workloads and ratios, improved allowances and did not contain improvements that were recently included in the 2024–28 public sector nurses and midwives' agreement. Nurses and midwives want pay parity with public sector nurses and midwives including new and improved allowances and more than 40 improved entitlements and working conditions.

The ANMF has over 800 members at St Vincent's private hospitals in Fitzroy, East Melbourne, Werribee and Kew. Nurses and midwives began protected industrial action November 18 that could include bans on overtime, taking the full meal break, ban on redeployment between wards, wearing ANMF t-shirts and collecting administrative data and 24 others.

### **Metro Tasmania drivers on strike again to demand better pay and conditions**

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) bus drivers from the government-owned Metro Tasmania struck again this week to demand an improved pay offer in the government's proposed enterprise agreement. Drivers in Launceston and Burnie stopped work for two hours on Wednesday and drivers in Hobart held two-hour stoppages at 5 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Friday.

Over 200 drivers began industrial action across Metro's networks on October 10. They put in place indefinite work bans that include a "work-to-rule," meaning they are not performing extra duties, along with bans on attending supervisors' meetings and various paperwork. They held limited two-hour strikes on October 24 and November 8 but called off strikes planned for last week while negotiations continued.

The drivers have rejected the state Liberal government's proposed work agreement, which they say would mean longer working hours for a sub-inflation 2 percent pay rise. The current consumer price index (CPI) rate is 2.8 percent. 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.

### **Stonnington City Council workers take action for better pay**

About 150 Australian Services Union (ASU) members from Stonnington City Council, Victoria, began industrial action on Wednesday demanding higher wages and improved conditions in the council's proposed enterprise agreement. The low-level action includes stopping

work to attach union campaign notices to clothing, placing signage on council vehicles and in libraries, and bans on attending meetings, wearing council uniform and doing annual reviews.

The ASU has been in negotiations with the council since July. Workers want a 7.5 percent wage rise or \$75 per week (whichever is greater), an extra cost-of-living payment, improved entitlements, job security and workplace democracy. Council's pay offer in a three-year agreement is annual increases of 2.6, 2.3 and 2.3 percent.

The workers' last pay rise was more than a year ago for just 2.25 percent, an amount well behind the then 5.4 percent inflation rate and well behind the current annual inflation rate of 3.5 percent. The previous wage rises negotiated by the ASU were effectively wage cuts relative to inflation. The putative current 7.5 percent demand, even if agreed to, will not cover the workers' last decade of wage suppression.



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