

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: Karnataka Accredited Social Health Activists on strike in Bengaluru

Thousands of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers began an indefinite strike at Freedom Park, Bengaluru on January 7 to demand better conditions and monthly wages increased to 15,000 rupees (\$US175). Other demands are for an additional 2,000 rupees in urban work areas, which is proportionate to their workload, and provision of basic amenities, such as toilets at workplaces.

Additional demands are 500,000 rupees as retirement benefits, recognition of workers as permanent employees with health insurance, accident insurance while at work, equal pay for equal work, an honorarium of 7,500 rupees for facilitators, three advanced wage payments in case of serious illness and all wages paid on time.

The workers have won additional support from writers and former justices saying that the government should immediately grant the demands of the ASHA workers who are a healthcare lifeline for the community. The All-India United Trade Union Centre claimed the ruling Congress government in Karnataka promised a raise of 3,000 rupees for ASHA workers during the election, a pledge that is yet to be fulfilled even after 15 rounds of talks.

Punjab Roadways contract workers' union ends strike

Around 8,000 contract workers from Punjab Roadways (PUNBUS, PEPSU and PRTC) ended a three-day strike on Wednesday after the Aam Admi Party Chief Minister Bhagwat Mann agreed to meet with them on January 15. Union leaders threatened that if their demands were not met, they would re-start their strike on January 16.

Workers' want higher wages, permanent jobs and all other related benefits. Nearly 2,800 buses in 27 bus depots remained off the road during the strike.

Punjab midday meal workers threaten to widen their strike

Punjab public school midday meal workers have been on strike since December 7 to demand the ruling Aam Admi Party (AAP) increase their

meagre 3,000 rupee (\$35) honorarium, which workers say is not enough to sustain their families. The midday meal workers, who have not been paid for December, have threatened to broaden their action to a state-wide strike on January 12 during the Lohiri religious festival.

Workers complained that the ruling AAP had promised during the election to double their wages, which was not fulfilled.

Telangana Civil Supply Hamali workers' union closes down strike

The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) called off the seven-day strike by Telangana Civil Supply Hamali (unskilled, low paid) workers on January 7, claiming it had received assurances from the government that their demands would be addressed within two to three days.

Workers want the state government to issue a Government Order (GO) to implement revised wage rates. A CITU spokesperson said the government had promised to increase the bonus from 6,500 rupees to 7,500 rupees, implement new wage rates and other assurances. Three months later, the government has not fulfilled these commitments.

Assam health department workers strike for permanent jobs

Assam Public Health Department temporary workers have been on strike since December 3 to demand permanent jobs. The workers were also protesting the death of a water distribution worker whilst on duty, which they said was due to "the miserable plight" of health department workers. Although the striking workers have been issued "show cause" notices, this has only made them more determined to maintain their strike.

Sri Lankan water and drainage utility workers protest

Hundreds of Income Assistance Officers from the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB), marched to the NWSDB head office on Wednesday in Ratmalana, Colombo suburb where they demonstrated to call for the expedition of internal promotions and other demands.

Water Supply Trade Unions members held placards saying, "Stop issuing meter reading contracts immediately," "Abolish conditions for compensatory leave" and "Immediately begin issuing bills to consumers." Workers continued the protest within NWSDB premises where a spokesperson from the Income Assistant Officers Union condemned the

NWSDB and the government for the “poor economic situation.”

St Vincent's Private hospital nurses in Victoria escalate industrial action

About 800 nurses and midwives at four Victorian hospitals of St Vincent's Private escalated current industrial action this week to include bed closures. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members at St Vincent's Private hospitals in Kew, East Melbourne, Werribee and Fitzroy instituted work bans on November 18 and began four-hour rolling stoppages on December 13 in opposition to management's proposed enterprise agreement.

Their ongoing action includes overtime bans, taking the full meal break, bans on redeployment between wards, wearing ANMF t-shirts and not collecting administrative data. On Tuesday they began closing one in three beds on their wards (apart from life-threatening cases), refusing to undertake food services related duties, and charges refusing to take a patient load. St Vincent's management have attempted to intimidate nurses by falsely claiming the bed closures are illegal.

ANMF members rejected St Vincent's latest pay rise offer of 4 percent. ANMF said the 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.

ANMF members want pay parity with public sector nurses and midwives, including new and improved allowances and more than 40 improved entitlements and working conditions.

Qube offshore logistics workers in Western Australia strike again

Six stores/logistics workers employed by contractor Qube Offshore Services on Shell's Prelude floating LNG processing plant, in Western Australia, stopped work for 48 hours on Monday in response to Qube's refusal to pay them while work bans are in place.

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 workers' action followed a 48-hour strike on December 20 and a three-day strike on November 23.

Industrial action includes administrative data entering and labelling, restrictions on loading and unloading equipment, a ban on issuing equipment from the stores and other bans. Qube has transferred logistics workers from onshore LNG plants to the Prelude to act as strike breakers.

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.

Smit Lamnalco Gladstone tug workers announce 15 days of industrial action

Members of the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) employed

on Smit Lamnalco Towage tugboats at the Port of Gladstone, North Queensland, announced this week that they will begin 15 days of protected industrial action on January 14. This could include unlimited work stoppages of 1, 4, 8, 12, 24, 48 hours and seven days, along with bans on working longer than 12 hours, working outside of rostered hours, plus 13 other bans.

AMOU and AIMPE are in dispute with Smit Lamnalco over its proposed enterprise agreement. An AMOU spokesperson said the current agreement expired on December 31 and members have only received a 4 percent increase over the last eight years. Smit Lamnalco has offered pay increases in line with the minimum award, which is only 3.75 percent.

The unions want a pay increase that compensates for eight years of real wage cuts and for the new agreement to include a term preventing Smit Lamnalco from scheduling masters and engineers up to 17 hours in any 24 and a roster that provides tug ownership and maintenance opportunities.

New South Wales public hospital psychiatrists threaten to resign over staffing crisis

The New South Wales (NSW) branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists has informed the state Labor government that 190 of 295 salaried psychiatrists in the NSW public hospital system are currently threatening to resign on January 21 over chronic workforce shortages and low pay.

The Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF), who represent the doctors, claimed that one-third of specialist psychiatry positions across the NSW public hospital system are unfilled, forcing hospitals to fill vacancies where they can with temporary and locum staff. NSW Health is currently attempting to plug the staff shortages with temporary workers, offering rates of more than \$3,000 per day, but even this is not enough to fill the gaps.

NSW's Campbelltown Hospital Mental Health Intensive Care Unit currently has just two beds out of six available for patients because of understaffing, and likewise only 12 of the 20 beds at Campbelltown's High Dependency Unit (HDU) could be used for the same reason.

Media reported that the crisis is statewide, saying that the Shellharbour Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Unit was forced to stop admissions for a week after a single staff member took unplanned leave over the New Year period. The \$10.8 million Freshwater Mental Health Unit high-security five-bed unit, completed in August 2023, has still not opened for use due to staffing and funding shortages.

A spokesman for the specialist psychiatrists said the resignations are for a 25 percent pay rise, which he says would improve patient care to an acceptable level through improved staff retention and recruitment. According to the ASMOF, public hospital psychiatrists working in other states and territories can earn up to 30 percent more than those in NSW.



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