

# 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: Hyundai Steel workers strike over failed wage negotiations**

Members of the National Metal Workers' Union Hyundai Steel branch held a 24-hour strike beginning at 7 a.m. on Tuesday and halting production at multiple plants. The walkout followed a breakdown in wage negotiations. The union has been trying to negotiate a wage deal with Hyundai Steel since September but failed to reach an agreement during the 18th round of talks on January 16.

The union wants conditions similar to those at Hyundai Motor, including a 159,800 won (\$US111) increase in base pay (excluding seniority raise), maximum performance bonuses, a two-year 10 million won interest-free loan for vehicle purchases, and a 20 percent discount on vehicles for retirees every three years.

Management proposed a plan centred on a 100,000-won increase in base pay and a comprehensive discussion of performance bonuses for 2024 and 2025. The union rejected the proposal saying that discussing performance bonuses for last year and this year in the one agreement essentially means not paying last year's bonuses. The union has threatened to hold a general strike on February 11 if an agreement is not reached by then.

## **India: Kerala state government workers strike for pay rise and outstanding allowances**

Kerala government workers held a state-wide sick-leave strike on Wednesday for demands, including a pay rise, reinstatement of the choice to surrender leave and immediate payment of the overdue dearness allowance. Some schools declared a holiday.

Government authorities told workers they had to present sick-leave certificates from doctors while department heads were directed not to grant leave to the striking workers. The strike was condemned by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led state government which issued a no work, no pay order against the workers.

The members of the rival Communist Party of India participated in the strike along with the Congress-led opposition parties.

## **Employees of the Tamil Nadu government-owned TASMAL liquor stores demand permanency**

Contract workers at Tamil Nadu government-owned TASMAL liquor stores plan to protest on January 26 to demand permanent jobs. The casual workers, some of whom have been employed at the stores for over a decade, do not receive the benefits received by permanent workers. The TASMAL Unions' Federation said 24,000 TASMAL employees are only paid 10,000 rupees (\$US115) per month.

## **Victimised Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant contract workers protest**

Victimised contract workers, formerly from Maruti Suzuki's Manesar plant in Haryana, are planning a protest march to the Manesar plant on January 30 to demand reinstatement at any of the company's plants. Maruti-Suzuki is India's largest automaker.

The planned action follows a demonstration by these workers outside the company's Haryana premises on January 10 with demands. They also called for reduction of the pay disparity between contract and permanent workers, permanent jobs and reduction of the tier-wage system. On the same day the workers announced that they had formed a union called the Maruti Suzuki Asthaya (contract) Workers Union.

The victimised workers held repeated militant job actions, including a sit-down strike during 2011 and 2012. Their determination drew the ire of Maruti Suzuki management and employers across the giant Gurgaon-Manesar industrial belt. The workers were sacked for challenging the contract-labour system that has been used to divide workers and impose poverty wages and brutal working conditions.

## **Telangana Electricity Artisans hold protest hunger strike for permanent jobs**

Two thousand electricity artisans held a four-day protest hunger strike on January 20. The Artisans are a special category of workers created by the Telangana state government under the derogatory Artisans Service Rule and not paid the same salaries as permanent employees.

While the workers are involved in all core operation and maintenance jobs, some of them with diplomas and degrees, they are defined as artisans. Many have been serving there for 15 to 20 years.

The workers are members of the Telangana Vidyuth Artisans Conversation Joint Action committee, which has planned demonstrations outside the 31 district headquarters and up to 40 Telangana Electricity Distribution, Transmission and Generation Companies offices.

## **Pakistan: University teachers strike over vice chancellor appointments**

The Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association (Fapuasa) members, who stopped attending classes on January 18, continue to boycott academic activities in public sector universities. A meeting of association members on Wednesday discussed their opposition to the Sindh government's proposed amendments to universities law and related policies.

Teachers have expressed serious concerns over the government's persistent ongoing plans to amend the Universities Act, particularly proposals to allow the appointment of bureaucrats as vice chancellors of public sector universities.

## **Pakistan: Punjab government schoolteachers strike over pay and privatisation**

Hundreds of teachers are boycotting classes at all state schools and colleges between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. over the past week. The teachers are members of the All-Government Employees Grand Alliance (Agiga).

The teachers, who took industrial action and held mass protests last year, are demanding the government withdraw planned changes in pension, gratuity and leave encashment rules, that pay protection be instituted and that the government stop privatising schools. The government plans to privatise hundreds of schools.

## **Bangladesh: Beximco Industrial Park workers resume protest opposing factory closures**

Thousands of garment workers at Beximco Industrial Park in Gazipur resumed protests on Tuesday with a rally at Suncity. Demanding the reopening of 16 closed plants in the industrial park, they chanted "We want work, not alms," "We want to live with our families," and "Open the factories." They held a similar protest on January 14.

The Garments Workers Unity Forum president threatened to step up protest action if any worker lost their job and has demanded the government reopen the factories within 24 hours. She also proposed nationalisation of the Beximco units.

The Beximco Group laid off 30,000 or 75 percent of the company's workforce in mid-December claiming lack of orders and banking support. The laid-off workers received half of their basic salary and allowances for only 45 days.

On January 20, a state advisory council meeting was convened at Bangladesh Secretariat to discuss ways to sell the 16 factories, preferably to foreign entrepreneurs. The council could not decide on the sale, citing the need for further scrutiny of the group's bank statements.

## **Textile factory workers in Gazipur demand entitlements**

Hundreds of workers from DIRD Composite Textile Limited marched along the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur on January 17 and

rallied at the Rajendrapur crossing. They were demanding wage arrears, maternity benefits, provident fund and service benefits. Protesters said they had not been paid wages and benefits for the last seven months.

President of the Gazipur city unit of the Bangladesh Garments and Industry Workers Federation said that the owners closed the factory permanently on November 22, 2023, dismissing around 8,000 workers without paying their entitlements.

"I started working at the factory in 2011," a mechanical deputy manager of the factory told the media.

"I have not received my salary for the last five months. Provident fund is pending. Service benefits are pending. It has become impossible for our family to manage the daily essentials. Our demands should be met quickly," he said.

## **Tomago Aluminium workers in New South Wales strike for higher pay**

About 580 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members from the Tomago Aluminium plant in Newcastle, 140km north of Sydney, began protected industrial action with rolling two-hour stoppages on January 19. The action involves pot line, cast house and carbon workers who are opposed to the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The AWU said workers want a 15 percent pay increase over three years to cover cost of living increases. Tomago Aluminium has offered only 10 percent over three years.

## **Weatherford offshore LNG platform workers in Western Australia still on strike**

Industrial action by 36 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by drilling and completion services company Weatherford at several offshore oil and gas platforms in Western Australia has entered its fifth week. Workers imposed work bans, including rolling one-hour stoppages, on December 19. The company has employed scab labour to maintain operations.

The workers are represented by the Offshore Alliance (comprising the AWU and Maritime Union of Australia) which said Weatherford is attempting to impose a low \$60,000 base line wage and reduced conditions below industry standards in its proposed enterprise agreement. One hundred percent of workers have voted to escalate industrial action.

Weatherford is an American multinational oilfield drilling and completion services company operating in 75 countries across oil and natural gas producing regions.

## **Victoria: Forest fire management workers' strike enters ninth week**

About 800 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) have escalated industrial action begun on November 28 for higher pay. Action, which included bans on non-emergency tasks, and on taking meal breaks in the field, instead returning to depots, was escalated this week to include not doing camping ground maintenance.

Enterprise agreement negotiations with the Department of Energy,

Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) began in June, but stalled over the state Labor government's insistence that its cost-cutting 3 percent wage cap policy can only be exceeded if its employees make concessions on current conditions. Due to previous low-pay work agreements negotiated by the AWU, these workers are some of the worst-paid state sector workers, languishing in the bottom 5 percent.

DEECA workers are employed in a wide range of duties, including recovery and prevention of bush fires and floods and the containment of animal and agricultural pandemics.

### **K&S Energy Fuels truck drivers in Western Australia strike for better pay and conditions**

About 15 Transport Workers Union members from liquid fuel freighter K&S Energy Fuels, in Western Australia walked off the job for 48 hours on Wednesday to demand better pay and conditions in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers' demands include abolishment of the Yard Rate, under which when on sick leave and annual leave they are paid significantly less than when driving. Other demands are for 15 percent superannuation and cost of living adjustment to keep wages in line with inflation.

### **Smit Lamnalco tug workers at Gladstone Port escalate industrial action**

Tugmasters and engineers employed on Smit Lamnalco Towage (SL) tugboats at the Port of Gladstone, North Queensland, have escalated low-level industrial action begun on January 14 to include an overtime ban, following the lack of response from Smit Lamnalco to their existing bans.

The Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) are attempting to reach a deal with Smit Lamnalco for a new enterprise agreement. AMOU said the workers have only received a 4 percent increase over the last eight years and it wants a pay rise that compensates for the below-inflation pay rises over that period. The company has offered pay increases in line with the minimum award, which is only 3.75 percent.

The workers also want clauses stopping Smit Lamnalco from scheduling masters and engineers up to 17 hours in any 24 hours in the new agreement. Smit Lamnalco claimed that its flexible manning model "allows us to maintain lean and efficient operations" which maintains their competitive edge of being 40 percent cheaper than equivalent services at other ports.

### **Infrabuild Wire workers in Victoria strike for higher pay**

About 50 workers from Infrabuild's Geelong Wire Mill in Victoria walked off the job for 24 hours and demonstrated outside the plant on Wednesday. Members of the Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union are in dispute with Infrabuild over its proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed months of low-level work bans.

In July, workers rejected Infrabuild's wage rise offer of 10 percent over three years with almost no improvements on the old agreement. Workers

are seeking a significant pay rise, saying their wages have fallen behind those at similar industrial sites in Geelong. Other demands are for additional allowances to reflect the current working situation and a nine-day fortnight.

Their current agreement expired on August 31. Their last pay increase was in September 2023 and only 2.5 percent, when the consumer price index (CPI) rate was 5.4 percent, a real pay cut negotiated by the union.



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