

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: Tamil Nadu public transport workers hold state-wide protest

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) workers and pensioners held a statewide protest on January 22. Hundreds of protesters blockaded roads in major cities, including Chennai and Madurai.

Their long-pending demands include wage increases, the filling of all vacant posts for drivers and conductors and higher pensions and Dearness Allowance for retired workers. The protest was organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

The workers struck last year on January 9 but the industrial action was quickly called off by the union, citing the festival season as the reason.

Focus Edumatics workers in Tamil Nadu protest sackings

Workers at the US-owned Focus Edumatics in Coimbatore demonstrated against mass sackings and unpaid wages outside the labour office on Wednesday. Workers said they had been terminated illegally without any prior notice. They met with the collector and submitted a petition demanding the unpaid wages.

Neyveli Lignite Corporation mineworkers strike after colleague's death

Workers at the Neyveli Lignite Corporation's Mines II unit in Neyveli, Tamil Nadu, stopped work on January 27 to demand a job for a family member of a deceased fellow worker. The strike continued for 12 hours until the management agreed to consider the workers' demands during talks.

Rajasthan municipal sanitation workers protest local government interference in union elections

Sanitation workers from the Jaipur Municipal Corporation in Rajasthan state stopped work on Tuesday and protested outside the corporation's

premises after the corporation delayed union presidential elections due to alleged corruption. Police violently attacked the protest with lathi canes when workers began throwing garbage at the premises. At least four workers were injured.

Karnataka Anganwadi workers demonstrate for higher pay

Anganwadi (childcare) workers from rural areas of Karnataka, including 3,500 from south Karnataka, protested in Bengaluru's Freedom Park on Tuesday. They were demanding a pay rise and permanent jobs in the state public service for both workers and helpers. Anganwadi workers want monthly wages increased to 25,000 rupees (\$US288) and 12,000 rupees for helpers.

Kashmir government wildlife workers demand permanent jobs

Casual workers from the Kashmir government Wildlife Department demonstrated outside the department's office in Srinagar on Wednesday to demand permanent jobs and the payment of unpaid wages. About 50 protesting workers met with the chief minister who assured them that their demands would be met soon. The workers warned that their action would escalate if the demands were not met.

Pakistan government workers hold nationwide protest

The All-Government Employees Grand Alliance (AGEGA), which includes over 100 unions and associations from various government departments, held a nationwide protest on Wednesday to demand higher salaries and the reversal of pension reforms. Other demands were for 200 percent increase in house rent, medical, and conveyance allowances that were recommended by the Pay and Pension Committee in 2020.

Protests were held in Islamabad, and in front of provincial headquarters in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan and Sind provinces. Workers have been wearing black armbands in protest since January 6.

In Islamabad, workers marched towards the Parliament building after gathering at Q Block in the Pakistan Secretariat. An AGEDA spokesperson threatened that if their demands were not met by February 10, workers would hold a sit-down protest in front of the Parliament building for an indefinite period until their demands were addressed.

Bangladeshi railway union suspends national strike

The Bangladesh Railway Running Staff and Workers Union, representing assistant train drivers and their support staff, ended their nationwide strike on Wednesday after 26 hours, following talks with the government. According to the union, the government promised to quickly “resolve our issues” through the finance ministry by Wednesday.

Workers had demanded that the government and the railways restore their previous benefits for working extra hours, or to abolish the pay scheme where the “running allowance” would not exceed their monthly basic salary.

Although the workers’ duty period is eight hours daily, they are compelled to work for 15 to 18 hours because of staff shortfalls. Prior to 2022 they received special financial facilities under the Railways Act to satisfy payments for any extra hours. These facilities were cancelled in 2022 by the Finance Division which fixed the maximum “running allowance” to one month’s basic salary.

Bangladeshi tannery workers strike over poverty wages

Tannery workers in the Savar Leather Industrial Zone observed a two-hour work stoppage and staged protests on Wednesday demanding the immediate implementation of the government-declared minimum wage structure. For the third consecutive day, workers gathered at key points in the industrial zone.

“We have waited for 13 months while struggling to make ends meet amidst rising living costs. Despite the wage being agreed upon by both employers and employees, its implementation is still pending. We cannot endure this any longer,” one worker told the media.

The workers are members of the Tannery Workers Union, which warned that there would be escalating action if its demands remain unmet.

Australia

Dnata ground workers at four Australian airports strike for higher pay offer

More than 1,000 Dnata ground crew at Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane airports walked off the job for four hours in the morning of January 17. They were demanding a better pay offer in the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. Outgoing flights at some airports were delayed up to three hours.

Transport Workers Union (TWU) members twice last year rejected Dnata’s proposed agreement. The deal offered an 11 percent increase over two years, well below the union’s demand for an immediate 11 percent increase and 6 percent in six months. It included a maximum six rostered consecutive shifts, minimum 48-hour rest periods and 7 days’ notice of any rostering changes.

Workers are currently only guaranteed 24 hours per week, which they want increased. They are also seeking fair overtime payments, shift allowances and back pay.

Dnata is owned by the UAE airline Emirates. It services 21 airlines, including Emirates, Singapore, Japan Airlines and Qantas.

Western Australian court security workers hold third strike

About 200 security workers from Ventia, which provides court security, custodial services and prisoner transport in Western Australia, walked off the job for eight hours across the state on January 24 to demand higher pay. The workers held stoppages in November and December over the issue.

The Transport Workers Union, which covers the workers, claimed Ventia is paying its workers 24 percent less than those of their competitors doing the same job. Workers said the low pay is undermining staff retention.

Wilpinjong mine workers in New South Wales demand better pay and conditions

About 250 Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members at Peabody’s Wilpinjong mine in New South Wales’ western coalfields imposed shift stoppages on January 24, after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement deadlocked. Workers also imposed continuous bans on overtime, training, and performing higher duties. Further stoppages are planned.

The MEU claim that Peabody is refusing to compromise on any of the workers’ key demands. These are for an improvement to the base wage rate, long-service leave, parental leave and laundry services so they are not forced to wash their two supplied uniforms between every shift change.

Australian Clinical Labs workers expected to reject company’s sub-inflation pay offer

About 2,000 Health Workers Union members at Australian Clinical Labs (ACL) in Victoria voted this week on a cost-cutting sub-inflation enterprise bargaining agreement offer from the giant pathology company. It is the first ACL agreement that covers the broad range of job classifications at the company and includes pathology collectors, specimen reception workers, clerical staff, and couriers.

ACL has “offered” wage increases barely above inflation with 4 percent in the first year of the three-year agreement and 3 percent in the following years. For some workers this would be as little as a \$0.07 per hour increase in their pay. The previous agreement expired in March 2024, but ACL says it will only give workers three months backpay, instead of the nearly nine months that it owes.

The proposed agreement also entrenches poor working conditions with higher workloads, unsafe staffing levels and inadequate protections for workers who were on the frontline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The HWU says ACL made almost \$500 million in pre-tax profit during the period of the last agreement and last year gave its CEO a \$2 million bonus. The union has called for a no vote but not held any mass meetings in the past nine months, none are scheduled nor announced any future industrial action.

St Vincent's Private hospital nurses in Victoria partially pause industrial action

The Victorian branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has convinced its members to pause industrial action at St Vincent's Private hospitals in Kew, East Melbourne, Werribee and Fitzroy after St Vincent's agreed to meet the union twice a week for two weeks to try to reach a deal to end three months of industrial action.

Nurses and midwives paused bans on bed closures, surgery sessions and admissions of new and transferred patients. All other existing bans remain in place, including a ban on any work related to meals, telephone calls, or other communication from the employer. The pause will end on February 8 unless a deal is reached.

ANMF members began imposing work bans on November 18 and four-hour rolling stoppages on December 13 in opposition to management's proposed enterprise agreement. On January 7, they began closing one in three beds on their wards (apart from life-threatening cases), refused to undertake food services related duties, and charges refused to take a patient load.

The November "offer" included a four percent pay rise and 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.

New South Wales Snowy Hydro workers ban work in dangerous tunnels

About 700 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed on Australia's Snowy 2.0 hydropower project have downed tools due to safety concerns. They have refused to work on two key tunnelling projects since January 2, preventing the operation of three tunnel-boring machines and all drill and blast work.

The AWU says refuge chambers in the tunnels are not fit for purpose nor are its members being trained in their use. The refuge chambers are designed to provide oxygen and shelter in the event of an underground emergency, such as a tunnel collapse. Workers said some refuge chambers are not being properly maintained and are inoperable. The union has stated that regular underground rescue scenarios have not been conducted in some areas for months.

The Snowy Hydro project, which is now costing \$12 billion, has experienced significant delays and cost overruns. The project has a long history of difficulties, including issues with tunnel boring machines and tunnel collapses. The AWU has claimed that Health and Safety Representatives have had their safety concerns ignored for months. All production at the project has ceased.

Fire Rescue Victoria workers threaten to take nearly half its fire-truck fleet off the road

An ongoing dispute over safety, wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement is taking place between members of the United Firefighters Union (UFU) and their employer Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV),

and has resulted in UFU members voting on Wednesday to take about 30 unsafe fire trucks off the road.

In October, UFU members demonstrated outside state parliament claiming that half the vehicle fleet was unsafe and that they had not received a pay raise in four years. The union stated that 42 percent of the FRV fleet is past its 15-year replacement date, which was estimated to rise to 64 percent by the end of the year.

The UFU is claiming that the state Labor government's pay increase offer of 12 percent over four years, along with bonuses, is in fact a real pay cut, given the rapid rise in the cost of living since their last pay increase. They argue they need a minimum 14.8 percent rise to keep pace with real cost-of-living increases.

Serco immigration detention centre workers across Australia to strike

About 850 United Workers Union (UWU) members at government immigration centres managed by Serco in Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane have voted to strike over redundancy pay.

British security and defence multinational Serco lost its contract to operate Australia's six detention centres to American prison operator Secure Journeys late last year. Serco claimed Secure Journeys rejected an offer to transition employees, along with lump sum payments equivalent to each individual employee's leave entitlement.

In an attempt to avoid paying redundancy, Serco notified its immigration centre workers that if they wanted to take up employment with the new contractor they would have to resign from Serco. UWU claimed that not one Serco worker had been offered a position with the new operator and told its members that by resigning they will not be paid redundancy/severance benefits by Serco.

The union alleged that Serco is illegally trying to avoid paying redundancy and said members will strike next week if the issue is not resolved. Serco has warned its managers to prepare for strikes.



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