

# 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: National Health Mission workers in Maharashtra begin indefinite strike

About 20,000 National Health Mission (NHM) workers across Maharashtra state began an indefinite strike on Wednesday to demand permanent jobs. The walkout involved technical and non-technical workers, including those employed for more than 10 years. Workers said they were forced to strike because the government had failed to honour previous assurances to resolve their grievances.

## Striking Chennai Corporation conservancy workers defy police repression

About 3,000 conservancy workers from the Greater Chennai Corporation are maintaining strike action and their demonstration outside the corporation's building that they began on August 2 to protest privatisation of their jobs. The strikers are defying a Madras High Court directive that they clear the protest site and end all industrial action.

Police, following orders from the Tamil Nadu government, attacked the protest at midnight August 13. The workers, who are part of National Urban Livelihood Missions, have resolved to continue their strike.

The workers said they have been temporary employees for 15 years expecting to be made permanent. They are concerned that privatisation of conservancy services, which started on August 1, is a threat to their livelihoods.

The strikers have won support from corporation workers in Madurai and Coimbatore who held protests on August 19 and 14 respectively.

## Punjab Roadways and PRTC contract workers strike for permanent jobs

About 8,000 contract workers from Punjab Roadways and the Pepsu Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) began strike action on August 14 to demand permanent jobs, ending of contract hiring and introduction of new buses. About 2,500 buses from 27 bus depots were idle during the strike.

## Construction workers in Karnataka strike over lack of materials

Construction workers in Udupi district, Karnataka began an indefinite strike in the region on Monday over the non-availability of house construction laterite stones (red bricks). The walkout was called by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions. Workers fear that they could lose their jobs due to the higher royalty cost on laterite stones.

## Bangladesh: Petroleum refinery contract workers demand better wages and conditions

More than a hundred contract workers from the Padma, Meghna, Jamuna Oil and Eastern Refinery, which operate under the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), protested outside BPC head office in Chattogram on August 14.

Protesters presented a memorandum of demands to the BPC chairman. This included changes to the BPC Recruitment Policy 2023 to include daily-wage workers to give them job security, financial benefits, legal protection and other rights as per their co-workers. They also want the government-declared daily wage of 800 taka (\$US6.58) to be applied from July 1.

## Sri Lanka: Non-academic university workers hold national strike

Hundreds of non-academic university workers held a national strike on Wednesday in opposition to the Dissanayake government's 2026 budget proposals to cut allowances and overtime. Workers displayed posters demanding the immediate restoration of allowances and overtime rates that were cut by 20 percent, and the provision of increased disaster loans.

## Qantas engineers continue pay rise strike

About 600 Qantas line engineers have been holding twice-weekly stoppages in addition to rolling work bans imposed on June 25 at all major Australian airports in their long-running dispute for higher pay.

Management told the Qantas Alliance Unions (QAU), which represents the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union, that it intended to represent their original pay offer to workers. Qantas line engineers rejected that offer in May. Qantas

demanding that the unions endorse the offer and threatened to withdraw backpay if it was rejected.

Qantas has offered 3 percent annual wage rises in a three-year agreement. Workers are demanding a 15 percent wage rise in the first year, and 5 percent for every year thereafter, to compensate for three-and-a-half years of wage freezes agreed by the unions during the COVID pandemic.

While the unions say that their members' pay has increased by only 12 percent in the last decade, they have allowed negotiations with the company to drag on since April 2024. Line engineers play a critical role at airports, responsible for towing and marshalling aircraft and performing turnaround safety checks on aircraft.

In the Federal Court on Monday, Qantas was ordered to pay a \$90 million fine for illegally outsourcing 1,200 ground handling jobs during the COVID pandemic. This was on top of \$120 million Qantas agreed to pay into a compensation fund for the affected workers.

### **DNATA baggage handlers at Perth Airport strike for pay parity**

Close to 90 baggage handlers employed by Dubai National Air Travel Agency (DNATA) at Perth Airport, Western Australia walked off the job at 5.30 p.m. on Thursday in a 16-hour strike for higher pay and job security. The workers are in the Transport Workers Union (TWU), which claim its members are the lowest paid DNATA workers in the country.

TWU members overwhelmingly rejected the company's pay rise offer of 4 percent in 2025, 3.5 percent for 2026, 3 percent for 2027 and 2.5 percent or CPI for 2028 (with CPI capped at 3 per cent) voted on August 14 by 94 percent to take strike action ranging from one hour to 24 hours. The union compared DNATA's pay offer to Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide employees who received a 6 percent increase last year and will receive 5 percent this year.

Perth workers also want improved roster flexibility, retention of soil allowance and job security.

### **Cairns Regional Council administrative staff strike for fairer pay**

Administrative workers at the Cairns Regional Council, northern Queensland stopped work for one hour on August 14 and rallied outside the council offices to demand higher pay in a new certified agreement. The council sent emails to workers threatening to lock them out for two hours if they joined the strike.

The Service Union (TSU) members rejected council's pay offer because outdoor staff would receive a 9 percent pay increase in the first year and annual 4 percent increases on the following two years compared to indoor staff who were only offered 6–6.5 percent, followed by 4 percent annual rises. Workers accused the council of trying to divide its workforce.

### **Otis Elevator Company electricians in Queensland strike for industry standard pay**

Fifty striking Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the Otis Elevator Company marched from Toowong, a suburb of Brisbane, and rallied outside the company's headquarters on Tuesday. About 100 ETU

members are demanding industry standard wages and improved conditions in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. They began their strike on Monday.

### **Metroll building materials supply workers in Western Australia walkout**

Some 16 truck drivers and loaders from building materials supplier Metroll in Perth walked off the job on Thursday in their dispute for better pay and conditions. In a last-minute meeting on Wednesday management told Transport Workers Union officials that it would not improve its pay offer, increase allowances, provide safer working conditions or guarantee union delegate rights in its proposed enterprise agreement.

Metroll workers voted unanimously on August 1 for future industrial action, including strikes for up to one week and a ban on overtime.

### **MSS security guards in Victoria strike for higher wages**

Over 150 workers employed by MSS Security, which is contracted to provide security for the Department of Defence, Homes Victoria, Monash Health, several universities and the Thales Group, struck on Wednesday in their dispute with the company over its proposed enterprise agreement.

The United Workers Union (UWU) claimed the workers are paid hundreds of dollars less than guards at other companies doing the same work and are denied basic work rights.

UWU members voted on August 11 for future industrial action that could include work stoppages from one minute to 24 hours or indefinite duration. They also foreshadowed five work bans, including overtime, supervising contractors and visitors and training other staff.

### **Derwent Valley Council workers in Tasmania vote for industrial action**

After more than a year of failed negotiations, Australian Services Union (ASU) members from the Derwent Valley Council on August 15 voted for future industrial action to win improved pay in the council's current proposed enterprise agreement.

The council's last wage rise offer was just 2.5 percent, which workers said did not match Tasmania's cost-of-living increases and contrasted unfavourably with the 5.1 percent salary increase management had awarded themselves. Council has refused to hold further meetings with the union.

The 37 ASU members want annual 5 percent pay increases over the life of the agreement, maintenance of the uncapped CPI safety net, improved conditions and improved classification structure.

Although workers overwhelmingly voted for future strike action up to 24 hours, the ASU is planning to begin its industrial campaign with a mediocre community protest and the chalking of council cars and offices. The union said if management did not make a better offer it would impose other work bans including the non-collection of fines and rubbish.

## **New Zealand nurses start new round of industrial action**

New Zealand nurses have begun a new round of industrial action to win better staffing levels. The action comes ahead of a two-day nationwide strike by 36,000 nurses beginning on September 2 and follows two 24-hour nationwide strikes in July and December.

Nurses at Christchurch Hospital walked off the job for two hours on August 15. NZ Nurses Organisation (NZNO) members in theatre, post-anaesthetic care and radiology struck. Theatre nurse Gayl Marryatt said the strike was a result of the “desperate” staffing issues that had not been resolved in bargaining with Health NZ.

Other action has included nurses on Auckland’s North Shore wearing t-shirts saying, “Not Enough Nurses” instead of uniforms. Nurses in the Cardiothoracic and Vascular Intensive Care Units at Auckland City and Whangarei Hospital are refusing to cover staff shortages.

The NZNO has been negotiating behind closed doors and dragging out the dispute for more than eight months. The union’s main demand is for a paltry 5 percent pay increase over two years, and an extra \$2,000 rate increase for senior roles. This is little better than Health NZ’s offer and for most nurses it would still be a pay cut relative to inflation.

## **New Zealand media staff strike**

Staff at media company *Stuff* have this week voted to take strike action. The workers are opposed to the company’s plans to split their collective agreement into two, which would reduce their bargaining power. The company separated into two different entities last year.

Stuff Digital administers stuff.co.nz and its audio and video divisions. Newspaper brands and their websites, including the *Post*, the *Press* and the *Waikato Times*, are run by Masthead Publishing.

A spokesperson for the E T? union said staff had “overwhelmingly” voted for action, which has not been revealed, in response to their employer’s position but that negotiations were “ongoing.”

## **Hornby Club workers in Christchurch strike against two-tier wage structure**

Hornby Club workers in Christchurch walked out for the second time on August 15 in an ongoing pay dispute. The workers struck from 5 p.m. until midnight, following a similar strike on August 8. One striker said, “workers are fed up with being ignored. We haven’t seen any real change since we first went on strike, and we’re not backing down.”

The dispute follows a breakdown in bargaining over the club’s proposal to cut some of the printed rates in the pay structure. A spokesman for the E T? union said for years the Hornby Club has kept their pay rates in line with the Living Wage (currently \$28.95), but their latest proposal would see new workers start on less and weaken pay progression for existing staff.



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