

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Telangana government contract health workers demand unpaid wages and bonuses

About 110,000 Telangana government contract health workers protested outside their hospitals and at the Medical and Health Department headquarters in Koti on Tuesday to demand pending wages and festival bonus payments for the past five months. Protesters from HIV wards demanded an additional 2,500 rupees (\$US28), which was an election promise of the current Congress government.

A Telangana Medical and Health Contract Employees Trade Union spokesperson alleged that outsourcing agencies deduct Provident Fund contributions from salaries but fail to deposit them with the relevant department. He added that the Congress party's manifesto had promised to abolish outsourcing agencies and establish a corporation to manage employees, but that promise had not been fulfilled.

India: Ludhiana Municipal Corporation workers protest outsourcing of garbage collection

Door-to-door garbage collection workers from the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation, in Punjab, protested against the outsourcing of their jobs on Tuesday. The Door-to-Door Mazdoor Ekta Sangathan union coordinated the protest. Workers fear they will lose their livelihoods if the corporation goes ahead with the plan. Workers handed a memorandum of their demands to the mayor. They asked for appointment letters to be issued immediately to sewage-cleaning men, sanitation workers, manual labourers and over-aged employees, and for outsourcing to be stopped.

Coal India workers and pensioners in West Bengal demand pay and pension increase

Workers and retired staff from Coal India demonstrated at the company headquarters in Kolkata on Tuesday, demanding increased pensions, parity in pay scales and comprehensive medical benefits. The demonstration was called by the All India Association of Coal Executives (AIACE) and the All-India Coal Pensioners' Association (AICPA) who said the workers' demands had been ignored for several years. They submitted a list of demands to a company representative.

Pallorbond tea estate workers in Assam protest low pay and reduced bonus

On September 14, around 2,000 workers from the Pallorbond tea estate in Cachar district of Guwahati city protested irregular rations, low wages and the reduction of festival bonus. Workers demanded a festival bonus of 20 percent but the authorities offered only 8.33 percent. Workers said they would keep protesting until their demand was met.

Bangladesh: Workers from Eurozone Fashion Garments resume protest

Over 500 workers from the Eurozone Fashion Garments factory in Dhaka resumed their protest for several hours on the afternoon of September 11. They blocked the roads in Dhaka's Kuril area, demanding unpaid wages and allowances. Police intervened and ended the protest. Earlier in the month, the workers ended a protest over the same demands, after the factory owners falsely assured them that all arrears would be cleared by September 10.

Sri Lankan public school teachers protest

Hundreds of public school teachers held a protest on Monday to demand that their children be admitted to the government schools where they serve. The demonstration started in front of the Presidential Secretariat and continued through the night.

On Tuesday, the teachers marched to the Ministry of Education seeking a meeting with the minister to discuss their demands. However, after failing to receive a constructive response, they escalated their action by launching a Satyagraha—a peaceful protest of nonviolent resistance. The teachers protested in May over the same issue.

Schindler Lifts technicians in New South Wales on strike for pay parity

Members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and Electrical Trades Union (ETU) from Schindler Lifts in New South Wales are maintaining their indefinite strike begun on September 8 in a long-running enterprise bargaining dispute. The action follows 18 rounds of failed negotiations and a series of stoppages.

Workers want a 6 percent pay rise, the same amount Schindler recently gave to its Queensland workers, improved parental leave, rights for health

and safety representatives and job security.

Schindler locked out its entire workforce of 300 on August 8 in response to low-level work bans. The Fair Work Commission, however, declared the lockout unlawful and workers returned on August 15. The ETU claimed that the company could afford the pay increase and pointed out that in 2024 Schindler Lifts Australia paid \$11.66 million in dividends and made \$6.16 million profit after tax.

Newcastle bus drivers to stop work for four hours

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) gave notice this week that bus drivers from Keolis Downer Hunter (KDH) in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie, New South Wales, will attend a 4-hour stop-work meeting at 10 a.m. on September 22 to decide on the next steps in their dispute with KDH for a new enterprise agreement. Eighteen rounds of negotiations have been held since December.

As part of the long-running dispute, in early April RTBU members stopped work for 24 hours and turned off their Opal card readers (fare collecting machines), giving commuters free travel.

A union spokesperson said there were two key demands: a pay increase to keep pace with the increasing cost of living and at least 72 hours' notice for changes to driver's shifts. The two parties were to meet in the Fair Work Commission on Thursday.

The state government awarded the French firm Keolis Downer a 10-year contract to provide bus commuter services in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas in 2016. Workers are calling for the operation of the bus service to be returned to the government.

Woodside oil and gas production workers in Western Australia step up industrial action

Following the beginning of low-level industrial action on September 5, 250 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by maintenance contractors Monos and Legeneering at five Woodside oil and gas offshore production facilities in Western Australia this week stepped up industrial action by stopping work for longer periods. The workers are in dispute with Monos and Legeneering over their proposed enterprise agreement. They are seeking industry standard wages and conditions.

The workers' bargaining unit is the Offshore Alliance (made up of the AWU and the Maritime Union of Australia). It claimed that Woodside is demanding that the contractors cap wages at 2.5 percent per annum for the next four years. Legeneering wants its hook-up and commissioning crew to accept a 10 percent rate cut.

AWU members voted on August 28 to approve future industrial action which could include unlimited strikes from 30 minutes to 24 hours duration and up to ten work bans. Workers said they will progressively step up industrial action until maintenance comes to a standstill.

South Australian public sector health and disability support workers protest low pay offer

About 400 public sector health and disability support workers stopped work and rallied outside the electoral office of South Australian Premier

Peter Malinauskas on Tuesday after rejecting the government's low pay offer in its proposed work agreement. United Workers Union (UWU) members attending the rally came from major Adelaide hospitals, disability support, aged care and early education.

More than 2,000 workers are involved in the dispute, which has dragged on for over eight months. Under the government's latest offer, workers would receive a 4 percent first-year wage increase in a two-year deal, which the union claimed doesn't provide meaningful cost-of-living relief. As well as an improved pay offer, workers want a 200 percent increase to Sunday penalty rates. The Labor government is only offering a 175 percent increase, and only after July 2026.

In February, 1,000 UWU members, including theatre orderlies, patient service assistants, central sterilised stores department technicians, menu monitors, chefs, cleaners and kitchen services workers imposed a series of bans and various work-to-rule measures as part of their campaign.

At the same time, more than 1,100 disability support workers demanding a "living wage" and "Safe Support Services" imposed bans at 240 Department of Human Services (DHS) houses. These workers are demanding pay parity with workers employed under the federal award.

Meanwhile, Australian Nurses and Midwives Federation (ANMF) members in the state are maintaining rolling one-hour lunchtime stop-work rallies outside public hospitals in Adelaide in their campaign for higher pay. On Tuesday, 200 nurses and midwives rallied at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital as part of the campaign. The action followed similar stop-work rallies at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, Flinders Medical Centre and the Women's and Children's Hospital last week.

ANMF members have rejected the government's pay rise offer of 13 percent over four years in a new enterprise agreement. The union told the media it was not publicly naming a dollar figure but said nurses and midwives wanted parity with other states. ANMF members also want rural and regional attraction and retention provisions, increased penalties for night duties, and reduced use of excessive overtime.

South Australian firefighters continue industrial action

United Firefighters Union (UFU) members in South Australia put in place "Stage 3" industrial action this week in their dispute with the Malinauskas state government for better pay and conditions. After 13 months of negotiations UFU members rejected the government's proposed enterprise agreement on September 3 and put in place low level "Stage 1" industrial action in their "Fair Go For Furies" campaign. The UFU accused the government of not providing adequate training and demanded it "recognise and respect the true value of firefighters."

Stage 1 and 2 action included a ban on charging for alarms using "Code 600," wearing union t-shirts and flying union flags on work vehicles. Stage 2 involved working-to-rule on shift changeovers, a ban on "Act ups" in Operations, and chalking "Fair Go For Furies" on station windows and vehicles. Stage 3 maintains low-level action and bans certain transfers in Operations and doing relief and encourages station crew to carry out drills in public where possible. Members are also urged to attend the "City to Bay Fun Run" on Sunday wearing union T-shirts.

The union has not reported if the government has responded to their industrial action.

CDC bus drivers in the Northern Territory begin industrial action for pay increase

Close to 90 Transport Workers Union (TWU) bus drivers employed by CDC Darwin, CDC Regional NT and Buslink NT commenced industrial action on Monday, seeking a pay increase and improved conditions and safety in a new enterprise agreement. After several months of failed negotiations, the workers voted on September 3 to approve taking industrial action that could include work stoppages between one minute and 24 hours, wearing union badges and placing stickers on buses, among others. The union has restricted action to placing union posters in buses and drivers wearing union hi-vis vests.

Northern Territory public sector health professionals begin industrial action

Over 150 public sector allied health professionals in the Northern Territory commenced industrial action on Wednesday after rejecting the state government's latest pay offer of 12.55 percent over four years. The workers are members of the Health Services Union (HSU) and are demanding an 18.5 percent pay increase over three years, a \$2,500 professional development allowance and improved incentives for regional and remote work.

The HSU claimed that NT allied health professionals are paid up to 20 percent less than their interstate colleagues.

Even though union members voted on September 2 to approve putting in place up to 27 work bans, including work stoppages up to 12 hours, the HSU has restricted industrial action to limiting meeting attendances, and a ban on entering Medicare billing codes into the pathology information systems.

Forensic mental health workers in Victoria strike for improved pay offer

Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members at the state-run Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health (Forensicare) hospital in Fairfield, a suburb of Melbourne, stopped work for two hours on Thursday and rallied near the Clifton Hill facility. About 350 HACSU members are employed at Forensicare and are demanding better pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement.

The workers walked out for two hours in May and have since joined other mental health workers across the state in strikes and rallies pushing for better wages and conditions. The HACSU rejected the Labor government's last offer handed down on June 6, saying it did not come close to their pay demand for allied health workers, and accused the government of trying to split the workforce by offering funds, resources, and concessions to some disciplines and denying them to others.

Public hospital patient assistant workers in Eastern Health, Victoria protest outsourcing

About 40 Patient Services Assistants (PSAs) employed at Eastern Health public hospitals and facilities at Box Hill and Maroondah Hospitals, Yarra Ranges Health in Lilydale, and Blackburn and Healesville Food Services, rallied in front of the Box Hill Hospital on Tuesday to protest the outsourcing of their jobs. PSAs support nurses and

doctors in the day-to-day tasks of caring for patients, whether taking patients to the ward, delivering specimens to pathology or cleaning.

The Health Workers Union (HWU) claimed that up to 400 jobs could be outsourced. Workers were told they would be offered positions in the proposed labour hire company ISS Facility Services. However, no compensation figure has been offered and workers fear that they will lose hard-fought-for conditions and be on lower wages with less job security. Workers said medical staff at the facilities are supporting them but the HWU has not indicated if it will mount a united campaign to save their jobs.

Eastern Health was underfunded by over \$100 million in 2023-24. Management claimed, "The proposed change is designed to streamline operations and support long-term sustainability."

Alcoa aluminium smelter workers in Victoria strike for improved pay offer

About 380 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members from the Alcoa aluminium smelter at Portland, Victoria are taking strike action impacting the night shift operations. The action follows 16 weeks of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

Workers rejected Alcoa's latest pay offer of 12 percent over three years, which according to the union would strip away conditions. They want a pay rise of 15 percent over three years, job security, 14 percent superannuation to be calculated on total wages and backpay to June 30. The AWU alleged that Alcoa is attempting to get rid of the Senior Site Delegate position and remove the ability for members to raise a dispute over any employee related matters.

Fonterra dairy processing workers in Victoria begin indefinite strike

Close to 80 production workers from the Fonterra dairy processing plant at Bayswater, a suburb of Melbourne, went on indefinite strike on Wednesday in their fight for a new enterprise agreement. The action follows several weeks of rolling stoppages and work bans put in place on August 22 after workers accused management of purposely delaying negotiations for over six months ahead of the sale of the company to French dairy manufacturer Lactalis.

The workers are worried about future attacks on jobs and conditions and want their new enterprise agreement extended to four years during the company takeover. They are demanding an increase in redundancy payouts by 8 weeks to 60 weeks, as well as higher allowances and health-and-safety improvements. They also want wages increased to bring them in line with Fonterra workers at other company sites, who they say are paid \$5 more per hour.

Early childhood educators in Victoria strike

On Tuesday, Victorian early childhood educators stopped work for 24 hours after negotiations between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the Allan state Labor government broke down. Although bargaining began before the previous enterprise agreement (EA) expired in September 2024, no agreement has been reached over wage rises, staffing

levels and conditions in the new Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA).

More than 700 striking AEU members attended a mass meeting in Melbourne to hear the union's plan to "put pressure on the Allan government." The union admitted that the low-level work bans it called for on August 25 were having little effect.

Early childhood workers say their workloads are becoming intolerable, driven by increasing administrative and monitoring tasks, inadequate planning time, long unpaid overtime, insufficient staff, a lack of support for children in their care, barriers to salary progression and a low base wage. The union has included more than 60 items in its EA log of claims.

A recent report on Victoria's early childhood educator shortage estimates that by 2031 the shortfall will increase to 11,000, a number that would threaten the viability of future early childhood learning initiatives. To date the Victorian government has not issued a formal pay proposal.

Royal Hobart Hospital environmental services workers walk out

Dozens of environmental services workers at Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) in Tasmania walked off the job for an hour on Monday and protested outside the hospital. The strike was the latest action by Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members in their long-running dispute with RHH management and the Liberal state government over the hospital's refusal to pay a staff training allowance.

The dispute began last February when RHH refused to pay the workers a training allowance and began describing new staff training as "buddying." Union members say this was an attempt by RHH management to downplay the importance and responsibility workers take on when they are required to train and orientate new employees in an acute hospital setting and was aimed at denying workers the wage they should be paid for the work they do. Workers have put in place a ban on training new recruits until their demands are met.

The current dispute with RHH administrators follows a strike in October last year, when HACSU members took industrial action at the hospital to oppose chronic low staffing levels, shortages of patient linen and the employment of contract cleaners.

Public school facility attendants in Tasmania strike over workload and resources

Education Facility Attendants, including cleaners, grounds staff and kitchen assistants, stopped work for the day on Wednesday and rallied in Hobart outside parliament and at the state premier's office. The government responded by closing 14 affected schools.

According to the United Workers Union, the facility attendants' enterprise agreement expired three years ago and they've had no additional resources since the first agreement in 1997. Workers want a new agreement that provides adequate resources and reduced workload.



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