

# 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 Korean airport workers hold nationwide strike

About 15,000 workers at 15 airports nationwide, including workers in sanitation, traffic control, fire safety, mechanical facility management and terminal operations and electrical maintenance, walked out at 6 a.m. on Wednesday. Many of the workers, who are union members, were still on strike on Thursday.

As part of the industrial action, security screening workers at the Incheon International Airport, Korea's main gateway, refused to work overtime during the Chuseok holiday.

Workers want a four-team, two-shift system, instead of the current three-team, two-shift rotation, along with additional staffing, and better treatment for subsidiary employees.

## South Korean bank workers walk out for shorter work week

Several thousand South Korean bank workers went on strike and held a rally in central Seoul, pressing for higher pay and a shorter workweek on September 26. The Korean Financial Industry Union had expected 80,000 to join the strike but unions at some private banks did not, even though private bank workers had overwhelmingly voted to strike.

Workers are seeking a 5 percent pay increase, a workweek of four-and-a-half days and extension of the retirement age. Striking workers, many wearing red headbands saying, "General Strike", marched through Gwanghwamun Square, in Seoul carrying banners and placards with their demands.

Korea is well-known for long office hours and a relentless corporate culture. In 2023, Koreans' average hours of work were the seventh-longest among members of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

## Philippines: Antique province hospital contract nurses strike

Contract nurses and other staff at the government-owned Angel Salazar Memorial General Hospital in the provincial capital of San Jose de Buenavista walked out on indefinite strike on Wednesday. The workers have been demanding payment of overdue salaries. While the workers

remain on strike, hospital staff are being directed to do overtime. The government claimed that a dispute over hospital documents and records has caused the delay.

## India: Kadamba Transport Corporation workers strike in Goa

On Tuesday, Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) workers staged a day-long hunger protest outside the corporation's head office in Panaji, the capital of Goa state. Workers want immediate payment of the 7th pay review, outstanding for the past 34 months, permanent jobs for daily-wage workers, and rectification of long-standing salary anomalies.

The workers are members of the Kadamba Drivers and Allied Employees' Association, affiliated with the All India Trade Union Congress.

## Delhi Municipal Corporation workers strike for permanent jobs

Multitasking workers, including mosquito eradication employees, from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi stopped work and rallied outside the corporation's headquarters on Monday. They were demanding streamlined leave procedures and permanent jobs for precarious employees.

The workers play a critical role in the process of preventing vector diseases, such as malaria, by spraying stagnant water to kill mosquito larvae and other health measures.

## Tamil Nadu railway workers strike over staff shortages

Around 90 members of the Southern Railway Mazdoor Union (SRMU) held a sit-in protest at Madurai on September 24. They were protesting the critical staff shortage, lack of proper work schedules and mounting safety risks. Workers said there were around 150 vacancies which would affect about 500 employees. In the last two years 21 loco pilots left because of the stressful work schedules.

## Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research workers protest

Contract workers from the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandrigha held a protest march on Tuesday demanding payment of outstanding wages of about 800 to 900 million rupees (\$US10.1 million).

They also protested the imposition of the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), which makes striking illegal. The Joint Action Committee, an umbrella of trade unions from all sections of contract workers in the institute, alleged that the wage arrears has been deliberately withheld since a High Court ruling on March 13, 2019.

### **Chhattisgarh National Health Mission workers on indefinite strike**

Nearly 16,000 National Health Mission (NHM) workers are continuing strike action they began on August 8. Maintenance of the strike is in response to the arrest of 25 union leaders and which led to the mass resignation of around 14,000 NHM workers in the region.

Strikers want equal pay for equal work in line with permanent workers, creation of a dedicated public health cadre, annual performance evaluations, a 27 percent salary hike, cashless medical insurance worth at least one million rupees (\$US12,000) and expanded leave and medical benefits.

### **Bangladesh police arrest garment workers protesting factory closures**

On September 25, police arrested seven apparel workers from the NASSA Group's factories in the Ashulia industrial hub at Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka. The workers protested the previous day following the sudden closure of the factories. They demonstrated in surrounding streets over the closures and to demand unpaid entitlements.

Protesters blocked the Bypile-Abdullahpur highway at Ashulia for an hour. Police used water cannons and tear gas shells to break up the protest. The NASSA Group's 16 apparel factories are in Dhaka, Gazipur, Chattogram and Cumilla export processing zone, employing 12,000 workers since 1990.

The permanent shuttering of the factories was approved in a meeting that included the Ministry of Labour, representatives from the military, police, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and trade union officials on September 23. According to a memorandum, the authorities were directed to sell certain assets in order to pay the workers' entitlements: They are expected to receive their payments for August by October 15 and for September by October 30.

### **Sri Lankan public sector university academics strike**

On Tuesday, academic staff from universities across Sri Lanka held a nationwide strike to demand urgent solutions to a series of escalating issues within the higher education sector. The strike, which was called by the Federation of University Teachers' Unions (FUTU), cited chronic shortages of academic staff, severe funding cuts, and deteriorating physical and human resources as the main issues of the protest.

The federation's chairman said that the government has shown minimal commitment to addressing the grievances over the past year and that members were collectively withdrawing from all academic and

administrative duties—including lectures, examinations, and governance activities—as a form of protest.

The Federation outlined several critical grievances, including failure to recruit adequate numbers of professors, leaving only 5,000 staff to meet impossible work demands, insufficient support for academic and training programs, inadequate salaries, compounded by a 20 percent income tax burden.

The federation warned that unless constructive solutions are presented within fourteen days there would be further industrial action.

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa power utility workers strike against staff shortage and privatisation**

All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union members in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, stopped work in the province's capital Peshawar on Wednesday. Workers gathered at Wapda House and shouted slogans for the early filling of all vacancies to address critical staff shortages.

They also condemned the suspension of marriage grants and cuts in other allowances, and demanded their restoration. Another demand was for the early recovery of kidnapped Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) employees in Bannu on September 12.

Union members staged protest sit-ins at divisional headquarters across the province over delayed implementation of service structures and a pay raise to part-time employees.

PESCO workers said they operate with only 70 percent of the required staff numbers and while the law-and-order situation in the province was fast deteriorating they still worked day and night generating about 20 billion rupees (\$US71 million) this year to the power company.

Workers called for withdrawal of the government's decision to privatise Wapda, which will split it into three electricity distribution companies. They also called for payment of one month's basic salary as bonus.

### **Sindh province government employees still protesting over pension cuts**

Sindh government employees continued their province-wide strike on Saturday against a newly introduced pension policy. They said that millions of government employees had been protesting for several months for their legitimate demands, including group insurance, benevolent fund and disparity reduction allowance (DRA) but the Sindh government was not only ignoring these demands but resorted to apply a 65 percent cut in pension.

Strikers said their September 23–27 protest would be followed by a sit-down protest outside Bilawal House in Karachi on October 6.

### **Napean Power electricians in New South Wales locked out in pay dispute**

About 50 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the commercial power products manufacturer Napean Power at Tomago, an industrial suburb of Newcastle, are taking industrial action for a new enterprise agreement. ETU members walked out for two hours when negotiations reached an impasse on September 23. Management locked them out the

next day and told apprentices not to attend classes.

ETU members previously voted unanimously on August 15 for future industrial action which could include unlimited work stoppages between 30 minutes and one week, or for an infinite duration. They also approved the imposition of 24 different work bans, including overtime. Workers want better pay and conditions in the company's proposed agreement.

### **Western Australian park rangers strike for higher pay**

On September 27, National Parks rangers across Western Australia stopped work for four hours at 7 am to demand higher pay, reduced workload and improved safety. United Workers Union members are not collecting park entry fees during the dispute.

A union spokesman said entry level rangers are paid a fraction above the minimum wage and that all rangers are expected to work weekends, public holidays, overtime and be available 24/7 whenever required without fair compensation.

"We can't take a weekend off because Parks are under-staffed and we have no legal right to say no. Rangers in remote areas are worked 20 and sometimes 30 days straight without a break to cover for shortages," he said.

Workers want improved staffing levels and a "fair" pay to cover the increasing cost of living and recognise the job they do.

### **Queensland Transport and Main Roads workers strike for shorter week**

Tradesman and professionals from the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) stopped work on Monday and rallied outside TMR offices and depots across Queensland on Monday as a part of ongoing industrial action for a shorter working week. About 40 members of the Electrical Trades Union and Professionals Australia rallied outside the TMR headquarters in Brisbane.

State public sector trades workers from QHealth, QBuild and the TMR, QBuild are part of the dispute. They are represented by five unions—the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union, Electrical Trades Union (ETU), the Plumbers Union and Professionals Australia—who want a 36-hour week to bring them into line with "white-collar" public servants.

Professionals Australia members, including engineers and technical professionals, say they are paid up to 20 percent less than their Queensland colleagues who are partnering with them to deliver the exact same projects. They want pay parity.

### **Cleanaway truck drivers in Townsville strike over low pay offer**

Eight Transport Workers Union members from Cleanaway waste management in Townsville, on Queensland's north coast stopped work for the day and rallied outside their depot on September 26. They are in dispute with Cleanaway over its proposed enterprise agreement. Workers decided in September to take industrial action after rejecting the company's "lowball" offer.

Workers want a fair pay deal, safer rosters and real consultation and pay

parity with other workers in the industry who receive higher wages.

### **Industrial action by South Australian firefighters enters fifth week**

Industrial action by United Firefighters Union (UFU) members in South Australia, which began on September 3, is continuing with firefighters imposing Stage 5 work bans. UFU members are in dispute with the Malinauskas state government for better pay and conditions.

Stage 5 action involves erecting large signage supporting their demands in front of all fire stations and attached to vehicles, and public rallies at various venues commencing on October 8. Low-level Stage 1 to 4 protest activity continues.

After 13 months of negotiations, UFU members rejected the government's proposed enterprise agreement on September 3 and decided to commence industrial action.

### **Bucher Municipal workers in Victoria strike for improved work agreement**

About 60 Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members from Bucher Municipal sales and service facility at Clayton, Melbourne walked off the job on September 25 and rallied outside the premises in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Bucher Municipal supplies and services specialised equipment for municipal councils, including refuse collection vehicles, sweepers and sewer/drainage equipment.

As well as a pay rise, workers want the new agreement to include better working conditions and clearer paths to reclassification and progression. They voted on August 7 to approve future industrial action including strikes from 30 minutes and up to a week or longer and a ban on overtime and callbacks.

### **Central Goldfields Shire Council workers begin industrial action for higher pay**

Over 60 Australian Services Union (ASU) members from the Central Goldfields Shire Council in Maryborough, Queensland have begun low-level industrial action for an improved pay offer from the council. The dispute is being heard in the Fair Work Commission. While workers previously approved future strike action of up to 24 hours, the ASU has restricted industrial action to handing out flyers around council buildings and community hubs.

After nine months of negotiations, the council is only offering 3 percent annual pay increases. Workers are demanding 3 percent or \$55 per week, whichever is the greater. According to the union the council's offer some workers could be \$19 worse off per week.

### **Re.Group waste recycling workers on Queensland's Sunshine Coast strike**

On Thursday, Transport Workers Union (TWU) members from Re.Group at the council-owned waste recycling plant in Bli Bli, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, stopped work for the second time since August. They are demanding an improved pay offer in a new enterprise agreement. The union claimed that the workers' wages were 14 to 22 percent lower than workers in the region doing similar work.

Workers immediately rejected the company's insulting 0.7 percent wage rise offer. They are demanding a 21.5 percent pay rise over three years.

The Materials Recovery Facility at Bli Bli is one of many recycling facilities run by transnational company Re.Group. The company, which receives millions of dollars in government funding, is one of Australia' and New Zealand's largest recycling network operators. It provides curbside recycling services to more than five million people across 40 local government areas in Australia and New Zealand.

### **Fonterra dairy factory maintenance workers in Tasmania strike**

Plant maintenance workers from Fonterra's dairy production factories at Spreyton and Wynyard in Tasmania have been holding a series of rolling stoppages and rallies outside the plants and imposed work bans over recent weeks.

The workers, who are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union, are in dispute with the company over its proposed enterprise agreement.

The AMWU says the company had made an in-principal agreement on some of the workers' demands but is refusing to meet demands for wage parity with workers at Fonterra's Australian mainland plants. The company has rejected the workers' claims for 10 days personal leave, improved provisions around callbacks and the inclusion of a shutdown allowance.

Fonterra offered just a 1.1 percent wage rise in the new agreement, a real wage cut relative to Tasmania's increasing cost of living. The AMWU says the workers are paid 25 percent less than Fonterra's mainland equivalents. The unions said industrial action will continue while the company refuses to meet their demands.



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