

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 sanitation workers in Madurai plan indefinite strike

Contract sanitation workers from the Madurai City Corporation this week issued notice that they plan to strike indefinitely on October 21 to oppose the dismissal of 23 fellow workers and in support of other demands. Workers want payment of the Diwali bonus, proper implementation of wages and the reinstatement of employees fired on September 17.

The workers ended a strike over the same issues on September 19 but returned to work after accepting a false assurance from the city mayor to resolve their grievances. The workers were organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU).

Andhra Pradesh construction workers strike for overdue wages

Contract construction workers at the Statue of Social Justice (Ambedkar Smriti Vanam) in Vijayawada, Tamil Nadu held a begging bowl protest at the site on October 4 to demand nine months unpaid wages. They tried to enter the premises but were violently blocked by police. Workers condemned their contract employer and the ruling Chandrababu Naidu's government for ignoring their plight and protest. The workers are organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Punjab Anganwadi employees protest non-payment of honorarium

About 50,000 Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers demonstrated outside the Social Security Department in Chandigarh on October 1 to demand six months' unpaid honorarium. The workers are paid 11,000 rupees (\$US124) per month, of which about 4,500 rupees is honorarium. The honorarium consists of 3,000 rupees paid by the central government and 1,500 rupees paid by the state government. Workers threatened that they would stop the social security minister entering their villages while their honorarium remained unpaid.

Himachal Pradesh emergency ambulance workers walk out

Emergency 102 and 108 Ambulance services workers in Shimla stopped work for 24 hours on October 4. The Ambulance Employees Union, which is affiliated with the CITU, said employees were forced to work for 12 hours without overtime pay and were not given leave or other social benefits. The union alleged that provident fund contributions were illegally taken from their wages, which had led to a 2,000-rupee loss in take-home pay. Workers demanded minimum wages be implemented and other illegal practices stopped immediately.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa college academics protest outsourcing

The Association (KPPLA) on Monday vowed to continue their partial boycott of classes to protest the provincial government's decision to outsource under-enrolled colleges. They are also opposed to the proposal to link the promotion of college teachers to MPhil degrees and research work in their respective subjects.

The KPPLA threatened that if the government did not withdraw its proposals the academics would expand their protest. Students also demonstrated against the planned outsourcing of colleges.

Bangladesh: Islami Bank employees oppose terminations

Hundreds of Islami Bank employees demonstrated on Saturday to demand reinstatement of about 5,500 terminated employees. Together with family members, over 2,000 blocked the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway for an hour. Protesters chanted slogans such as, "We want justice," "No place for discrimination in my Sonar Bangla," and "We don't accept illegal management."

They also called for the immediate withdrawal of the officers on special duty (OSD) status currently imposed on thousands of staff members, cessation of conditional assessment tests, an end to "punishment transfers" and a fair working environment. They announced an indefinite strike starting Sunday if their demands are not met.

Islami Bank management introduced a controversial "special assessment test" earlier last month to evaluate mid- and lower-tier officials. Many employees boycotted the exam, calling it discriminatory, politically motivated and designed to sideline a section of the workforce. Management responded by terminating the workers while placing some in OSD status.

“We are not being paid, and our accounts have been shut down. We appeal to everyone to support us during this difficult time,” one terminated worker said.

Bank management claims the terminated workers were appointed by the S Alam Group management and without any qualifications. The board of directors appointed by the S Alam Group management was dissolved in August last year.

Sri Lanka: Public sector health workers strike over management intimidation

Minor employees from the Welisara Chest Hospital in Colombo walked out on Wednesday to protest hospital management’s heavy-handed decision to send a worker back home because they arrived late for duties. On the same day, the Government Medical Officers’ Association began industrial action to protest arbitrary transfers made by the health administration in the Ampara district in eastern province.

Industrial action continues at Woodside oil and gas production in Western Australia

Over 250 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by maintenance contractors Monadelphous (Monos) and Legeneering at five Woodside oil and gas offshore production facilities in Western Australia are continuing rolling stoppages and work bans after almost unanimously again rejected the companies’ enterprise agreements.

The workers’ bargaining unit is the Offshore Alliance (OA), which is made up of the AWU and the Maritime Union of Australia.

Monos and Legeneering offered a 20 percent uplift in rates in a four-year agreement which OA said failed to compensate for a non-union deal with workers at Woodside facilities in 2017 and continued each year since then. OA wants the wage deal to align with benchmark industry standards.

OA claimed that originally Woodside demanded that the contractors cap wages at 2.5 percent per annum for the next four years and that Legeneering wanted its hook-up and commissioning crew to accept a 10 percent rate cut. Workers began industrial action on September 5 and said this will increase until maintenance comes to a standstill.

CBH Kwinana grain terminal workers locked out again during pay dispute

On Wednesday morning, 130 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Electrical Trades Union at the Co-operative Bulk Handling (CBH) Kwinana port grain export terminal in Western Australia were locked out for the second time in two months, despite having suspended industrial action during the past five weeks. A replacement scab workforce has been brought in.

The lockout was management’s response to workers’ rejection of the company’s latest enterprise agreement proposal. The workers were locked out for an indefinite period on September 1 when they rejected the company’s offer and refused to work after management said it would pay only 9 percent of workers’ salaries for implementing bans.

Workers want 6 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement

to compensate for three years of below-inflation pay increases. CBH’s original offer was only 2.5 percent despite a large grain harvest. According to the MUA, the latest proposal offers a below-inflation pay increase, did not resolve disputed issues, and was unfair and unworkable.

The union claimed the offer leaves the Kwinana maintenance workers far behind current pay rates at all other CBH maintenance departments and leaves them with worse rosters and shift loadings compared to their current agreement.

Tasmanian public health and community services workers reject low pay offer

Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members from public hospitals, ambulance and community services at meetings across the state this week overwhelmingly rejected the Rockliff Liberal state government’s “first and final” pay rise offer. Workers said the offer was insulting, devalued their commitment to the community and lacked respect.

After six months of cancelled meetings, the government proposed a one-year agreement with a 3 percent pay rise and no improvement in conditions. The union accused the Rockliff government of trying to “strong-arm” workers by threatening to withhold back pay if they reject the deal. Workers want wage parity with their counterparts in other Australian states.

The union said delegate committees and sub-branches are now finalising plans for industrial action, which could begin in the coming weeks if no improved offer is made.

Hydro Tasmania specialised workers strike for pay rise

Professionals Australia members, including electricians, engineers and hydrologists, from the state government-owned power generator Hydro Tasmania stopped work for 24 hours on October 5 to demand higher pay. Their action is in parallel with industrial action being carried out by Electrical Trades Union members at Hydro Tasmania over the same issues.

The industrial action follows seven months of negotiations and intransigent opposition by the Rockliff Liberal government to workers’ demands for an above-inflation pay rise and better conditions. Workers want compensation for previous union-negotiated pay deals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The below-inflation pay increases amount to year-on-year real wage reductions since 2020, despite increasing workloads. The wage rates are below those employed in other state-owned corporations and government business enterprises.

Western Australian firefighters rally for better pay and conditions

About 500 Western Australian fire fighters marched through the state capital Perth on Thursday in opposition to the Cooke Labor government’s low base wage rise offer of just 40 cents an hour on top of its 5, 4 and 3.75 percent annual increase. The union wants the base rate increased by at least \$2 an hour.

Negotiations with the United Professional Firefighters Union (UPFU)

have dragged on since October last year. The UPFU demands include a higher base wage rate, improved fatigue management, better health and safety protections, specialist capability allowances and expanded leadership training.

The union claimed current wages and conditions are limiting recruitment and retention of firefighters. Currently the service is down by 600 officers with the current number of 80 trainees unable to cover this shortfall. Fire fighters are having to cover 350 overtime shifts per week, which they say cuts across their health, rest and family time.

Rix's Creek miners walk out in New South Wales

Around 250 Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members at the Bloomfield Group-owned Rix's Creek open-cut coal mine near Singleton, New South Wales are continuing strike action begun late last month. Their strike follows months of fruitless negotiations by the MEU over wages and conditions in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Bloomfield's pay increase offer of 16.75 percent over four years, consisting of annual rises of 4.75, 4.75, 4.5 and 2.75 percent, was rejected by workers who said it was totally unacceptable. As well as an improved pay offer, workers want accident pay lifted to parity with other pits. The industrial action, including work bans, is expected to continue unless an agreement acceptable to workers is received.

Bloomfield is a billion-dollar family-owned company with approval to extract 1.3 million tonnes of coal per annum from its open cut mine.

Victorian nurses' union prepares for industrial action at Healthscope

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), representing members at 13 Healthscope facilities in Victoria, applied for a protected action ballot order in the Fair Work Commission on October 6. The union has accused Healthscope of stalling negotiations while it tries to reach a deal on wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The union is seeking annual pay increases starting from July 2025 of 4.24, 3.5, 4 and 5 percent.

According to the union, Healthscope is refusing to finalise the enterprise agreement if a new salary packaging clause (which would result in nurses and midwives receiving only a fraction of any benefit) is included in the enterprise deal.

Healthscope, with 37 facilities nationwide and in debt for \$1.6 billion, wants employees to support the creation of a not-for-profit entity—PurposeCo—as a means of keeping as many of its facilities within the one organisation as possible. If accepted, Healthscope will receive the considerable majority (up to 90 percent) of staff salary packaging benefits to support operational costs, including servicing corporate debt.

The ANMF claimed that Healthscope's rejection of its wage claim means that rates of pay will remain behind all comparable employers in Victoria, including St Vincent's Private Hospitals, St John of God and Epworth, all of which provide the full benefit of salary packaging.



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