

# 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: 5,000 sanitation workers strike indefinitely in Jaipur

Around 5,000 sanitation workers walked out on November 23 in Jaipur to demand permanent jobs, proper overtime payments and resumption of stalled recruitments for jobs for other family members. The striking workers will be joined next week by workers from other districts, including Ajmer and Bhilwara. The walkout follows long-running protests, including hunger strikes, over these demands.

## Anganwadi (childcare) workers demand pay rise in Bhubaneswar

Thousands of All Odisha Anganwadi Ladies' Association members demonstrated near the state assembly building on November 24 for higher wages, pensions, government employee status and other demands.

The workers, who staged a similar protest last December, just before the state parliament's winter session, want 18,000 rupees (\$US201) monthly and 9,000 rupees per month for assistants, 5G mobile handsets for official use, and a monthly pension of 5,000 rupees.

## Midday meal workers in Telangana fight for higher wages

Hundreds of midday meal scheme workers from across Telangana and organised by the All-India Trade Union Congress protested outside the office of Director of School Education on November 24 to demand long-promised pay rises.

Telangana's Congress government promised to increase midday meal workers' pay during the 2024 election. Protesters told the media that they are still only being paid 1,000 rupees per month, while their work hours and responsibilities have increased significantly. The mainly women workers are demanding 10,000 rupees per month.

## Bangladesh: Garment workers fight sudden closure of factory

Workers at Honeywell Garments, a readymade garment plant in Gazipur's Baghia area of Konabari, blocked a local road on Tuesday after suddenly being informed that their factory was closing. Arriving for work that morning, they discovered the gate locked, prompting them to occupy the road from Mitali Club to Konabari New Market for hours.

Factory management claimed it was "irrational and unlawful agitation" by workers who went on strike on Monday to demand timely payment of wages. Workers, police officials and locals told the media, however, that employees had long been protesting for payment of wages and allowances by the 10th of each month.

Tensions increased during Monday's walkout following rumours that some workers might be dismissed for "instigating unrest." Strikers responded by calling for the removal of certain factory officials.

The situation intensified on Tuesday when workers saw the closure notice and took to the streets again. The closure notice said the factory would reopen when a "favourable environment" was restored. Industrial police were mobilised, directing workers to end their protests and claiming there would be mediation with management.

## Bus drivers strike in Newcastle

Bus drivers employed by Keolis Downer (KD) in Newcastle initiated 24-hour "refusal of service" action on Monday. The ban involves bus drivers refusing to operate the next service if the previous service was late by more than six minutes.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members at the company are continuing industrial action they began earlier this year after RTBU and KD enterprise agreement negotiations broke down.

Negotiations that began when the previous agreement expired in November last year are now deadlocked despite 24 meetings in the past twelve months. Last week, KD offered drivers a 15.5 per cent pay increase over four years and an additional 8 percent over four years for Trainee Year 1 employees. Drivers rejected the offer, describing it as inadequate.

The RTBU says its members want an increase that compensates for the rising cost of living and improves safety and working conditions. The union says working conditions have gone backwards since the NSW government privatised bus services.

The current industrial action, which also includes refusing to drive

buses with less than a full tank of fuel or without a first aid kit on-board, and 12- and 24-hour strikes.

Keolis Downer is a multibillion-dollar transport company operating buses, trams and ferry networks across Asia Pacific. The NSW government's public transport model includes bus operations run by private conglomerates who operate for profit, and are funded by the taxpayer.

### **Mount Gambier nurses and midwives protest low wages and staff shortages**

About 50 nurses and midwives protested outside the Mount Gambier Hospital two weeks ago over staffing shortages and pay. It followed a 4,000 strong demonstration on October 30 by Australian Nursing and Midwifery Union (ANMF) members outside the South Australian parliament.

ANMF members are in an enterprise agreement dispute with the South Australian Labor government and its failure to improve low wages and chronic staff shortages in the state's public hospital system.

The ANMF says Mount Gambier Hospital, the state's largest regional hospital, has approximately 400 staff and a vacancy rate of 80 that cannot be filled with the 60 casual or agency staff available in the area.

ANMF members have rejected the state government's offer of 13 percent over four years, a one-off bonus payment totaling \$4,500, and other incentives. The union says the offer, which if accepted, would ensure its members remained amongst the lowest paid nurses and midwives in Australia, and does not address the questions of professional recognition and long-term career sustainability.

The ANMF says its Mount Gambier members are calling for an escalation of their industrial campaign on December 1 if the government does not offer a better deal.

### **Coca Cola locks out Richland maintenance workers**

Last Friday Coca-Cola Europacific Partners locked out 34 maintenance workers at its Richlands facility in Queensland.

The lockout was in response to the decision of Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union of Australia (CEPU) members to impose various bans.

The company is in dispute with its maintenance workers over a new enterprise agreement. While the previous deal expired in June, Coca Cola has refused to make an acceptable offer to its maintenance workforce.

On September 23, CEPU members overwhelmingly voted to take industrial action, including strikes, bans on overtime and the operation of some computer programs and other work. The CEPU says its members want wage and conditions parity with industry standard benchmarks.

The union, in line with its compliance with the pro-big business Fair Work Act, has not called on other unions at Coca Cola Europacific

Partners to support the locked-out workers.

### **Queensland's Urban Utilities workers strike for better agreement**

Over 160 Australian Services Union (ASU) members employed by Queensland water authority, Urban Utilities began industrial action last Wednesday, including strikes and bans on the issuing of permits, approvals and certifications.

The action follows months of deadlocked negotiations between the ASU and Urban Utilities over wages and conditions in a new enterprise deal.

Urban Utilities has offered a 12 percent pay rise over three years to its workers. This was rejected by ASU members who voted almost unanimously for industrial action.

The union estimates that the consumer price index rose in Brisbane, Queensland's capital, by 17 percent during the last enterprise deal but that members' wages only increased by 10 percent under the previous agreement. The ASU members are demanding pay parity with Brisbane City Council, Urban Utilities' largest local government council member.

Urban Utilities, which is owned by Brisbane, Ipswich, Scenic Rim, Somerset and Lockyer Valley councils, delivers water and sewerage services to 1.6 million Queenslanders.

### **Tasmania's public hospital scientists walk out for better enterprise deal**

Public hospital scientists took one-hour strike action last week in Tasmania as part of their ongoing dispute with the state government.

On Monday, cardiac physiologists and neurophysiology scientists employed by the Royal Hobart Hospital walked out, followed by pathology and allied health staff at the Launceston General Hospital on Tuesday. On Wednesday medical imaging workers at the Royal Hobart Hospital struck for an hour. The striking workers are involved in an ongoing dispute with the Tasmanian Liberal government over wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement.

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members are fighting the state government's failure to address its chronic underfunding of public health services and the reduction of ongoing staff shortages and rostering shortfalls, causing delays to patient treatment.

This week's industrial action follows union members' overwhelming rejection of the government's 3 percent one-year wage rise. The government responded by threatening to withhold back pay if workers refuse to accept its offer. HACSU says further industrial action is being prepared.



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