

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 Korea: National rail and Seoul Metro workers to walk out

Unions representing national rail and Seoul subway workers announced on Tuesday that their members will strike on December 11 and 12 after failing to narrow differences with management and the government during wages and conditions negotiations.

The Korean Railway Workers' Union announced that it would begin a full strike on December 11, affecting Seoul line 9, unless management meets its core demands of restoring performance-pay standards, integrating high-speed rail services and implementing stronger safety measures. The union also accused the government of ignoring their demand that the current system, which bases performance pay on 80 percent of base salary, must be overhauled.

Three unions covering workers at Seoul Metro, which operates subway Lines one through eight, have declared a December 12 walkout unless the city fulfills its earlier agreement to increase staffing. A union spokesperson said that if the city continues to ignore their demands and hides behind repetitive cost-cutting rhetoric, a general strike will be inevitable. Workers imposed work-to-rule measures on December 1.

Both national rail services and the Seoul subway network are affected.

South Korea: Public school non-teaching staff strike for better pay and conditions

About 94,000 members of the National Solidarity Council of School Irregular Workers began a series of nationwide stoppages on November 21, calling for higher pay, safe working conditions and improved benefits. Non-teaching staff include cafeteria cooks and assistants, childcare workers, meal distributors and administrative aides.

The action was called after negotiations with the education ministry and 17 provincial and metropolitan education offices stalled. The union claimed that none of their long-standing demands, from raising meagre base pay to installing basic ventilation systems in kitchens, have been met.

According to the Seoul education office, a kitchen worker's base monthly salary is 2,066,000 won (\$US1,403), lower than the legal minimum wage when converted into a standard monthly rate of 2,096,270 won for a 40-hour week. Even with seniority, family and hazard allowances, an 11-year veteran earns roughly only 2.7 million won with many not being paid during school holidays.

The strike began in Seoul, Incheon, Gangwon, Sejong, and North

Chungcheong, and expanded southward to Gwangju, Jeolla and Jeju on November 29; Gyeonggi, Daejeon, and South Chungcheong on December 4; and the Yeongnam region on December 5.

Philippines school teachers hold national strike

Thousands of teachers from 237 schools across 34 major cities and provinces in the Philippines halted classes during a nationwide sit-down strike on November 28 to demand fair pay and meaningful reforms. The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) coordinated the walkout.

The ACT said teachers conducted full-day alternative classes to discuss the worsening crisis in public education, including chronic shortages, corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Their demands include doubling the education budget to address classroom, personnel and basic education shortages; a living wage and long-overdue salary upgrades; accountability for corruption that has weakened schools and public trust; and meaningful social and systemic reforms to end recurring crises in public education.

An ACT spokesperson said that if the government refuses to fix the crisis, teachers will continue to act collectively, and the movement will grow stronger.

India: National Health Mission workers in Punjab strike over delayed wages

National Health Mission (NHM) workers in Ludhiana district, including doctors, nurses, clerks and lab technicians, stopped work on Tuesday to protest the non-payment of wages since October. Workers threatened to hold an all-out strike if their demands were not soon met. NHM workers are permanent or outsourced employees who do the bulk of the work in Punjab state public hospitals.

Outsourced power workers in Punjab strike against privatisation

Outsourced power workers from the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) in Ludhiana began a three-day strike on Tuesday in opposition to proposed privatisation. Other demands were for permanent jobs based on seniority and experience and repeal of the electrical law and new labour codes.

The PSPCL workers' campaign is in parallel with a campaign by other

power workers in Punjab. On October 28, outsourced workers from distribution utilities Powercom and Transco protested in Ludhiana over similar issues.

The union alleged that the present state government had promised to cancel its privatisation policy and make all outsourced contract workers permanent, but after three years, no worker had been made permanent. Workers want the privatisation policy cancelled, all workers to be directly included in the department, a minimum living wage, guaranteed permanent jobs and pensions for accident victims.

Punjab bus transport workers end four-day strike

Contract workers from government-owned commuter bus companies PUNBUS, PEPSU and Punjab Road Transport corporation, began a statewide strike on November 28 over the opening of tenders for 100 air-conditioned buses under the kilometre-based bus scheme. Workers claimed this was a backdoor attempt to allow private players to operate on government-notified routes. Under the scheme, private operators lease buses to the transport department and are paid a fixed rate per kilometre.

Workers feared that the move threatened thousands of jobs in the state transport sector. They called off a previous strike on November 30 after a meeting with the government but soon resumed it, demanding the release of arrested and detained employees and reinstatement of those suspended.

Strikers returned to work on Tuesday after the government accepted their call for reinstatement of suspended employees and release of those arrested during the protest.

Punjab: Jalandhar Municipal Corporation workers strike for higher wages and permanent jobs

Jalandhar Municipal Corporation workers of Class IV, who are mainly sanitation workers, struck for two days on December 2, accusing the current state government of reneging on its election promise of higher wages and permanent jobs. Workers also opposed government moves to hand over the sanitation work to a private operator. Workers demonstrated on Tuesday and burnt an effigy of Chief Minister Bhagawat Mann.

Assam National Health Mission authority cuts protesting workers' pay

The Assam National Health Mission (NHM) authority on Tuesday ordered pay cuts on NHM employees who protested from October 29 to November 11 to demand equal pay for equal work. At least 20,000 workers, including 2,000 doctors, face pay cuts.

The draconian order says that all service delivery staff involved in the action, which includes doctors, nurses and paramedical staff, will lose three days' pay, while non-technical employees will have seven days' pay cut from their wages. The government provocatively declared that there were thousands of doctors waiting for jobs who could replace these "irresponsible" doctors.

Bangladesh: Primary school teachers strike for higher pay and promotions

Government primary school teachers initiated a "complete shutdown" holding protests rallies and sit-ins across the country outside every sub-district education office on Wednesday over unmet demands.

The Primary Teachers' Demand Implementation Council called for upgrading assistant teachers' pay scale to grade 10, resolution of complexities related to higher grade benefits after 10 and 16 years of service, and ensuring 100 percent departmental promotion from assistant teacher to head teacher.

Teachers said the government had falsely claimed it would meet their demands but that 22 days had lapsed without any progress. They said they would continue boycotting examinations and enforcing the shutdown until their three demands were met.

The government responded to the protest by issuing show-cause notices for allegedly obstructing annual exams. The teachers protested from November 8 to 11 during which 150 were injured by police, and then again on November 27.

According to the Directorate of Primary Education, there are currently 65,569 government primary schools nationwide, employing over 384,000 teachers, the majority of whom are assistant teachers.

Bangladeshi health sector employees continue action

Thousands of government health sector employees, such as nurses, medical technologists, pharmacists, and health assistants, have been holding separate demonstrations starting from November 29. The protests have mainly affected vaccination of children across the country.

Their six demands include amendment of recruitment rules to include graduate-level qualifications and placement in the 14th grade, 11th grade and technical status for in-service diploma holders, sequential higher-grade promotions, and inclusion of all health inspectors and assistant inspectors in the graduate-scale pay without additional training requirements. They also want adjustment of time scale/higher scale benefits into the revised pay scale and official recognition of the in-service diploma as an equivalent qualification.

Workers said they had been ignored by the government and have threatened to intensify their actions if demands are not met.

Queensland public health professionals walk out over proposed cuts

Over 330 health professionals walked out from public hospitals across Queensland and rallied outside state parliament in Brisbane on Wednesday. The United Workers Union (UWU) members, who include medical imaging staff, radiographers, radiation therapists, nuclear medicine scientists, pharmacists and oral health professionals, are opposed to the state Liberal-National Party government's proposed enterprise agreement.

The health professionals say the government's offer would cut pay for some workers by up to 25 percent, weaken workload management, wind back consultation rights, and remove hard-won entitlements.

The decision to walk out followed six months of failed negotiations with the government over its proposed agreement, which included a low 8 percent pay rise over three years in return for cuts to existing attraction

and retention allowances.

The current official annual inflation rate (CPI) for Brisbane is 4.7 percent, meaning the pay offer is a real pay cut. The UWU claimed some workers could lose \$30,000 in take home pay.

Northern Territory public health workers strike for improved pay offer

Over 1,000 public health sector workers from two unions—the United Workers Union (UWU) and the Health Services Union (HSU)—stopped work on Wednesday to demand the Country-Liberal Party government improve its annual 3 percent pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. The official annual inflation rate is 3.2 percent, while housing, health and education have increased by 4.7, 4.2 and 5.3 percent, respectively.

The UWU represents orderlies, personal care assistants, sterilisation, biomedical techs, catering teams, housekeeping crews, sonographers, radiographers, maintenance and morgue staff. The HSU covers health professionals, including physiotherapists, radiographers, social workers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, dietitians, psychologists, pathology scientists and sonographers.

UWU members want a pay rise that will compensate for the four-year pay freeze in their previous agreement. The UWU said it was willing to accept a slightly improved pay increase offer of 15 percent over four years, plus improvements in safety and staffing.

The HSU has directed members to vote down the government's offer of annual increases of 4 percent. The union says that the offer is less than the 5 percent police have received.

South Australian public sector workers continue action for improved pay offer

South Australia's public sector workers are maintaining their ongoing campaign of work stoppages and rallies at government buildings that began in October in pursuit of an improved pay offer and increased staffing. On November 26 over 5,000 workers, including sheriffs, pathology workers, Service SA employees, prison officers and TAFE administration staff, stopped work and rallied outside state parliament protesting low wages, short staffing and unsafe conditions.

The latest action followed a strike and rally outside parliament by over 2,000 workers on October 15 followed by weekly "snap" rallies outside the offices of Labor members of parliament.

The workers are members of the Public Service Association (PSA), which is demanding a 20 percent pay rise over 18 months. After 13 months of negotiations, the Malinauskas Labor government has offered only a 10 percent pay increase over three years. The PSA claimed that these workers' wages have increased by only 6 percent in the past six years.

South Australian public health nurses and midwives strike for higher pay

Thousands of Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF)

members from public hospitals and clinics across South Australia are maintaining industrial action begun on October 30 with a stopwork rally outside the state parliament, followed by a series of rallies at individual hospitals, after rejecting the state Labor government's proposed pay increase offer of just 13 percent over four years. The ANMF claimed that even if the offer was accepted, South Australian nurses would remain the lowest paid in Australia.

ANMF members in Adelaide kicked off a new round of stoppages and rallies on Tuesday at the Molbury Hospital, followed the next day by nurses and midwives from the Women's and Children's Hospital. Nurses and midwives at Lyell McEwin Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Flinders Medical Centre, Royal Adelaide Hospital, Noarlunga Health Services, Repatriation Hospital and Glenside will hold stopwork rallies over the next two weeks.

According to the ANMF, their members' low wages are a major reason for the state's poor workforce recruitment and retention rate. It claimed that health worker shortages are driving rising exploitation and excessive overtime, leading to exhaustion and burnout.

Tasmanian public sector health and community services workers demonstrate

Tasmanian public sector workers continue to protest for improved pay and conditions. Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members at the Mersey Community Hospital in Latrobe, Tasmania walked off the job for half an hour on November 27. HACSU covers workers in Tasmania's public hospitals, community health and ambulance service who are maintaining work bans put in place in October.

The action is part of a wider campaign of public sector workers, including teachers, health workers, firefighters, child safety workers, park rangers and others, who stopped work for up to four hours over several days across Tasmania in early November to attend rallies in opposition to the state Liberal government's latest pay rise offer.

The dispute also involves members of the Australian Education Union and the Community and Public Sector Union whose members called for industrial action following six months of cancelled meetings, after which the government proposed a one-year agreement with a 3 percent pay rise and no improvement in conditions, to be followed by further negotiations.

HACSU members want a three-year agreement that includes wage parity with other Australian states, safe workloads and proper staffing. The Tasmanian government has cancelled bargaining with all unions and maintains its offer is fair and affordable.

TK elevator technicians in Western Australia continue industrial action

About 30 installation and maintenance technicians from TK Elevators in Perth are maintaining work bans imposed after a 24-hour strike on November 7. The Electrical Trades Union members are campaigning for an industry standard enterprise agreement.

The work bans are affecting the restoration of elevators and lifts into service in and around Perth. The ETU has accused TKE of hiring unlicensed scab labour to maintain services.

The workers want their wages and conditions brought into line with the rest of the elevator industry. They complained that the company has been reaping profits for years while offering the lowest on-call rates and

conditions in the industry. The ETU claimed that TKE has “all but shut down communications” with it and members.

Pacific National rail workers in Queensland strike for better pay and conditions

Over 300 members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE) from Pacific National Coal (PNC) in Queensland stopped work for 36 hours on November 27 to demand better pay and conditions. The unions, which have been in negotiations with the company for over six months, are maintaining bans on overtime and shift changes imposed on November 7.

The RTBU claimed that PNC is trying to strip back conditions and has ignored key concerns of members. It said members want a fair wage rise and time to rest and recover from grueling shift work. AFULE members are refusing to work altered rosters and on their rostered day off. PNC threatened to remove backpay from its offer and not pay workers if they refuse to work altered shifts.

Greater Melbourne Cemetery Trust workers strike

About 100 members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) employed by Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (GMCT) at Fawkner and Lilydale, suburbs of Melbourne, stopped work for four hours and imposed a ban on overtime work on Friday.

The workers are in dispute with GMCT over improved wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement (EA). AWU and GMCT began negotiations prior to the expiry of the current agreement in June. In October, following lack of progress, AWU members voted overwhelmingly to prepare for industrial action including strikes and work bans.

The workers want wage increases in line with the rises in the cost-of-living, which, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, climbed by 3.2 percent for the 12-month period up to October 2025. This is far above the workers’ last wage rise of just 2 percent in July 2024. Workers say they are prepared to widen their campaign if GMCT does not make an acceptable offer.

The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust is responsible for the operation and management of 18 cemeteries across Victoria.

Victorian public sector health workers strike for pay rise

On Thursday, over 1,000 public sector allied health and hospital support staff stopped work and rallied outside the Victorian Trades Hall and then marched to state parliament. The protest was in response to a breakdown in enterprise agreement negotiations between the Health Workers Union (HWU) and the state Labor government. Negotiations began before the expiry of the current agreement in June.

Close to 5,000 HWU members from 80 public health facilities near unanimously voted to take industrial action following rejection of the government’s 3 percent pay rise offer. The HWU says its members were already the worst paid health workers in Australia and the wage rise offer would not have delivered a livable wage. Further industrial action is

expected.

Victorian forestry firefighters’ wage dispute enters second year

Australian Workers Union (AWU) forest firefighter members are continuing industrial action they began more than one year ago. Their long-running enterprise agreement dispute over wages and conditions is with Victoria’s Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

The union claims that it reached a tentative agreement with DEECA earlier this year but that the department had changed its position on the deal in May and changed backpay provisions to no back pay and offered just 3 percent annual wage increases. The workers want a pay rise between 7 and 14 percent to bring them into parity with their colleagues at Parks Victoria doing identical work.

The union has previously restricted industrial action to low-level work bans. AWU members are currently voting on future industrial action that could include work stoppages and bans on the use of chainsaws, rake-hoes and all work at recreation sites.

Experience Co skydiving instructors to stop work to protest pay cut

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed as skydiving instructors by tourism giant Experience Co stopped work on Friday and rallied at the company’s eight sites, which are in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. The protected industrial action follows ten months of hostile enterprise agreement negotiations. The AWU claimed the company wants to cut wages and conditions.

The union said parts of the agreement included cuts of between \$20,000 and \$100,000 per year, and a reduction to the instructors’ minimum wage from \$57,000 to \$49,000 through a new low “per jump” piece-rate. The AWU says the cuts would undermine the safety of every customer and instructor. Experience Co employs over 1,000 workers and 130 skydivers across Australia.

New Zealand teachers’ union settles pay deals

The New Zealand secondary teachers union, the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), settled a pay deal this week providing for two pay rises totaling 4.6 percent over two years. The offer was put to a ballot after facilitated bargaining with the Public Service Commission in the wake of weeks of drawn-out industrial action.

PPTA president Chris Abercrombie claimed members voted to settle so they had “a clean start to next year.” In fact, the 20,000 members were eventually isolated and worn down by the union bureaucracy’s demobilising the mass struggle that had erupted in the October 23 “mega-strike.”

The agreement—2.5 percent pay increase from next January and another 2.1 percent from January 2027—is a rotten sellout and like others previously rejected by teachers. Official inflation is running at 3 percent annually, but basic costs, including food and electricity, are much higher.

The PPTA has separately settled a new Collective Agreement for 440 Community Education workers, who mostly work part-time to deliver

programs through schools. The deal provides for a 3.8 percent total pay rise over the three-year term of the agreement.

Both deals will be used by the wider union bureaucracy which is seeking to bully primary teachers, nurses and others into accepting similar pay cuts, but which may not yet succeed.



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