

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: Construction workers in Tamil Nadu demand minimum wage

More than 200 construction workers demonstrated outside the Collector's Office at Dindigul, Tamil Nadu on December 9. The protest was organised by the All India Trade Union Congress.

Workers were demanding a minimum monthly wage of 6,000 rupees (\$US66.8) and the immediate payment disbursement of a 2,000-rupee pension for retired workers. They also want a Provident Fund, medical insurance of 1 million rupees and implementation of maternity laws. Workers submitted a memorandum of demands to the Collector after the demonstration.

Sanitary workers demonstrate in various Tamil Nadu cities

Several hundred sanitary workers held road-block demonstrations at Dindigul, Theni, Tirunelveli and Coimbatore on December 8 to demand higher wages and entitlements. Several protesting workers in Coimbatore and Tirunelveli were arrested by police.

Demonstrators also called for permanent jobs in rural and urban services, Employee State Insurance, a minimum wage of 15,000 rupees (\$US166.5) and on time wage payments. The protests were coordinated by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Tamil Nadu rubber plantation workers protest job outsourcing

Rubber tree tapping workers from the Arasu Rubber Corporation plantation began an ongoing protest on December 2 against the outsourcing of their jobs. The plantation covers 4,600 rubber trees in Keeriparai division, Nagercoil. Workers said the outsourcing would imperil their livelihoods. Around 85 employees, including 65 permanent workers are involved in the protest.

Karnataka ASHA workers hold protest march in Mysuru

Around 4,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers from across Karnataka held a "Go to Belagavi" march in Mysuru on December 10. The protesters represented around 42,000 ASHA workers from across the state and included about 100 from Mysuru district.

The march, which was organised by Karnataka Rajya Samyuktha ASHA trade union, called for a 10,000-rupee (\$US111) fixed honorarium, inclusion in the Employee Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance, reinstatement of 2,000 former ASHA workers and reduced workloads. Other demands include the provision of smart phones with properly functioning communications networks to enter performance data and the distribution of a 1,000-rupee honorarium promised by the Congress-ruled state government.

Assam 108 Ambulance emergency workers' strike enters second week

About 3,000 Assam 108 Ambulance emergency contract workers are maintaining strike action and a protest in Guwahati that began on December 1. Those protesting include ambulance pilots, emergency medical technicians, and emergency response officers. The department, which has deemed the strike illegal, is now victimising participants by serving them dismissal orders.

The strikers want higher wages and permanent jobs. They have also complained that written assurance of a salary increment issued on August 4 by the employer, Jeevika-EMRI, has not been implemented.

Bangladesh: Chattogram port workers protest privatisation

Following a protest on December 5, Chattogram Port workers held a march and rally at Dewanhat intersection in Chattogram on Wednesday to demand the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) cancel its lease agreements with foreign companies for the Laldia and the Pangaon terminals. The Shipping Adviser justified the government's leasing arrangements claiming some workers are illegally collecting money.

The action followed several months of protests by the Workers-Employees Unity Council, a trade union alliance. It has threatened tougher action if its demands are ignored.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand factory reopening

PN Composite garment workers at Ambagh in Konabari, Gazipur demonstrated on Tuesday to protest the sudden closure of their factory. Employees began the protest after discovering a closure notice on the main gate of the plant when they arrived for work on Tuesday morning. Police were called to the location to contain the demonstration.

The closure followed a demonstration on Monday by a group of workers demanding the removal of several officials involved in a dispute over their removal of a fellow worker who had been treated unfairly.

Workers ended Tuesday's protest after a few hours following assurances by the authorities that production would resume next week.

Australian bookstore workers strike for better pay and conditions

About 100 workers from the Leichardt store Harry Hartog and Berkelouw Books (HHBB) in Sydney began industrial action on Wednesday in their fight for industry standard pay and conditions. It is the first industrial action at the 200-year-old, family-owned establishment, which has 19 stores across Australia.

The workers are members of the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) which says the industrial action is a direct response to a "zombie" enterprise agreement made in 2012.

HHBB management claim the 2012 agreement was ratified by the Fair Work Commission and had passed the "Better Of Overall" test. The deal, however, abolished all weeknight and Saturday penalty rates and casualised penalty rates.

Workers complained that when hired they are given a permanent part-time contract which only guarantees four hours' work a week, with no regular days or hours and subject to change week-to-week, without casual loading. RAFFWU said the workers have numerous demands but after three meetings since October and mediation in the Fair Work Commission, bookshop management has refused to have further discussions.

Workers want a minimum wage of \$31 an hour and the return of the conditions that were stripped out in the 2012 agreement. This includes weeknight and weekend penalty rates as well as protections against unfair treatment and job security rights, particularly for part-time employees.

Union members have imposed various work bans including receiving stock and restocking shelves. They will strike at the Leichardt store from 11 a.m. today and continue on Sunday.

Mobile crane workers in Western Australia strike for better pay and conditions

Over 150 Construction Forestry Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) members employed by mobile crane operator Freo Cranes in the Pilbara, Western Australia are involved in an enterprise agreement dispute with the company. After a one-hour walkout on November 8, operators and riggers struck for 24 hours on December 5.

Negotiations for a new enterprise agreement have been ongoing for over six months with workers overwhelmingly rejecting the company's last pay offer.

Workers want a significant increase in pay and conditions, including superannuation paid on all hours, double time on nightshift, paid stand down after nightshift and improved delegate clauses in the agreement.

Queensland's Urban Utility workers strike for higher wages

Over 160 members of The Services Union (TSU) employed by Queensland water authority, Urban Utilities walked out on Tuesday—their second strike in two weeks—after management forced a second enterprise agreement to a ballot. Workers overwhelmingly rejected the company's first offer. The union, which represents administrative and technology workers, claimed the revised offer was a step backward and urged workers to reject it.

TSU members began industrial action on November 26 with a one-day strike and bans on the issuing of permits, approvals and certifications. The action followed three years of declining real wages and months of negotiations after which Urban Utilities offered a 12 percent pay rise over three years, which 70 percent of workers rejected. The union claims that operations and field staff had already secured a 17.5 percent increase over three years.

The TSU estimates that the consumer price index rose in Brisbane, Queensland's capital, by 17 percent during the last enterprise deal but that members' wages increased by only 10 percent. Workers want wage parity with Brisbane City Council, Urban Utilities' largest local government owner.

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

TK Elevators in Western Australia locks out technicians

About 30 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) technicians from TK Elevators (TKE) in Perth have been maintaining work bans imposed after a 24-hour strike on November 7. The industrial action has impacted on the servicing of elevators and lifts in and around Perth. The ETU has accused TKE of hiring unlicensed scab labour to maintain services.

TKE informed ETU members on Tuesday that it will not pay workers involved in industrial action, even though they are reporting each day for their full shift and performing work not included in work bans. ETU members responded to the announcement by withdrawing their labour, refusing to work for no pay.

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 claims that TKE has "all but shut down communications" with it and members.

Downer EDI and Progress Rail workers in Newcastle strike for pay rise

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members from Downer EDI Rail and Progress Rail at Cardiff, a suburb of Newcastle in New South Wales, stopped work and picketed the rail maintenance facility on Tuesday to demand improved pay and conditions in separate new enterprise agreements.

On December 5, Downer EDI Rail workers walked off the job for an initial 24 hours after already enacting a railcar shunting ban. The workers decided to continue their action and picket for an unspecified period. Progress Rail workers, who struck for 24 hours on November 27 and

again on December 5, walked out again and joined the Downer EDI picket on Tuesday.

CSL pharmaceutical workers in Victoria strike

More than 200 warehousing and production workers from three unions at the CSL pharmaceutical manufacturing facility in Melbourne walked out for 24 hours on December 5 to demand an improved enterprise agreement offer. As well as a pay rise, the highly skilled workers want the agreement to include paid breaks, flexible work options, including a 4-day work week trial, and fair career progression.

The workers are covered by the United Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Community and Public Sector Union. They voted overwhelmingly in November to take future industrial action that could include work stoppages from one hour to 24 hours and up to 15 separate work bans.

Healthscope theatre nurses in Victoria strike

Theatre nurses stopped work for four hours at 12 Healthscope facilities in Victoria on Wednesday at 11am as part of ongoing industrial action by 2,500 members of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF).

The action, over stalled wage negotiations, followed a four-hour strike on November 20 and ongoing action that includes wearing campaign T-shirts, as well as bans on redeployment, overtime, working outside ordinary hours and some administrative work.

The ANMF claims Healthscope's pay offer would leave wages about 10 percent behind those in the public sector by the end of 2027. Currently, Healthscope pays some 2.5–3.5 percent less than the public sector, according to the union.

The union wants pay rises starting from July 2025 of 4.24 percent, 3.5 percent in October 2025, 4 percent in July 2026 and 5 percent in July 2027. Other demands include improved staffing levels and for in-charge-nurses to have no patient load. The company has offered just 11.75 percent over four years.

The ANMF allege that 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 not 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 up to 90 percent of staff salary packaging benefits to support operational costs, including servicing corporate debt.

Tasmanian public school teachers strike again

Thousands of public school teachers and support staff across Tasmania held their second half-day strike in two months on December 12. Many schools were expected to remain closed until midday. Protest rallies were held in Burnie, Launceston and Hobart.

Teachers are protesting the state Liberal government's failure to overcome chronic short staffing, rising workloads and increasing classroom violence, and to deliver an acceptable wage increase and improved conditions in its proposed enterprise agreement.

The Australian Education Union (AEU) said main focus of the walkout was to highlight the plight of school support staff, that includes teachers' assistants, cleaners, lab technicians, library assistants and admin staff, who they say are due for a wage rise now and will face weeks without pay during the summer school holidays. The final day for public-school students is December 18.

The AEU accused the government of stalling, denying teachers and support staff a pay rise before Christmas. Teachers are demanding a 21.5 percent pay rise over three years, while the government has offered only 3 percent in a one year agreement.

Launceston General Hospital service staff strike

On Wednesday, support workers, including cleaners, orderlies and administration staff, from the Launceston General Hospital (LGH) in Tasmania stopped work for one hour and protested outside the premises. It was their second one-hour strike in less than two weeks.

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) condemned the state Liberal government's failure to address chronic understaffing, heavy overtime demands, double shifts and lack of recovery time.

HACSU is in dispute with the Rockliff government over wages and conditions in its proposed enterprise agreement. The government is refusing to improve on its 3 percent wage rise offer in its proposed one-year agreement with no improvement in conditions, to be followed by further negotiations. The proposal has been rejected by public sector workers across Tasmania.

The union claims that its members are being paid 7 percent less than equivalent workers at hospitals on the Australian mainland, and it wants pay parity.

Roy Fagan Centre nursing aides in Tasmania strike for better conditions

On Monday, dozens of ward aids from the Roy Fagan Centre in the Lenah Valley, Tasmania stopped work for one hour and protested outside the facility. The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members are in a long running enterprise agreement dispute with the state Liberal government over wages, penalties and conditions.

HACSU members stopped work over the same issues in June after more than a year of stalled negotiations. The government previously reached an "in-principal agreement" in April but then dropped the deal. Workers want wage rise parity with the facility's registered nurses, payment of an occupational violence allowance, paid meal breaks and improved conditions for ward aides who work 12- to 12.5-hour shifts. Ward aides are not paid meal breaks and are paid lower shift penalties. Their last agreement expired five years ago.

The Roy Fagan Centre, which is operated and primarily funded by the Tasmanian Department of Health, is a specialised inpatient facility run to support elderly people with dementia and Huntington's disease, who require 24-hour assistance.

Victorian ambulance fleet maintenance workers strike

United Workers Union members employed in metropolitan fleet management roles at Ambulance Victoria stopped work for 24 hours on Friday to demand an equitable pay offer and an end to the two-tier pay structure. Workers said they would not attend the workplace or address minor and major faults, instead forcing Ambulance Victoria to send tow trucks to retrieve broken-down vehicles.

UWU members have imposed work bans since November 21. They want an enterprise agreement that reflects the skill and responsibility of their work.

Queensland public health professionals strike again over proposed cuts

Following a walkout from public hospitals by 330 health professionals on December 3, they struck for one hour at 12.30 p.m. on Thursday. The United Workers Union (UWU) members, who include medical imaging staff, radiographers, radiation therapists, nuclear medicine scientists, pharmacists and oral health professionals, have rejected the state Liberal-National Party government's proposed enterprise agreement.

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

South Australian court workers strike for higher pay

Dozens of sheriffs' officers, crown solicitors and DPP lawyers walked out on Thursday, forcing the closure of all South Australian courts. The workers are members of the Public Service Association which is demanding a 20 percent pay rise over 18 months. The state Labor government has offered only 12.5 percent. The workers held a protest rally at Adelaide's Victoria Square.

Keolis Downer bus drivers in Newcastle continue industrial action

Bus drivers employed by Keolis Downer Hunter (KDH) in Newcastle, New South Wales struck for 24 hours at 4 a.m. on Friday impacting on all services.

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members have been taking industrial action, including strikes and work bans, since April after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement failed. Drivers have banned the use of their Opal (fare collection) machines since April.

While the previous agreement expired in November 2024 talks are deadlocked despite 24 meetings in the past twelve months. KDH's latest offer includes a 15.5 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 has been campaigning for the bus service to be returned to public hands, saying working conditions have gone backwards since the state

government privatised bus services.

New Zealand firefighters continue strike action

About 2,000 New Zealand firefighters held a one-hour strike on December 5, part of a series of weekly stoppages called by the NZ Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) over a long-running contract dispute with Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ). Notices were issued for similar strikes on December 12 and 19.

The December 5 walkout was the third since November. The Employment Relations Authority (ERA) directed the parties to begin facilitated bargaining, beginning this week.

The NZPFU says future strikes are dependent on FENZ's resuming bargaining talks. Firefighters have rejected a 5.1 percent pay increase over three years, i.e., less than inflation at 3 percent per year, while protesting the dire state of the fire service, including repeated truck breakdowns and equipment failures.

The union claims it has been "innovative in developing options for settlement" and criticised FENZ's refusal to bargain while as the same time proposing to slash 160 jobs. The NZPFU and Public Service Association (PSA) have filed an application with the ERA for an order requiring FENZ to comply with the consultation provisions in the unions' respective collective agreements over the cuts.



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