

# 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: Telangana steel workers halt production over colleague's death in molten metal accident**

On December 15, workers at the steel production plant of MS Agarwal Foundries, in Medak stopped work and shut down the plant to protest the accidental death of work colleague Saranth Pandey, 35, from Uttar Pradesh and the critical injury of Rajesh Pandey, 45, from Bihar when molten metal spilled on them.

Workers said factory management had ignored their concerns about seriously unsafe conditions which led to the tragic industrial accident. MS Agarwal Foundries manufactures steel products for construction.

## **India: Tamil Nadu public sector workers demand previous pension scheme**

About 700 Tamil Nadu school teachers and other public sector workers held a protest hunger strike in Thoothukudi on December 13 to demand reinstatement of the old pension scheme. It was organised by the Joint Action Council of Tamil Nadu Teachers Organisation and Government Employees' Organisation. Similar protests were held in Tenkasi district and Kanyakumari.

Protesters claimed that their demand for reinstatement of the old pension scheme was an election promise of the current Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government. Workers say the current market-linked new pension scheme is neither secure nor sustainable for government employees after retirement. Teachers were also demanding permanent jobs.

## **Tamil Nadu construction workers protest for Hindu festival allowance**

Around 500 construction workers, including 300 women, demonstrated and held a roadblock in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu on Tuesday over payment of the Pongal (Hindu festival) bonus. The protest was called by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions. Workers demanded a bonus of 5,000 rupees (\$US55.3) and a pension of 3,000 rupees for workers above 55 years.

## **Kashmir ASHA workers protest overdue wages**

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers employed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare demonstrated in Hajin, North Kashmir's Bandipora district, on December 17, over a six-month delay in the payment of wages. Frontline health workers say they are finding it difficult to survive because of the delayed wage payments. They have threatened to step up their agitation if their demands are not met.

## **Assam 108 Ambulance emergency workers remain on strike**

About 3,000 Assam 108 Ambulance emergency contract workers, including ambulance pilots, emergency medical technicians and emergency response officers, are maintaining strike action and a protest in Guwahati.

The workers, who walked out on December 1 to demand permanent jobs, have ignored the Assam state government's use of the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act to illegalise the industrial action. Their demands include higher wages and a salary increment issued on August 4 by their employer, Jeevika-EMRI.

## **Pakistan: Punjab hospital security guards strike over low pay**

Security guards at two public hospitals—the DHQ (Dr Faisal Masood) Teaching Hospital and Maula Bakhsh Hospital—in Sargodha stopped work and protested this week over longer working hours and low pay.

Strikers closed the main gate of one public hospital, blocking ambulances carrying patients from entering the facility. Workers said the contract security company forced them to work overtime but paid them only 16,000 rupees (\$US57) a month.

## **Bangladesh: Chattogram water utility workers demand permanency**

Over 100 temporary wage workers from the state-owned Chattogram Water Supply and Sewerage Authority demonstrated on December 11 to demand permanent jobs and to protest a new recruitment circular which they claim undermines their demand. They gathered outside the utility's main gate, disrupting entrance to the facility for three hours.

Workers have accused the authorities of attempting to sideline temporary employees, despite a pending High Court case involving their employment status. They said the new recruitment circular would disadvantage more than 150 temporary workers who have been serving the utility for years.

“We have long been demanding regular posts. We were told that contractual staffers would be adjusted against vacant positions and only then would new posts be advertised,” said a protester.

### **Western Australia: Woodside Pluto-2 LNG construction workers ready to walk out**

About 1,000 construction workers employed at Woodside’s \$12.5 billion Pluto 2 LNG processing plant project in Western Australia plan to begin one-hour rolling stoppages on January 5. The workers are members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Construction Forestry Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU). They are in dispute with Woodside’s lead contractor Bechtel over its proposed enterprise agreement.

The Offshore Alliance (OA), which includes the AWU and Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), and the other unions began negotiations in September. Workers have twice rejected Bechtel’s proposed agreement. Bechtel presented a revised proposal to 2,000 workers this week, with the ballot to close this weekend.

The revised agreement includes a 20 percent increase in the base rate of pay over three years, including 10 percent this year on top of 2.5 percent already paid at the start of the month, and a \$10,000 sign-on bonus paid before Christmas, up from previous offers of \$8,000 paid in March. The unions directed members to reject the proposal.

The unions want a 30 percent base pay increase to address real pay cuts in the current agreement which expired this month. The OA is demanding that travel time to and from camp be included as work time, superannuation paid on all hours, increased site allowance, 2-1 rosters with 12-hour days and all overtime paid at double time.

### **MSS Security workers at Canberra Airport strike for pay parity**

Following 15-minute rolling stoppages on December 12 at Canberra Airport, MSS Security workers will maintain their action up to December 23 when they will hold a longer stoppage and rally at the airport. The workers are members of the United Workers Union (UWU) which is seeking pay parity with security workers in the same roles at Sydney Airport. The UWU claimed that the MSS pay offer was far below what Sydney Airport workers receive.

### **Healthscope nurses in Victoria escalate industrial action**

Close to 2,500 Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members at Healthscope private hospitals in Victoria have begun closing beds in their long running dispute with the private health provider over stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The action follows several four-hour stoppages at Healthscope’s 12 facilities since 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.

As well as closing beds, ANMF members imposed additional bans on Monday. These include refusing receptionist/administrative duties or food delivery and banning any nurse or midwife in charge of a ward or unit taking a patient load. Healthscope has threatened to dock workers imposing the bans.

Nurses and midwives are calling for Healthscope to return to the negotiating table. 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.

The ANMF members rejected Healthscope’s pay offer which 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.

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 the company’s debt.

### **Bridgewater Dental Clinic workers in Tasmania strike for higher pay**

About one dozen workers at the government-run Bridgewater Dental Clinic stopped work and protested outside their facility at Bridgewater on Monday. The action, by members of the Health and Community Services Union, was part of ongoing statewide protests and stoppages by state public sector workers in dispute with the Rockliff Liberal government over wages and conditions.

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.

### **Crown Melbourne casino workers prepare for industrial action**

United Workers Union (UWU) members at the Crown Melbourne casino are preparing to take protected industrial action, intensifying their dispute with Crown over its proposed enterprise agreement. More than 1,000 UWU members are opposing Crown’s demand for a two-tier wages system which will impact 4,500 Crown workers.

Crown and the UWU have been in negotiations for more than four months. Management proposed a radical restructure of pay rates. Base rates for new hires would be cut by between 16 and 32 percent, though existing employees would retain their current wages through a “grandfathering” arrangement.

The UWU says Crown wants new level one workers to start on \$28.84 per hour, compared with \$34.22 for current staff. The union alleged this would equate to an annual wage difference between a current worker and a new worker of as much as \$10,600 for workers doing identical work.

The UWU says the offer would institutionalise inequality and lay the groundwork for long-term wage suppression. Workers argue that the two-tier model will inevitably be used to drive down overall labour costs by

reducing shifts for experienced staff and expanding the lower-paid workforce.

### **South Australian nurses and midwives rally for higher wages**

Public sector nurses and midwives in South Australia are once again rallying to call on the state Labor government for higher wages and better conditions in a new enterprise agreement.

On Tuesday, more than 200 members of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) stopped work and rallied outside the Flinders Medical Centre in Adelaide. It followed earlier stopwork protests at major metropolitan hospitals and a statewide rally in October, when more than 4,000 nurses, midwives and supporters gathered outside state parliament to protest the government's wage rise offer of just 13 percent across four years, supplemented by several one-off payments.

The ANMF argues that the offer fails to address cost-of-living pressures, interstate wage disparities, and chronic staffing pressures. The government has refused to improve its offer citing budget restraints.

To combat ongoing nurse and midwife shortages the union is demanding wage parity with equivalent health workers in other states. The union's principal demand is a 23 percent pay increase by 2027, and a further rise of 3 to 4 percent if the agreement extends into 2028. Other claims include improved allowances and the formal recognition of babies as patients for the purpose of nurse-to-patient ratios.

The ANMF plan another stop work rally outside parliament on February 5.

### **Tasmania's Child Safety, Youth Justice and Advice Referral Line workers strike**

On Wednesday, about 60 Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members from Child Safety, Youth Justice and Advice Referral Line held rolling two-hour stoppages across Tasmania and put in place a ban on unpaid overtime.

The workers are calling on the state Liberal government to increase wages, resolve chronic understaffing, end unsafe workloads and to change vacancy controls that are preventing backfilling. Workers are demanding urgent recruitment and the advertising and backfilling of all vacancies, safe staffing levels and enforceable workload caps, and measures to address occupational violence and improve safety supports.

The HACSU says chronic worker shortages are so bad that single staff members are now doing the work of entire teams which is placing vulnerable children, young people and families at risk. The union says the government's long term underfunding of child welfare services is risking system failure.

The HACSU has run an isolated campaign since 2023 consisting of largely ineffective and limited industrial actions appealing to the government to negotiate with it. It has not organised its thousands of other members in a campaign of support for the distressed and overworked child welfare members, leaving them isolated.

### **TasRail freight workers strike**

The Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) and the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members employed by state-owned TasRail held a 24-hour stoppage on December 12. About 100 members at TasRail's Burnie marshalling yard and the East Tamar Junction site in Launceston participated in the strike.

The unions have been in negotiations with TasRail for a new enterprise agreement. The talks are stalled over TasRail's refusal to meet the workers' wages, conditions and staffing demands.

Workers want a 31 percent wage rise over three years to make up for concessions the unions gave during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further industrial action is expected if TasRail refuses to make an acceptable offer.

### **Union cancels Air New Zealand cabin crew strike**

The E t? union this week called off a planned one-day strike by Air New Zealand cabin crew during the pre-Christmas buildup. More than 400 Air NZ staff will no longer strike after the union reached an "agreement in principle" with the company.

The airline's short-haul cabin crews, who work on domestic flights, as well as flights across the Tasman and Pacific, had voted to strike on December 18 over pay and conditions. Workers are employed on as little as \$60,000 a year and their pay has not kept up with soaring living costs. The union has not publicly announced details of the settlement.

E t? assistant national secretary Rachel Mackintosh said the strike was called off when the deal for cabin crew was "close enough" to being finalised. Unions have been negotiating with Air NZ since April. An earlier strike planned for December 8 had also been cancelled. At the time a company spokesperson said discussions with E t? were "constructive and progressing well."

After the cabin crew initially voted to strike, E t? director Michael Wood appealed to the company—which is 51 percent owned by the government—to return to negotiations, saying that the union would "work hard ... to prevent any strike action."



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**