

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

South Korea: Seoul city bus union announces January strike

The Seoul intracity bus union announced on December 24 that it will hold a full-scale strike on January 13 after failing to narrow differences with management in wage negotiations.

The union claimed that the Seoul Metropolitan Government and bus operators had reneged on an agreement to resolve unpaid wages based on a Seoul High Court ruling in the Dong-A Transportation case. The court ruled that regular bonuses be included in the bus workers' ordinary wages. The employers are refusing to pay the overdue wages, citing a pending appeal to the Supreme Court.

The union rejected the bus operators' offer of a 10 percent increase in the hourly wage. The union argued that the wage increases should be 12.85 percent, as per the court ruling, including unpaid allowances calculated based on the new ordinary wage standards.

Intracity buses in Seoul are operated under a semi-public management system with private bus companies running operations and the municipal governments covering their losses. The union previously threatened to walk out in May and November this year due to wage disputes but did not carry through with the threats.

India: Ambulance service workers in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh strike

Rajasthan Ambulance Employees Union members stopped work at midnight Sunday across Rajasthan state to protest against lower wages proposed in the new tender and oppose the continuation of 12-hour work shifts instead of the demanded 8-hour shift. The strike affected '108' emergency services and '104' health services with a total of 1,600 vehicles.

A union spokesperson said repeated demands to the Health Department and National Health Mission for a 30 percent pay rise with 10 percent annual increments and reduction of the 12-hour shift to 8 hours were ignored. The workers currently are paid 12,730 rupees (\$US142) a month.

In a separate dispute, Ambulance '108' and '102' workers in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh stopped work for 48 hours on December 27 demanding an increase in minimum wage and adherence to labour laws. Members of the 108 and 102 Ambulance Workers' Union demonstrated outside the District Collectors office in Shimla calling for the proper implementation of wage laws and an end to worker harassment.

Workers had several complaints. A spokesperson said workers endure 12-hour shifts without overtime pay, despite directives from legal authorities demanding improved conditions. He said workers face mental

harassment, transfers, forced resignations, or prolonged off-duty periods without justification, along with irregularities in Employee Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance deductions resulting in a monthly financial loss to employees.

The Himachal Pradesh workers are employed by the private company Medswan Foundation under the National Health Mission.

Thousands of gig workers strike across India on New Year's eve

About 150,000 gig workers from various delivery platforms, including zepto, Zomato, blinkit and Swiggy, stopped work across India on New Year's Eve to demand fair wages, safe working conditions, social security and protection of workers' rights. The strike was partial in all the cities because the platforms offered higher incentives to break the strike.

In a post in X, the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers said, "Nearly 40,000 delivery workers across India participated in a nationwide flash strike on December 25, causing 50–60 percent service disruption in many cities. Workers were protesting unsafe work models, falling incomes, arbitrary ID blocking, police harassment and denial of dignity and social security".

Medical college contract workers in Chandigarh on hunger strike

After 46 days of peaceful protest, contract workers from the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh began a protest hunger strike on December 30. Demands were payment of wages arrears, close to 900 million rupees (\$US10 million), and Dearness Allowance pending since January 2024. There are around 4,500 contract staff working in security, kitchen and sanitation. Workers defied the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) which made the strike illegal.

Rajasthan public sector workers demand filling of vacant posts

Hundreds of government employees from across Rajasthan held a one-day protest at Shaheed Smarak in Jaipur, the state capital, on Monday to demand the filling of vacant posts. Their main concern was the filling of posts for the Grade III government teachers. Around 125,000 teaching posts remain vacant.

The Akhil Rajasthan Rajya Karamchari Sanyukt Mahasangh called the protest citing salary anomalies, delays in promotions, and the slow posting of newly recruited teachers in Mahatma Gandhi Schools.

West Bengal: Tea garden workers at Alipurduar protest

Around 300 tea garden workers from an estate run by Marico at Alipurduar, in North Bengal held a peaceful demonstration on Tuesday over the non-payment of wages for the past eight weeks. The Chai Mazdoor Ekta Andolan called the protest saying that workers had not been paid their provident fund, gratuity and bonus, which was illegal.

Sri Lanka: University educators strike over proposed amendments to the University Act

Lecturers and professors at the Rajarata University in Central Province, along with educators from universities across Sri Lanka, struck on Tuesday, withdrawing from all academic and administrative duties. They were protesting proposed amendments to the University Act recently approved by the University Grants Commission and expected to be submitted to parliament for enactment.

Key grievances included undermining university autonomy, preventing permanent appointments for key positions like Vice-Chancellors, lack of academic staff, and inadequate research funding.

Sri Lankan airport workers demand increase in 2025 year-end bonus

Around 500 airport employees protested at the Bandaranaike International Airport on last Monday to demand the 2025 year-end bonus announced by the Airport and Aviation Services Company Limited be increased to five basic salaries. The workers were represented by five unions, the Airport Sri Lanka Free Employees Union, the General Public Employees Union, the Progressive Employees Union, the National Employees Union, and the Sri Lanka Free Employees Union of Sri Lankan Airlines.

The Sri Lanka Free Employees' Union said that the current bonus allocation amounts to two basic salaries, despite the airport company recording an annual net profit of 21 billion rupees (\$US67.7 million). Workers threatened to escalate their action to disrupt airport operations if their demand is not met.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest layoffs

Workers at Koresh Bangladesh PLC Limited, a readymade garment factory located in the Mouchak area of Ward 3, Siddhirganj, Narayanganj, blocked the Dhaka–Chittagong highway on Tuesday in protest against layoffs. The blockade lasted for about 40 minutes, causing severe traffic congestion.

The protest erupted after workers discovered that factory authorities had laid off at least 70 workers without providing any compensation. Initially, the workers demonstrated at the factory gate before moving onto the highway.

Police from Siddhirganj Police Station and the Industrial Police intervened and broke up the protest. They remained in the surrounding area to prevent the protest from spreading. Police said that negotiations were underway between workers and factory owners.

Crown Melbourne casino workers strike over pay cut

United Workers Union (UWU) members at the Crown casino in Melbourne voted overwhelmingly to strike for four hours on New Year's Eve, commencing at 10 p.m. and on the next day for four hours at 10 a.m. The nearly 2,500 UWU members are in dispute with Crown over its proposed enterprise agreement, which aims to cut wages and conditions by introducing a two-tier wage system that will impact over 4,500 workers.

Crown and the UWU have been in negotiations since May. Management proposed a radical restructuring 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, that 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 claimed 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.

The union said that after three days of talks leading up to Tuesday Crown refused to remove the two-tier wage system, leaving workers with no option but to take action.

New Zealand Woolworths workers strike

Customer care workers at New Zealand retail chain Woolworths went on strike until midnight on Christmas eve to protest the removal of working-from-home privileges and a mandatory one weekend day off. Some 105 staff were involved in the action which was expected to cause delays for customer enquiries over the critical period.

It was the third strike by workers in the Australian-owned company's call centre in a fortnight, following four rounds of negotiations by the Workers First union. The union members were demanding higher wages and pushing back against attempts to remove entitlements including one weekend day off per week and the ability to work from home. They were also protesting a requirement to be available, on-call, for 12 hours per working day, while only being paid for eight.

The workers are responsible for assisting with online ordering and logistics, customer complaints and refunds, and queries about the 'Everyday Rewards' loyalty scheme. Centre staff had a major restructure last August, with similar job advertisements appearing for their roles in the Philippines. A section of the Australian contact centre has already been outsourced.



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