

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: Seoul city bus union ends strike with inferior pay deal

The Seoul City Bus Union called off its indefinite strike on Wednesday evening after reaching agreement on a wage increase with the Seoul City Bus Association. Bus union members from 64 bus companies stopped work on Tuesday halting 6,500 buses operating across 394 intracity routes. Wage and collective bargaining talks had been deadlocked since negotiations collapsed in May 2025.

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.

Upon ending the strike, both sides agreed that the base wage would be lifted by 2.9 percent, 0.5 percent higher than mediated proposals but below the union's 3 percent demand. Management agreed to raise the retirement age in stages, from 63 to 64 in July and to 65 in July 2027, partially meeting union demands. Capitulating to employers' demands, the union dropped its major demand for reform of the wages system and agreed to hold discussions at a later date.

The union argues that if the employers' appeal to the Supreme Court ruling fails and the ruling is applied to ordinary wages, regular bonuses in ordinary wages alone would result in a 12.85 percent wage increase effect due to rises in various allowances. The bus companies have offered an increase of just 10.3 percent, which the union claimed would be a wage cut.

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.

India: Tamil Nadu malaria prevention workers protest in Chennai

Around 700 National Urban Livelihoods Mission malaria prevention workers, began a protest hunger strike on January 13. Those protesting included nurses, pharmacists, lab technicians and data entry operators affiliated with the All India Trade Union Centre. They are demanding a wage increase and permanent jobs.

Protests were held in 15 zones of the Greater Chennai Corporation, with workers protesting that wage revision was due from June 2023, but they have not received it. The workers' wages range from 12,500 to 18,000 rupees (\$US200) a month which they say is the bare minimum to survive on.

Himachal Pradesh anganwadi workers demonstrate over colleague's death

Anganwadi (childcare) workers in Shimla protested on January 12 demanding justice for their co-worker, Harsha, who died due to an accident whilst on duty. The workers, who are affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, submitted a memorandum to Himachal Pradesh's chief minister through a child development project officer. They demanded proper compensation and accused authorities of criminal negligence.

A union spokesperson said that Harsha's death in the Tarna circle of Mandi district was due to a fall while on Pulse Polio duty. The union asserted that this incident was a consequence of a negligent system in which anganwadi workers are forced to perform risky tasks for various departments and referred to several deaths of anganwadi workers in the past couple of years.

Pakistan: Balochistan government employees demands wage hike and allowances

Balochistan government employees held a province-wide protest on January 12 demanding the implementation of the Disparity Reduction Allowance (DRA). Protests in Quetta lead to road blockades and arrests. The protests were called by the Balochistan Grand Alliance (BGA) which claimed that employees of institutions such as the governor's house, chief minister's secretariat and the high court are paid higher salaries despite being in the same grade as workers in other government departments.

Protesters blocked key highways connecting the province's capital Quetta to Karachi, Taftan, Gwadar, Sindh and other locations. The Balochistan government responded by cracking down on protest leaders, with more than 50 workers arrested.

The BGA, a joint platform and a representative body for various unions and associations of government employees in the province, said the final stage of their action will be a sit-in near the Red Zone in Quetta on January 20. Workers have threatened to launch a "Jail Bharo" (Fill the Jails) movement if no action is taken over their demands.

Pakistan: Power sector workers protest IMF-driven privatisation

Thousands of power sector workers across Pakistan held a nationwide protest on January 6, against the proposed privatisation of power distribution companies, and called for price controls and improved safety.

The protests, organised by the All Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union, were held in major cities including Lahore, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Multan, Sukkur, Hyderabad and Quetta. In Lahore, workers demonstrated outside the Press Club criticising the government's compliance with International Monetary Fund (IMF)-driven reforms and pointing to several failed privatisation attempts.

Workers want the nine-year recruitment ban removed in the power sector to cut excessive workloads and reduce the risk of on-duty accidents, improved safety measures, including the provision of proper protective equipment for line staff, and the strict enforcement of safety protocols. Other demands were for an immediate halt to the privatisation of power distribution companies and negotiations with independent power producers to bring down electricity tariffs.

The union warned that the protests will intensify in the coming weeks if workers' demands are ignored.

Bangladeshi garment workers hospitalised during protest

Over 100 workers from two factories of Export Village Limited at Tongi, Gazipur fell ill during protests for unpaid November wages on Wednesday. They were rushed to Tongi Shaheed Ahsanullah Master General Hospital and several local clinics for treatment. Hospital sources said most of the affected workers experienced vomiting, difficulty breathing, dizziness, and general discomfort. The cause was unknown.

Police were called to prevent the struggle spreading to other factories where workers face a similar situation.

The workers staged a day-long strike on Sunday over the same demands. Although they suspended the strike and returned to work on Monday morning, they decided on Wednesday to resume their industrial action.

Victorian public sector health workers escalate industrial action

More than 5,000 allied health and hospital support workers from 80 public health facilities across Victoria have escalated industrial action in a long-running dispute with the state Labor government over pay, workloads and chronic staffing shortages. The Health Workers Union (HWU) has been trying to reach a deal with the government for a new enterprise agreement since the current agreement expired in June. Workers rejected the government's pay rise offer of just 3 percent; a pay cut compared to the current inflation rate of 3.8 percent.

Workers imposed work bans in December aimed at revenue collection, including refusal to process private health insurance claims or submit Medicare reimbursements. Beginning Tuesday, they escalated action including suspensions of support for Category 2 and 3 elective surgeries, closure of one-in-four hospital beds by refusing post-discharge cleaning, bans on cleaning non-clinical areas (offices, corridors, cafeterias), and suspension of staff training and onboarding.

The HWU says its members were already the worst-paid health employees in Australia and that the 3 percent wage rise offer would not have delivered a liveable wage. Workers are taking industrial action as a

direct emergency response to the decades-long crisis in public health that is being exacerbated by sustained wage suppression and understaffing. Some 97 percent of HWU members voted in a ballot to support taking industrial action.

The union has called a stop work rally for Tuesday, January 20 at the opening of the Frankston Hospital, Melbourne, where the state premier Jacinda Allen will be attending.

Holcim building materials factory workers in Queensland begin industrial action

About 35 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members from building materials supplier Holcim at Swanbank Enterprise Park in Ipswich, Queensland, began taking industrial action on January 9 in their dispute with the company for a new enterprise agreement. The workers are seeking annual pay increases of 6, 3 and 3 percent in a three-year agreement.

AWU members voted near unanimously on November 3 to take protected industrial action, which could include work stoppages from 1 hour to 48 hours or an indefinite strike, along with seven work bans.

Royal Hobart Hospital food preparation workers demand improved pay and conditions

About 15 Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members from the Cambridge Food Production Centre at the Royal Hobart Hospital, Tasmania, walked out and held a stop work meeting on Wednesday. They are in dispute with the state Liberal government after rejecting its proposed "shambolic" enterprise agreement.

Workers complained that they are dealing with rising costs, increased pressure, and workloads that keep getting heavier, yet the latest offer on the table doesn't match the reality of what they are being asked to carry. Workers voted unanimously to continue the campaign for "fair wages, safer workloads, and decent conditions." The union has not said what future action will be taken.



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