

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 January 2026

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

India: Tamil Nadu school midday meal workers strike

Public school midday meal workers across Tamil Nadu held a three-day strike from January 21 to 23 to demand reduced workloads, the filling of 65,000 vacancies, wages on time and pensions. The workers formed road blockades in Coimbatore and Namakkal with over 600 detained by police in Coimbatore and 300 in Namakkal. The Tamil Nadu Noon Meal Employees' Association also demanded proper cylinders and cooking facilities.

NSBMC medical college workers in Madhya Pradesh strike for overdue wages

Most health services at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Medical College (NSBMC), at Jabalpur were brought to a standstill when ward boys and sanitation workers officially began an indefinite strike on Wednesday. Workers cited the non-payment of salaries over several consecutive months. Workers also alleged Provident Fund (PF) accounts were being mismanaged, claiming that deductions have been irregular or non-existent for years.

Contract sanitation workers at Tarn Taran, Punjab demand permanent jobs

Sanitation and water supply contract workers in Tarn Taran, Punjab protested Wednesday to demand permanent jobs. They burned effigies of politicians from the Aam Aadmi Party-led government accusing it of not fulfilling its promise after several years. Protesters said many workers had been working on contract for 15 to 20 years. They plan to hold a larger protest, along with the families, on January 24.

Uttarakhand: Government Doon Medical College Hospital workers strike

Sanitation workers from the Government Doon Medical College (GDMC) Hospital at Dehradun went on strike on Wednesday, crippling hospital services. The workers also demanded wages unpaid since November. They returned following an assurance from the Health minister to pay their wage dues soon.

West Bengal: ASHA workers protest in Kolkata for higher pay

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers protested in Bidhannagar and Dharmatala in Central Kolkata on Wednesday over several demands. Thousands of workers participated in the protest and many were detained by police. Demands were for an honorarium of 15,000 rupees (\$US163) and an insurance cover of 500,000 rupees if a worker died on duty.

Pakistan: Balochistan government workers protest again for pay parity

Government workers under the Balochistan Grand Alliance (BGA) held their second protest this month on Tuesday in Quetta, demanding the implementation of the Disparity Reduction Allowance (DRA) as per the government schedule. Protesters were attacked by police using batons when they attempted to march toward the Red Zone to hold a sit-in.

The BGA 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.

The alliance declared an indefinite strike and a two-week jail bharo (fill the jails) movement across the province.

Bangladeshi tannery workers demand fixed wages

Tannery workers held a protest rally on Saturday in Savar, an industrial hub on the outskirts of Dhaka, demanding the immediate implementation of the government-declared minimum wage of 18,000 taka (\$US147). The demonstration took place outside the Tannery Workers Union office in the Harindhara area of Hemayetpur, with workers from several leather factories participating.

A union official denounced tannery owners at the rally for refusing to implement the wage structure announced on November 21, despite its

publication in a government gazette. The wage, he said, had been agreed upon by representatives of both employers and workers. Even after the Ministry of Labour and Employment revised the structure at the request of employers, factory owners have continued to delay payment.

Workers stressed that wages have remained stagnant for four years amid soaring living costs which are driving them into severe hardship. Union leaders threatened that unless the new wage is enforced immediately workers will escalate their struggle, including strikes that could halt production across the tannery sector.

Workers from over 50 tanneries in the Savar Tannery Estate protested in May 2025 to demand implementation of the minimum wage revised in November 2024 by the Ministry for Labour and Employment.

Bangladeshi government employees hold one-day protest

Government employees in Thakurgaon and Nilphamari districts held a hunger strike protest on January 16 to demand the immediate implementation of a fair, non-discriminatory 9th pay scale, based on a 1:4 ratio and 12-grade structure. Workers also called for a minimum salary of 35,000 taka (\$US285), and for the prompt publication and enforcement of the new pay scale gazette retroactive to January 1, 2026.

In Thakurgaon District the Bangladesh Government Employees Coordination Council organised the protest, while in Nilphamari the Government Employees' Demands Realisation Unity Council organised the protest.

Union leaders threatened that continued delays in implementing the pay scale would provoke further, escalated actions by government employees across the region.

Lake Imaging radiologists in Victoria strike against low pay and high workloads

About 40 Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA) members from Lake Imaging walked off the job at several facilities across Victoria on January 15 over low pay and high workload. Lake Imaging workers at the St John of God Geelong Hospital in Geelong stopped work for two hours at 12 noon while imaging staff at 16 other facilities held 30-minute protest rallies outside their premises.

A VAHPA spokesperson said members were fighting for a new enterprise agreement that delivered a liveable pay rise, and urgent action to address unsustainable workloads and chronic staff shortages. Union members voted overwhelmingly on November 21 to approve taking industrial action that could include seven separate work bans and stoppages ranging from 5 minutes to 24 hours.

Qube Logistics truck drivers in Western Australia and Victoria strike for pay rise

About 20 truck drivers from Qube Specialised Logistics in Western Australia and Victoria struck for 24 hours on Wednesday following several months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. Transport Workers Union (TWU) members rejected Qube's pay rise offer of 12 percent over three years saying that it didn't compensate for some

members not receiving a pay increase since 2022.

The TWU wants wages and conditions improved in a consolidated agreement to align West Australian drivers with their Victorian counterparts. For decades, the TWU has allowed fragmented agreements and employer contracts that keep wages low by pitting workers against each other. The union claimed it is fighting for national standard industry wide agreements.

Qantas workers in Sydney strike for new work agreement

Close to 150 Qantas Technical and Salaried Staff at Sydney Airport, including engineers, safety trainers and technicians, walked off the job and rallied outside the airport on January 16 for a new enterprise agreement.

Three unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and the Australian Licenced Aircraft Engineers Association, said Qantas has failed to make an offer in line with the cost of living after 18 months of negotiations. The workers' current agreement expired in December 2024.

South Australian public health nurses and midwives to strike in February

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) announced last week that its public sector members will strike on February 5 and hold a mass rally in central Adelaide. The ANMF said the State Labor government had said in December that it would provide a revised offer by January 23, but the union claimed it had not had any updates.

Thousands of ANMF members began industrial action on October 30 with a stop work rally outside the state parliament, 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. Meanwhile, the union has restricted industrial action to nurses and midwives holding a series of short stop work rallies outside their respective hospitals.

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.

To combat ongoing staff shortages, the union want 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.

Zinfra Tasmania power infrastructure workers locked out in pay dispute

Sixteen Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU) members from the power infrastructure construction and maintenance company Zinfra Tasmania were locked out by management on Tuesday after they put in place low-level work bans. The CEPU, representing 38 Zinfra

workers, is trying to reach a deal with management for a new enterprise agreement. Workers want the agreement to reflect the work they perform, particularly when compared to equivalent roles elsewhere in the industry.

The union claimed Zinfra Tasmania workers are paid \$6 an hour less than their counterparts in Victoria. Workers want pay parity with their Victorian counterparts.

Tasmanian mental health workers strike for improved wages and safety

On Tuesday, over a dozen Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) mental health members stopped work for one hour at the Millbrook Rose Centre at New Norfolk, southern Tasmania, and rallied outside the premises. Workers want a “decent” pay increase and an occupational violence allowance.

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 HACSU, along with the Australian Education Union and the Community and Public Sector Union, opposed the government’s proposed 3 percent pay rise in a one year agreement with no improvement in conditions, to be followed by further negotiations. The latest (September quarter) annualised consumer price index (CPI) rate for Hobart, Tasmania’s capital, is 4.3 percent, meaning the government’s pay offer is a real pay cut.

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.

TasRail freight workers strike again for pay rise

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU), representing about 100 workers at the state-owned TasRail, called a 24-hour strike on Friday, after failing to reach a deal with the government for a new enterprise agreement. Management threatened CEPU members that they would be stood down without pay if they put in place low level work bans such as not using hand tools and fault finding.

After ten months of negotiations and last-minute talks this week, the unions said they failed to resolve long-standing workplace issues. Workers stopped work for 24 hours on December 12 after rejecting TasRail’s pay increase offer of 16 percent over three and a half years. Workers want a 31 percent wage rise over three years to make up for concessions the unions gave during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kidston Pumped Hydro Project construction workers in Queensland walk out over appalling living conditions

On January 10, more than 150 construction workers at the \$1 billion Kidston Pumped Hydro Project in north-west Queensland evacuated the

site after months of complaints of substandard accommodation and inedible food. The evacuation from the remote fly-in, fly-out site was sparked when maggots were discovered in a meal served to workers at the camp.

The project, located about 285 kilometres west of Townsville at the former Kidston gold mine, is being developed by Genex Power, with construction undertaken by a John Holland–McConnell Dowell joint venture. Between 150 and 200 workers are employed onsite.

The evacuation comes only 49 days after the Joint Venture (JV) made commitments to rectify living conditions after workers reported mouldy rooms, putrid food and widespread gastro outbreaks due to appalling living conditions back in October 2025.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) says the contamination came to light after a worker was served a pre-packed crib meal visibly infested with maggots. Photographs of the initial meal raised broader concerns about food hygiene at the camp. In subsequent reports, union members alleged other incidents of meals contaminated with mould and flies, poor sanitation and food storage practices.

The ETU and the Construction Forestry Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) have allowed the substandard living conditions to persist admitting that members complained about food quality and hygiene since the project began and cited an incomplete Food Services Audit commissioned in November 2025, which identified serious deficiencies in food handling, sanitation, temperature control, monitoring and record-keeping.

New Zealand firefighters continue nationwide strike action

On January 16, about 2,000 New Zealand firefighters continued a series of one-hour nationwide strikes, defying demands by government ministers that they end their action. During a previous strike on January 9, a serious fire broke out in Auckland that required the attendance of volunteer crews.

Last week, the NZ Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) revealed that the state agency Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), had been caught spying on striking firefighters and their protesting supporters using Auckland Transport’s city-wide CCTV cameras. Drawn-out negotiations between the NZPFU and FENZ have repeatedly broken down. Firefighters overwhelmingly rejected an initial pay offer of 5.1 percent spread over three years. FENZ has since increased the offer to 6.2 percent, which is still well below the rate of inflation of 3 percent, with real living costs much higher.

The firefighters have been striking regularly for months over the plans to drive down their wages, as well as understaffing of the fire service and failure of successive governments to invest in new fire trucks and equipment. The NZPFU’s limited strike action while seeking a deal with FENZ is proving to be a dead end. Meanwhile, this week the Employment Relations Authority began hearing a case brought by the NZPFU and Public Service Association contesting a FENZ restructure that will cost 160 jobs.



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