

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: Gig workers hold one-day protests across India

The Gig and Platform Service Workers Union called a nationwide day-long protest on Tuesday. Workers stopped work in major cities and submitted their demands to the chief ministers of their respective states. Those participating included workers from Zomato, Swiggy, Urban Company, Zepto, Blinkit, Instamart and other platforms.

Gig workers face systemic exploitation and lack of fundamental protection in the industry. Tuesday's action followed nationwide stoppages by 150,000 Gig workers on January 26 and on New Year's Eve, and a smaller strike of 40,000 on December 25. The workers are fighting against falling incomes, arbitrary blocking of worker IDs, opaque rating systems, income insecurity, lack of grievance redressal mechanisms and unilateral changes in work policies.

Tamil Nadu school nutritious meal workers and Anganwadi employees protest in Dindigul

Over 200 nutritious meal workers and Anganwadi workers demonstrated in February in Dindigul with a 10-point charter of demands. The Tamil Nadu Federation of Nutritious Meal and Anganwadi Workers' Association had also organised stop work protests at other cities like Erode, Coimbatore and others. Demands included better pay, special pension and dearness allowance.

Other demands were for pay parity, filling of vacant posts, pensions for all the employees and timely promotions. Workers said there are about 60,000 vacant posts in the state. Nutritious meal workers are employed in a scheme that provides lunch to students in government schools.

Tamil Nadu secondary school teachers end protest after government assurances

Over 1,000 secondary school teachers who had been on a statewide protest since December 26 for equal pay ended their protest on January 31. Teachers who joined the workforce after June 2009 are only paid 5,200 rupees (\$US57.90) per month, while teachers employed prior to that date receive 8,370 rupees. They alleged that there is a 25,000-

30,000-rupee annual wage gap between them.

The teachers ended their protest after the education minister assured them that their grievance would be "sorted" and that the teachers' committee report would be taken into consideration.

Pondicherry government school contract teachers protest for permanency

An attempt by contract government schoolteachers to protest at the Pondicherry Assembly was blocked by police on Tuesday. The teachers were demanding permanent jobs, complaining that they had been working on contracts for over five years. Teachers condemned the education minister, claiming that they were assured of a solution by January in earlier talks.

Punjab state power workers protest privatisation

Power workers, engineers and pensioners in Patiala, organised by the Power Sector Joint Action Committee, demonstrated on Wednesday against privatisation of the Punjab State Power Corporation. Workers said it was unacceptable that the government had unilaterally decided to sell the power plants in the city.

The privatisation includes government power distribution and assets across Punjab. The Joint Action Committee said it will call a statewide protest on February 12.

Bangladesh: Chittagong Port workers strike against new terminal leasing

Chittagong port workers began an indefinite strike on Wednesday, bringing all port operations to a complete standstill. They are protesting the government's decision to lease the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) to Dubai-based multinational logistics firm DP World. Their action followed earlier protests, including an eight-hour strike for three consecutive days from Saturday to Monday, and a 24-hour strike on Tuesday.

The ongoing strikes, which are coordinated by the Port Protection Movement Council, have disrupted the loading and unloading of containers and bulk cargo from vessels. The delivery of imported goods, container handling, the berthing and unberthing of ships, the transport of

containers to and from off-dock facilities, and the movement of cargo vehicles within the port have also come to a halt.

While the Ministry of Shipping has responded by transferring about 30 workers to other ports, workers said they would continue the strike until the government withdraws from the NCT leasing process.

Bangladeshi health workers demand outstanding pay

Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project workers staged a sit-down demonstration on January 28 outside the main entrance of the Rajshahi city corporation building, demanding payment of outstanding salaries.

Health authorities, which repeatedly assured them that their salaries and arrears would be paid soon, now say that they would pay only three months of arrears. In another blow to workers, the authorities told them that their arrears would be calculated according to a newly fixed salary of 9,000 taka (\$74), a drastic reduction from their original fixed pay of 16,500 taka.

The project provides primary healthcare to low-income urban residents through city corporation health centres, including maternal and childcare, antenatal and postnatal services, immunisation support, family planning, basic outpatient treatment, and health education. It was jointly funded by partner NGOs, city corporations and relevant ministries.

Sri Lanka: Union calls off School Development Officers' strike

Hundreds of School Development Officers (SDOs) began a sit-down protest outside the Presidential Secretariat on January 26 to demand formal integration into the national teaching service. They converted their action into a fast-unto-death campaign causing some protesters to be hospitalised.

The protesters, all of whom were university graduates, claimed that their academic qualifications and seven years of professional experience make additional recruitment examinations unnecessary.

On Tuesday, the union representing the SDOs called off the protest, claiming it had been given an assurance from President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on their demand. The president leads the National People's Power/Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna coalition government.

SDOs demonstrated in September and November during 2025 but the protests were called off after false assurances that the government would resolve the issue.

Sri Lankan doctors continue protest

About 20,000 Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) doctors are maintaining protest action they began on January 27 in response to the Dissanayake government's failure to fulfill their demands. It follows a 48-hour protest action on January 24. GMOA members are fighting the government's failure to implement the agreements reached during previous talks.

The protest action includes not recommending patients to purchase medicines and obtain laboratory services from outside, not participating in external clinics organized by politicians, not working in units that do not

provide support staff, and not covering duties by specialists.

The union wants the Disturbance, Attendance and Transport (DAT) allowance updated, the provision of medical officer allowances and conversion of the additional duty allowance into a fixed payment, in accordance with increased allowances for public officers and resolution of the research allowance problems.

Malaysia: Lumileds factory workers protest sackings and deportations

Workers from the Lumileds factory in Malaysia's Panang region, which makes screens for Apple devices, rallied outside their factory on January 29 to protest the sacking and deportation of union members. The Electronics Industry Employees Union Northern Region (EIEUNR) won the right to represent workers at the factory in November. Of the 1,200 eligible voters at the plant, 65 percent voted for the union, with 89 percent turnout.

The union won the ballot, despite company threats to deport migrant workers or evict them from company housing if they supported the union. Lumileds also excluded 200 union supporters from the voter list, and told workers in captive-audience meetings that they would only get better wages and benefits if they voted against the union.

Lumileds has begun disciplinary proceedings against the union chairman and several migrant workers who supported the union have been deported. One employee was fired on January 6 for defending a migrant worker who supported the union.

Workers are demanding the immediate reinstatement of all fired and deported members with back pay, an end to all disciplinary proceedings against union officials, and for Lumileds to bargain in good faith with the union.

South Australian nurses and midwives reject latest pay offer

Over 1,000 public sector nurses and midwives converged on South Australia's parliament house in Adelaide on Thursday after rejecting a last-minute pay offer of only 10.75 percent over three years from the state Labor government. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) said the offer was below inflation and failed to address critical staff shortages.

Thousands of ANMF members began industrial action on October 30 with a stop work rally outside the state parliament, after rejecting the government's proposed enterprise agreement. The ANMF claimed that the offer would ensure South Australian nurses were the lowest paid in Australia.

To combat ongoing staff shortages, the union wants 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 has restricted industrial action to a series of short stop work rallies outside their respective hospitals.

Tasmanian public hospital workers strike for better pay and conditions

About 70 Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members at the Launceston General Hospital in Tasmania held rolling stoppages over three hours on January 29 as part of a long running dispute with the state Liberal government over its proposed public sector enterprise agreement. Strikers included support staff, pathology workers, allied health professionals, cleaners, food services staff and trades people.

The action was part of a wider industrial campaign of public sector workers involving several unions covering teachers, health workers, firefighters, child safety workers, park rangers and others. They struck for up to four hours over several days across Tasmania in early November against the government's proposed agreement.

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 (December quarter) annualised consumer price index (CPI) rate for Hobart, Tasmania's capital, is 3.8 percent, meaning the government's pay offer is a real pay cut. Other issues concerning most public sector workers are chronic staffing shortages and workload pressures.

Negotiations with the government during 2025 dragged on for months with minimal progress, characterised by repeated meetings lacking government negotiators with authority to deliver improved offers. The government's initial 3 percent wage proposal has remained largely unchanged. In December, the government cancelled bargaining with all unions and maintains its offer is fair and affordable.

The unions have confined industrial action to short, rolling stoppages and work bans, rather than escalating to sustained strikes capable of forcing a resolution.

CSL workers in Victoria strike for higher pay and job security

On Wednesday, 1,270 workers from three unions stopped work for 24 hours at CSL's pharmaceutical manufacturing and warehousing facilities in Victoria and rallied outside the company's head office in Melbourne. The strike involved workers from CSL's major sites at Broadmeadows and Parkville, and included laboratory, manufacturing, maintenance, warehouse and white-collar staff.

The action followed a 24-hour strike on December 5 for an improved enterprise agreement offer. The highly skilled workers want the agreement to include paid breaks, flexible work options, including a four-day work week trial, and fair career progression.

The workers, covered by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) and the United Workers Union (UWU), voted overwhelmingly in November to take future industrial action, including strikes and up to 15 work bans, after rejecting CSL's proposed enterprise agreement. The company proposed major changes to current working conditions, including reducing the workforce at its Behring facility by 15 percent.

The unions said that key points of contention included a proposed 10.5 percent pay rise over three years, an increase in ordinary working hours, changes to rostering, a push to move sections of the workforce onto individual contracts, and reductions or freezes to allowances and leave conditions. The unions said their members are also concerned that the proposal would not address growing workload pressures and would affect long-term career progression.

Victorian public health support workers reject pay offer and maintain work bans

More than 5,000 allied health and hospital support workers from 80 public health facilities across Victoria are maintaining work bans after overwhelmingly rejecting the state Labor government's latest pay offer.

The Health Workers Union (HWU) said the 3.3 percent pay increase per year over three years was conditional on workers agreeing to give up key workplace protections and entitlements. The official inflation rate is 3.8 percent meaning the offer is a real pay cut. The current agreement expired in June 2025.

Wide ranging work bans imposed in December escalated on January 12, include refusal to process private health insurance claims or submit Medicare reimbursements, 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 and suspension of staff training and onboarding.

The industrial bans are a direct response to the decades-long crisis in public health, exacerbated by sustained wage suppression and understaffing. Some 97 percent of HWU members voted in a ballot on November 25 to support taking industrial action that could include work stoppages from one- to eight-hours and bans on 20 work activities.

Epworth Medical Imaging nurses in Victoria reject third pay offer

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation members at Epworth Medical Imaging (EMI) at Geelong and Richmond this week voted down EMI's proposed enterprise agreement for the third time. The offer consisted of a 4.5 percent increase, payable in the first full pay period on or after a positive vote, another 4.5 percent on July 1, 2026 and 4 percent on July 1, 2027. Instead of backpay, nurses were offered a one-off tax-free voucher of \$295.

The ANMF alleged that with the proposed agreement expiring in December 2028, and no corresponding yearly wage increase in July 2028, it would have meant that for the last 18 months of the agreement there would be no wage increase and bargaining for higher wages would be blocked until the end of 2028.

The ANMF has been negotiating with Epworth since September 2024. The 33 union members held two four-hour strikes in July, 2025. The walkouts were an escalation of limited industrial action that began in April after rejecting EMI's proposed agreement. The nurses' current agreement expired in February last year, and their last pay rise was in July 2024.

The ANMF has not called for further industrial action and instead has filed for arbitration in the Fair Work Commission under the federal government's intractable bargaining provisions. The union is seeking 5 percent annual pay increases, industry standard lead apron allowance and backpay dating back to the 12-month anniversary of the last wage increase.



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