

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 across India strike again against exploitation and low pay

On February 7, Gig workers under the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union and Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers trade unions went out on strike across India in opposition to systemic exploitation and lack of fundamental protections in the industry. The strike 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 that included workers from Zomato, Swiggy, Urban Company, Zepto, Blinkit, Instamart and other platforms.

The workers are fighting against falling incomes, arbitrary blocking of worker IDs, opaque rating systems, income insecurity, lack of grievance redressal mechanisms, unilateral changes in work policies and an end to 10-minute deliveries.

Punjab bus transport contract workers hold statewide strike

About 8,000 Punjab Roadways and PRTC contract workers from 27 depots held a state-wide strike on Wednesday. Workers complained that many who had been there for 10 to 20 years were still contract employees and that their conditions were precarious.

Their demands included reinstatement of 34 workers who were terminated during the previous struggles, regularisation of services, timely payment of salaries and withdrawal of the contract system, which they described as exploitative.

They also want the government to reverse a decision to open tenders for 100 air-conditioned buses under the kilometre-based bus scheme. Workers claimed this was a backdoor attempt to allow private players to operate on government-notified routes. Under the scheme, private operators lease buses to the transport department and are paid a fixed rate per kilometre. Workers fear that the move threatens thousands of jobs in the state transport sector.

Kerala: ASHA workers resume protests for higher pay and improved conditions

Kerala ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers who took industrial action last year resumed their agitation at the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat on February 10, calling for higher wages, permanent jobs and better working conditions. The Kerala ASHA Health Workers Association was forced by workers to restart protests that ended on November 1 when the union called off their 265-day strike with none of their long-pending demands resolved.

The poorly paid ASHA (community health) workers, who receive very few entitlements, had held out against threats of sackings from the government and frequent attacks by police on their sit-down protest at Thiruvananthapuram. Some workers went on a hunger strike, while others shaved their heads.

Workers were demanding that their monthly wage be increased from a meagre 7,000 rupees (\$US80) to about 21,000 rupees, plus an increased pension and withdrawal of the compulsory retirement age of 62. They were forced to accept a meagre 1,000-rupee (\$US11.30) pay increase and herded back to work with none of their other demands being met.

Sri Lankan government doctors continue protests

Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) doctors are continuing protest action launched on January 27 against the Dissanayake government's refusal to address long-standing grievances.

Around 20,000 doctors are protesting the government's failure to implement agreements reached in earlier negotiations. Their campaign includes refusing to direct patients to private pharmacies and laboratories, boycotting external clinics organised by politicians, declining work in hospital units lacking adequate support staff, and not covering duties assigned to specialists.

At the centre of the dispute are demands for revisions to the Disturbance, Attendance and Transport (DAT) allowance, the proper provision of medical officer allowances, the conversion of additional duty payments into a fixed allowance in line with increases granted to other public sector employees, and the resolution of long-standing problems related to research allowances.

The action, which followed a 48-hour protest on January 24, is a sign of mounting opposition within the public health sector over deteriorating conditions and broken promises.

Queensland Urban Utilities workers strike for higher pay

Following failed negotiations at mediation talks in the Fair Work Commission on Thursday, The Services Union (TSU), representing 160

administrative and technical workers employed by Queensland water authority, Urban Utilities gave notice that its members would commence industrial action on February 13 through to February 18.

The TSU is in dispute with Urban Utilities over its proposed enterprise agreement and its low pay rise offer. Following months of negotiations workers rejected the employer's pay offer in November and began limited work stoppages and put in place bans on the issuing of permits, approvals and certifications.

The rejected offer included a 12 percent pay rise over three years. The union says that since a full pay freeze in 2021–22, members have only received 10 percent in increases, while Brisbane's cost of living rose about 17 percent and customer prices jumped 14.2 percent. Workers want wage parity with Brisbane City Council, Urban Utilities' largest local government owner.

Planned industrial action includes a 4-hour work stoppage on February 13, rolling one-hour stoppages over a four-hour period on February 17 and an indefinite ban on overtime, followed on February 18 with rolling one-hour stoppages over a 24-hour period and a 30-day ban on training, supervision and collaboration with contractors.

Urban Utilities, owned by Brisbane, Ipswich, Scenic Rim, Somerset and Lockyer Valley councils, provides water and sewerage services to 1.6 million Queenslanders.

Crown Melbourne casino workers resume industrial action for pay rise

The United Workers Union (UWU), representing close to 2,500 workers at the Crown Melbourne casino, in Melbourne, Victoria notified Crown this week that its members will be participating in industrial action for 12 hours on Saturday, February 14, ahead of the key trading night Valentine's Day, which is expected to attract significant patronage.

The action follows four-hour walkouts on New Year's Eve and the following day over management's proposed enterprise agreement. Facing overwhelming opposition from workers, management responded to the New Year's Eve strike by dropping one of its key demands, which aimed to cut wages and conditions by introducing a two-tier wage system that would have impacted over 4,500 workers and cut base rates for new hires by between 16 and 32 percent.

A UWU representative said Crown has not put a wage offer on the table since the New Year's Eve strike. "Instead, they have stalled meetings and continue to delay a pay rise for workers due in July 2025," he said. Negotiations have dragged on since May last year.

The union has not presented a specific wage rise but called on Crown to, "Engage constructively and reach a fair agreement that reflects rising living costs and protects standards across the workforce."

Victorian public health support workers' industrial action enters tenth week

More than 5,000 Health Workers Union (HWU) members at 80 public health facilities across Victoria are maintaining industrial action begun on December 4 in their dispute with the state Labor government over its proposed enterprise agreement. The HWU has called for members at the new Footscray Hospital to strike on February 18, coinciding with its official opening, while members maintain wide ranging work bans across the state including ad hoc 20-minute walkouts and protests outside health

facilities.

Workers rejected the government's latest pay offer of annual 3.3 percent increases over three years that is conditional on 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.

Current work bans 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.

Royal Hobart Hospital environmental services workers protest under-staffing

About 30 environmental services workers at Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) in Tasmania walked off the job and demonstrated outside the hospital on February 5 to protest chronic short staffing. The walkout was sparked by management decision to add another middle-management role instead of investing in employing frontline cleaners.

The workers are members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) who walked out in October 2024 to oppose low-staffing levels, shortages of patient linen and the employment of contract cleaners. They walked out for an hour in September last year to protest the Liberal state government's refusal to pay a "mixed functions allowance" for training new staff.

The HACSU says the government's failure to address the staff shortages is delaying critical cleaning that is causing the growing wait time patients are forced to endure before getting access to a hospital bed.

New Zealand firefighters escalate strike action

New Zealand firefighters who have been holding regular one-hour strikes on Fridays since late last year are to escalate the action from next week to include Mondays. The NZ Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) has initially scheduled strikes from 12.00–1.00 p.m. on Friday February 13 and again on Monday February 16.

About 2,000 firefighters have continued striking in defiance of demands by government ministers that they end their action. A spokesperson for the employer, Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ), condemned the action as "unnecessary and dangerous," adding escalating to twice weekly strikes was not "bargaining in good faith." FENZ received 18 calls reporting fires during a strike on February 6.

Firefighters have rejected an initial pay offer of 5.1 percent spread over three years followed by an increased offer of 6.2 percent. This is still well below the rate of inflation of 3 percent, with real living costs much higher. They are also striking over understaffing and the failure of successive governments to invest in new fire trucks and equipment.

Air New Zealand cabin crew strike

Air New Zealand was forced to cancel 44 flights and adjust schedules during strikes by long-haul cabin crew on Thursday and Friday, affecting

about 16,000 customers. The strikes, involving most wide-body aircraft services, followed weeks of negotiations over pay and conditions between the E t? union, NZ Flight Attendants' Association (FAANZ) and the national carrier.

Air NZ has offered pay increases of between 4.14 and 6.41 percent for the first year of a proposed two-and-a-half-year agreement with subsequent above inflation increases. FAANZ president Craig Featherby said those numbers will only just see crew this year getting the so called "living wage," which is marginally above the minimum pay rate of \$23.50 per hour.

The unions are pushing for base pay to be above the living wage—currently just over \$60,000 or \$28.95 an hour—but would ideally like to see it start at \$62,000. "We're very close... we've got facilitated bargaining next week, which I think both unions welcome" Featherby said, emphasising the unions and the airline alike "want the dispute resolved."



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