

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 March 2026

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

## India: ASHA workers and midday meal workers demand wage rise

On March 1, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers, facilitators and school midday meal workers from Amritsar and Tarn Taran protested outside a cabinet minister's office, accusing Punjab's Bhagwant Mann-led government of failing to enhance their honorarium before the assembly elections. The Maan Bhatta Sanjha Morcha (an umbrella organisation of ASHA workers, facilitators and midday meal workers) also called a protest outside the District Administrative Complex on Tuesday with the same demands.

Workers want a regular monthly allowance of 26,000 rupees (\$US283) and a fixed retirement payment of 500,000 in addition to providing half of the workers' salaries as a pension. ASHA workers in Punjab receive a monthly honorarium of just 3,000 rupees (\$US32.6).

On February 27, Karnataka ASHA workers demonstrated in Bengaluru's Freedom Park to demand an increase in their honorarium to 15,000 rupees (\$US163). The current payment is 10,000 rupees and is based on performance. The workers were also protesting increases in their workloads from 1,000 people per ASHA worker to 2,000.

## Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation workers demonstrate over productive land

About 190 Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation (KSIC) workers, including 97 women weavers, who produce the famous Mysore Silk, began protests last month over the loss of land needed for production. The ministry of youth and development are attempting to acquire about five acres of KSIC land to make way for the construction of a sports stadium. Workers from Channapatna and Mysuru halted the Mysore Silk production in solidarity from February 21.

## Andhra Pradesh Anganwadi workers protest for higher wages

Andhra Pradesh Anganwadi (childcare) workers protested on Tuesday in major cities across the state to demand a wage rise. Police arrested several workers and union leaders.

Workers accused the current Telugu Desam Party government of

renegeing on promises made during elections. Anganwadi teachers demanded a wage of 24,800 rupees (\$US270) and their helpers 20,300 rupees. They also called for the upgrading of 1,810 mini-centres. The protest was coordinated by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, All India Trade Union Congress and Indian Federation of Trade Unions.

## Tamil Nadu government doctors in Chennai on hunger strike

Federation of Government Doctors' Association members in Tamil Nadu began a 48-hour hunger strike protest in Chennai on Thursday. They want a pay rise and resolution of other long-pending service demands, such as timely promotions. They also want a 3,000-rupee (\$US32.74) allowance for doctors working in Public Health Centres.

## Gujarat: Police attack striking L&T steel plant workers

Police violently assaulted and tear-gassed about 3,000 striking contract workers from the L&T steel plant in Hazira on February 28. Over 40 workers were arrested.

The plant, which is owned by Acelor Mittal Steel, employs nearly 10,000 contract labourers, many of them migrants from states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Odisha. The workers were demanding higher wages, transparent overtime calculations, and improved working conditions.

## Bangladesh: Police assault protesting garment workers

Police attacked 200 demonstrating garment workers on February 28, injuring at least 15 people. The protest blocked the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway at Rupganj in Narayanganj, creating a 12-kilometre traffic jam.

Police used batons and fired tear gas at protesters from the export-oriented B-Brothers Limited factory, located in the Borpa industrial area of Narayanganj District. The plant employs more than 2,000 workers. They were demanding unpaid wages and allowances for December, January and February and called for an end to management's harassment and arbitrary layoffs.

Previous discussions involving police, factory authorities and worker representatives failed to resolve the dispute, provoking workers to take action. They suspended the protest after factory authorities promised to grant their demands.

and to keep pace with the increasing cost of living. The consumer price index rate for Queensland is 5.2 percent.

### **Pacific National rail workers in Queensland locked out**

About 320 rail workers from the bulk coal carrier Pacific National (Coal Queensland) (PNC) were locked out by management for 24 hours on Tuesday while taking protected industrial action against cuts to conditions and a low pay offer in PNC's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers, who are members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Employees (AFULE), were locked out without pay for refusing to work overtime. They began industrial action last November, after six months of failed negotiations.

The industrial action included bans on overtime and altered rosters. The unions claimed that PNC is trying to strip back conditions and has ignored key concerns of their members.

### **Northern Territory firefighters demand higher pay and safe staffing**

About 240 firefighters from the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Services commenced industrial action on Friday after eight months of failed negotiations with the territory's Country-Liberal Party government over its proposed enterprise agreement and critically low staffing levels. They are wearing campaign shirts, writing slogans on fire trucks and holding public rallies.

The United Workers Union (UWU) members want a "decent" pay increase, health and safety provisions for workplace cancer protections, workplace flexibility, fatigue controls and safe staffing levels to attract and retain firefighters.

Firefighters in December rejected the government's pay offer of annual 3 percent increases in a three-year agreement, which is in line with its public sector wages cap policy. The offer was well below the official national inflation rate of 3.8 percent and less than increases other public servants have received. NT police were granted pay increases of 5 percent, 4 percent and 3 percent in September.

### **Transport and Major Roads workers in Cairns strike for better pay and conditions**

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the Transport and Major Roads (TMR) depot in Cairns, northern Queensland, walked off the job on Monday and demonstrated outside the depot. Their action was part of a long-running campaign by hundreds of workers from the state government's Building Trades Group who are fighting for improved pay and conditions in the state Liberal-National government's proposed enterprise agreement.

Trades workers from TMR, QBuild and QHealth, represented by four unions—the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Construction Forestry Maritime Employees Union, ETU and the Plumbers Union—began industrial action in September with a 24-hour strike and rally in Brisbane, followed by rolling ad hoc stoppages.

Negotiations have been ongoing for nine months. Workers want a 36-hour work week to bring them in line with white-collar public servants, a wage rise that would compensate for 18 months without a pay increase

### **Tasmanian public sector health workers escalate industrial action**

Tasmanian public hospital health workers, including pathology, allied health professionals, cleaners, food services staff, administration staff and trades people, have escalated industrial action in their ongoing enterprise agreement dispute with the state Liberal government.

About 160 Health and Community Sector Union (HACSU) members at Launceston General Hospital walked out for one hour on Tuesday, followed by a one hour stoppage by 300 HACSU members at the Royal Hobart Hospital on Wednesday. The action followed one-hour stoppages by 150 union members at the North West Regional Hospital and Mersey Community Hospital on Monday.

Workers are maintaining over 120 workplace bans, including targeting government revenue by refusing to process Medicare and PBS paperwork. They have threatened to extend the stoppages to 8 hours next week and 24 hours the following week if the government fails to improve its pay and conditions offer.

The escalation of industrial action is in response to the government renegeing on previous commitments after a week of negotiations. The union claims the government wants significant cuts to long-held conditions, issues not mentioned in previous negotiations.

A government spokesperson said the latest proposal offered 3 percent increases in years one and two, plus structural reforms, and a 2.75 percent increase in year three. The government's original offer, rejected in November, was a 3 percent pay increase, with no improvement in conditions, to be followed by further negotiations. The December quarter annualised consumer price index rate for Hobart, the Tasmanian capital, is 3.8 percent, meaning the offer is a real pay cut.

### **Tasmanian public-school teachers impose bans on NAPLAN**

Tasmanian public-school teachers on Wednesday imposed bans on mandated student assessments using the governments National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) program as part of their fight for a better enterprise agreement from the state Liberal government. NAPLAN tests the literacy and numeracy for students of years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

The action by members of the Australian Education Union (AEU) is in parallel with a wider industrial campaign by public sector workers involving several other unions covering, 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 offering a below inflation pay increase of only 3 percent in a one-year agreement with no improvement in conditions.

AEU negotiations for the new agreement began prior to April 2025 and before the current agreement expired in September. The union wants a wage rise of 5.95 percent to bring them in line with public school teachers in other states and other measures to address worsening workloads and not addressed in the current agreement.

In a ballot responded to by 875 AEU members, 91.8 percent supported applying bans, 93.5 percent approved one-hour stoppages and 80 percent supported a 24-hour strike.

## **Workers at eight Melbourne metropolitan councils prepare for industrial action**

The Australian Services Union (ASU) this week applied to the Fair Work Commission for an official ballot of its 10,000 members at eight Melbourne metropolitan councils. They workers want pay increases in multi-employer work agreements. The ASU says over 90 percent of members have indicated that they would approve taking industrial action.

An ASU spokesperson said rate-capping policies were outdated and that state government funding was inadequate while demand for essential services has soared. “Real wages for council workers have been going backwards for almost a decade now,” she said. The union is calling for annual pay increases of 10, 4, 4 and 4 percent, which are well above the state Labor government’s wage increase cap of 3 percent.

## **New Zealand firefighters continue strikes**

About 2,000 New Zealand firefighters are continuing with a series of one-hour stoppages on Mondays and Fridays every week, after 97 percent of members of the NZ Professional Firefighters’ Union (NZPFU) voted last week to keep striking.

The NZPFU said it was “not backing down” and urged the state agency Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) to “come to the table with a better offer.” Seven months of industrial action has so far produced no resolution. FENZ accused firefighters of “gambling with the public’s safety,” after they escalated the strikes from one day per week to two.

Firefighters 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 3 percent inflation rate, 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.

FENZ is mainly funded by through levies on property insurance. In 2024, it proposed a 5.2 percent increase to the levy to bring in more revenue. But the right-wing National Party-led government revised it down to 2.2 percent from July 2026 and told FENZ to find \$60 million in savings.



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