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: Industrial Development Bank of India workers strike against privatisation

More than 10,000 workers and officers at the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI Bank) held a national two-day strike starting on November 2 against the Indian government's privatisation plans. The United Forum of IDBI Officers & Employees said the action affected about 2,000 branches across the country.

Strikers demanded that the privatisation sale be scrapped, arguing that the bank's return to profitability followed extensive public investment and the efforts of its workforce. The union has also questioned the proposed valuation and warned that transferring control to a private buyer would undermine public accountability.

Madhya Pradesh sanitation workers remain on strike to demand permanent jobs and higher wages

Over 200,000 sanitation workers in Madhya Pradesh remained on indefinite strike on November 5, according to union officials, after beginning a state-wide stoppage on November 4. Garbage collection and street cleaning were disrupted in Bhopal and other cities, with hundreds of collection vehicles remaining idle.

The sanitation workers want an end to outsourcing, regularisation of daily-wage and contract employees, government-employee status, a minimum monthly wage of 25,000 rupees ($US265) and compassionate employment for a family member when a worker dies in service. Many daily-wage workers have been on insecure 29-day employment arrangements for years and only paid 10,000 rupees a month.

Talks with the state Urban Administration Department failed to resolve the dispute on November 4. Union representatives said the walkout would continue until the government gave concrete commitments on regularisation and the other demands.

Tamil Nadu state liquor shop workers end two-day walkout over bottle-return scheme

Employees of the state-owned Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) closed liquor outlets and walked out on November 1 and 2 in protest against a revised empty-bottle return system. The new system adds a 10-rupee ($US0.11) environmental cost to the price of each bottle, refundable when the empty bottle is returned.

TASMAC workers said the system sharply increased their workloads by requiring staff to verify, scan, store and process returned bottles without adequate manpower, equipment or storage space. The unions demanded additional staff and equipment, withdrawal of disciplinary action and that bottle collection be handled by automated machines or separate personnel.

Strikers returned to work on November 3 following talks with management. TASMAC issued show-cause notices to 1,729 employees and suspended 245 shop supervisors over the closures. The state government subsequently approved a phased shift to reverse-vending machines operated by an outside system operator, which is intended to remove the handling, storage and refund burden from retail staff once implemented.

Trichy steel workers protest workplace death and safety conditions

More than 200 workers at a private steel plant in the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu industrial estate in Trichy district, protested on November 3 following the death of a worker in an industrial accident.

The workers blocked the Trichy-Dindigul national highway and demanded improved workplace safety and employment benefits. The protest ended after police and government officials held talks with the workers and gave assurances that their grievances would be addressed.

Himachal Pradesh midday meal workers demand year-round pay and improved conditions

Midday meal workers held demonstrations across Himachal Pradesh on October 30, demanding payment for all 12 months of the year instead of the current arrangement under which 10 months of wages are spread across 12 months. The Midday Meal Workers Union said around 21,000 workers prepare food for children in government schools across the state.

Protesting workers demanded a monthly honorarium of 7,000 rupees ($US74), timely payment of wages, 20 days of annual leave, removal of the rule tying employment to a minimum school enrolment of 25 students, and protection against job losses.

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The workers also want gratuity and pension benefits, reimbursement of medical expenses, additional payment for preparing meals for election personnel and a policy to regularise their employment. Union officials demanded the state government implement court decisions directing support payment of wages for the full 12 months.

Karnataka hostel workers protest unpaid wages

Hostel workers employed by Karnataka's Social Welfare and Scheduled Tribes Welfare departments protested at the Ballari Zilla Panchayat premises in early November, demanding immediate payment of wages outstanding for August and September and higher minimum wages.

The workers include head cooks, assistant cooks and watchmen employed in government hostels. They said repeated wage delays had forced many workers to borrow money to meet basic household expenses.

The protest was organised by the Karnataka State United Hostel Workers Union and Karnataka State United Akshara Dasoha Workers Union, both affiliated with the All-India United Trade Union Centre. Workers demanded implementation of the revised minimum wages notified on May 22 and payment of salaries by the fifth of every month. Department officials said the two months of arrears would be released and that the revised wage demand would be taken up with senior authorities.

Bangladesh: Tea plantation workers continue strike over unpaid wages

Around 15,000 tea plantation workers in Habiganj and Moulvibazar districts walked out in early November to demand payment of outstanding wages. Workers at Lalchand, Deundi, Gilani and Noyapara estates in Habiganj and Mirtinga Tea Estate in Moulvibazar stopped work after wages and food rations went unpaid.

Striking plantation workers said they were each owed about 4,000 taka ($US32) in wage arrears and that provident-fund contributions had not been deposited for 47 months. They also demanded restoration of food rations, medical facilities, and other employment benefits. The workers daily wage is only 196 taka, supplemented by limited food rations.

Emergency assistance of 17 tonnes of rice was distributed to about 3,400 workers from several affected estates on November 3, with each family receiving five kilograms.

The Bangladesh Tea Workers' Union called for intervention by district authorities and negotiations with estate management, while workers continued to demand payment of all outstanding wages and benefits.

Private hospital nurses strike against Healthe Care

Nurses and midwives at Maitland Private Hospital and Lingard Private Hospital in Newcastle walked off the job on Wednesday, November 4, and rallied at Rowlands Park in The Junction. Maitland members stopped work for four hours and Lingard members for three.

It was the first time nurses at the two Hunter hospitals had struck. The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) said hundreds of nurses took part.

The two hospitals are run by Healthe Care, the country's second-largest private hospital operator, which is owned by private equity firm Pacific Equity Partners. The company has raised its pay "rise" offer for 2026 from 2.4 percent to 3.5 percent—still a real wage cut compared to current inflation of 4.3 percent—and refuses to commit to enforceable nurse-to-patient ratios.

It was the third major stoppage across Healthe Care's 13 NSW hospitals and day surgeries, after two-hour stoppages in the Illawarra on October 22. The union has announced overtime bans at Healthe Care hospitals across the state from November 10 to 12, and bans on non-essential paperwork, including charge sheets and forms, on November 11 and 12.

Sydney bus drivers impose indefinite work bans

About 2,000 bus drivers across Sydney's eastern suburbs, northern beaches, lower north shore and inner north-west began indefinite work bans on Wednesday, November 4. The drivers, members of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), are employed by Keolis Downer Northern Beaches, Transdev John Holland Buses and Busways North West in bus contract Regions 7, 8 and 9, and are bargaining for a single multi-enterprise agreement.

From 12:01 a.m. on November 4, drivers refused to operate buses showing warning lights on their dashboards. From 12:01 a.m. on November 5, they extended the bans to refuse to take any bus out of the depot unless it had a full fuel tank or a fully charged battery. Transport for New South Wales warned that some services would be delayed or cancelled.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, drivers are seeking a pay rise of about 22 percent over three years with no reduction in conditions. The base wage for a Sydney driver is about $67,000 a year.

Virgin Australia airport workers escalate industrial action

Australian Services Union (ASU) members in airport guest services at Virgin Australia escalated their industrial action throughout this week. On Thursday, November 5, they withdrew priority boarding and other premium services at departure gates, refused to accept baggage at the gate and waived fees on eligible sales transactions. On Friday, November 6, they imposed a ban on processing sales-related transactions, including excess baggage charges, seat changes and late fees.

The ASU said the escalation came after negotiations before the Fair Work Commission the previous week failed to resolve the dispute. The workers began action on October 28 to defend their rostering and leave conditions and oppose nine-hour shifts and cuts to days in lieu.

A Transport Workers' Union protected action ballot of Virgin cabin crew closes on November 11.

South Australian Catholic school teachers hold stop-work rally

Teachers and support staff in South Australian Catholic schools stopped work and rallied in Victoria Square in central Adelaide from 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 5.

Catholic Education South Australia is offering sub-inflationary pay rises

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of 3 percent for 2025 and 3 percent for 2026, with later increases linked to public school teachers' pay. The IEU has put forward a wage rise claim of 6 percent a year from 2025 to 2027. Educators are also seeking smaller classes and lower workloads, which the employer has largely rejected.

Tasmanian mental health nurses walk off the job

Nurses at the Tolosa Street Adult Mental Health Service in Glenorchy, Hobart, walked off the job for 30 minutes on Monday, November 2. The nurses, members of the Health and Community Services Union, are demanding an occupational violence allowance and the Sunday double-time rates that other public sector workers already receive. The union did not say how many took part.

The Tasmanian Liberal government made a wage offer to public sector nurses and midwives on October 30. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation has not published the offer and says it is seeking clarification. The union has called a community rally at Parliament Lawns in Hobart for 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, November 7.

Victorian public hospital allied health workers reject government offer again

Allied health workers in Victoria's public hospitals have rejected a revised offer from the state Labor government of Premier Ben Carroll. The Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA) said 85.33 percent of members voted no in a ballot that closed at 10 a.m. on Monday, November 2, with more than half of eligible members voting, despite the public holiday long weekend.

The government put two options to the workers, both worse than the previous rejected offer, according to the union. Accepting either offer would have would have barred industrial action for five months.

VAHPA said some industrial actions would be paused later in the week while it plans the "next escalation."

Palm Beach ferry crew workers begin action

Maritime Union of Australia crew at Palm Beach Ferries, which runs services across Pittwater between Sydney's Northern Beaches and the Central Coast, began industrial action on Thursday, November 5. They are flying union flags, wearing union clothing and making announcements to passengers.

The union says the crew are paid 30 percent less than ferry workers on Sydney Harbour. It is demanding that the services be brought onto the Opal ticketing system, and says crew will escalate to full strike action if necessary.

IKEA workers escalate strike action

Around 300 Workers First Union members at IKEA's Auckland store held a 24-hour strike on November 1 and picketed outside the facility, escalating a dispute over pay and conditions. Workers want weekend penalty rates comparable with those paid at IKEA stores in Australia, a higher general wage increase and improvements to benefits. The union said 95 percent of members who voted for industrial action did so rejecting the multi-national company's below-inflation pay offer.

The November 1 stoppage was the workers' second strike in just over a week. On October 24, about 300 IKEA workers held a four-hour stoppage and picket during the Labour Day long weekend. The union has been bargaining with the company for about eight months. On the same day as the first IKEA stoppage, Workers First members at Farmers department stores across New Zealand held a two-hour strike over a 2.5 percent pay offer, the company's performance-pay system and other working conditions.



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