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: Karnataka community health workers continue indefinite Bengaluru sit-in

About 15,000 Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers from across Karnataka continued an indefinite day-and-night sit-in at Bengaluru's Freedom Park on November 26, the tenth day of the action. Organised by the Karnataka State Joint ASHA Workers' Union, the workers are demanding a fixed monthly honorarium of 15,000 rupees ($US159), payment of outstanding incentives, six months' paid maternity leave, financial assistance during serious illness or accidents, a retirement benefit of 500,000 rupees and reinstatement of dismissed facilitators. They also want government-supplied smartphones, training and recharge allowances for compulsory app-based reporting, or an end to the requirement.

The workers say the state government has not implemented a January 2025 promise to raise their monthly honorarium to 10,000 rupees. They rejected verbal promises from Chief Minister D. K. Shivakumar and insisted on a written order. On November 26, Shivakumar ruled out an immediate written commitment and said the demands would be considered by the cabinet and legislature. The union reported that around 3,500 protesters had received medical attention and about 35 had required hospitalisation after workers spent days exposed to cold and rain.

Karnataka midday-meal workers demand four months' unpaid honoraria

The Karnataka State United Akshara Dasoha Workers' Union submitted a memorandum to the School Education Department on November 21 demanding the immediate payment of four months' outstanding honoraria to midday-meal cooks and helpers across the state. The union said the prolonged delay had forced the low-paid workers to borrow money to cover basic household expenses.

Workers demanded that payments be deposited directly into their bank accounts by the fifth of each month and accompanied by monthly payslips. They also sought a retirement benefit of 500,000 rupees ($US5,300), life-insurance coverage paid for by the department, extension of retirement benefits to workers who have already retired, regular grievance meetings with union representatives and protective clothing and safety equipment for staff preparing school meals.

Jharkhand ambulance workers end five-day strike after wage assurances

Drivers and emergency medical technicians on Jharkhand's 108 ambulance service ended a five-day strike on November 22 after the state government directed operator Samman Foundation to clear wage arrears within 48 hours and said a new operating agency would be appointed within two months. The Jharkhand Pradesh Ambulance Karmachari Sangh said around 1,500 employees were owed salaries for August, September and October, while 150 to 170 ambulances were out of service, leaving between 600 and 680 workers without duties.

The workers also demanded job security, minimum wages, insurance and an annual bonus, as well as investigations into alleged arbitrary deductions from Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' State Insurance contributions and irregularities in ambulance maintenance and salary records. Authorities filed 75 police cases against drivers and technicians during the stoppage for allegedly failing to hand over vehicle keys. On November 25, the union told the governor that the arrears remained unpaid, while Samman Foundation later claimed that all pending payments had been cleared.

Jharkhand school cooks hold four-day state-wide strike

Midday-meal cooks and helpers began a four-day state-wide strike on November 24, with hundreds of workers from several districts gathering at Kutey ground near the Jharkhand Assembly on November 25 and 26. More than 300 cooks from Godda district travelled to Ranchi to join the action. The Jharkhand State School Cooks' Association, supported by the All India Central Council of Trade Unions, is demanding government-employee status and a monthly minimum wage of 42,000 rupees ($US445) until workers are regularised.

Other demands include formal appointment and service rules, payment of honoraria by the fifth of each month, pension and insurance coverage, maternity and special leave, two sets of cotton uniforms or an annual clothing allowance of 2,000 rupees, and protection against compulsory removal at age 60. Workers also opposed proposals to involve non-government organisations in the school-meal scheme, warning that outsourcing would threaten their jobs.

Odisha Anganwadi workers continue indefinite state-wide action

Anganwadi workers and helpers across Odisha began an indefinite work

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stoppage and sit-in on November 23 over a seven-point charter of demands. By November 26, nearly 74,000 Anganwadi centres had remained closed for four consecutive days. In Gudari block in Rayagada district, all 133 centres were shut, affecting services for an estimated 5,000 children.

The workers are demanding recognition as government employees, monthly remuneration of 30,000 rupees ($US318) for Anganwadi workers and 15,000 rupees for helpers, and gratuity, pension and other post-retirement benefits. Hundreds continued to demonstrate on Mahatma Gandhi Marg in Bhubaneswar, saying the action would continue until the state government issued a written assurance addressing their demands.

Kerala electricity workers strike over sub-engineer's suspension

Kerala State Electricity Board employees in Kannur district held a one-day strike, demonstrations and a sit-in on November 23 demanding the immediate withdrawal of the suspension of sub-engineer Satheesh Babu. He was suspended after a power interruption occurred during an event attended by Electricity Minister Sunny Joseph.

Left-affiliated unions said a fault on a feeder required urgent maintenance and accused management of making the sub-engineer a scapegoat before completing an inquiry. The board said employees belonging to other unions remained at work and that arrangements were made to maintain essential electricity services during the action.

Himachal Pradesh sewage-treatment workers shut Mandi plant over unpaid wages

Workers at the Raghunath Padhar Sewage Treatment Plant in Mandi district shut down operations on November 17 over two months of unpaid wages and the non-payment of their Diwali bonus. The Sewage Treatment Plant Workers' Union, affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, said repeated representations to the contractor and the Jal Shakti Department had failed to secure payment.

Workers also demanded regular salary slips and wage records, correction of alleged irregularities in provident-fund contributions, proper toilet facilities for women and repairs to broken streetlights around the workplace. A company representative acknowledged that salaries had been delayed and said payment would be made after the company received funds, while workers said the stoppage would continue until their wages and other demands were addressed.

Pakistan: Quetta journalists protest bureau closures and job cuts

Journalists and media workers in Balochistan held a two-day sit-in outside the Quetta Press Club on November 23 and 24 against the closure of 11 media bureaus and the dismissal of large numbers of employees. The protest was called by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists and supported by the Balochistan Union of Journalists, political organisations, trade unions, lawyers and civil-society groups.

The unions demanded the reopening of the bureaus, reinstatement of dismissed workers, payment of outstanding salaries and withdrawal of legal action against media employees. Speakers said the closures had deprived 122 families of their livelihoods. They also drew attention to the dangerous conditions facing journalists in Balochistan, where the killers of 40 journalists have reportedly not been brought to justice.

Sri Lanka: University non-academic workers stage second one-day strike

Thousands of non-academic workers across Sri Lanka's state universities and affiliated institutions held an island-wide one-day token strike on November 25, their second stoppage within a week. University examinations were postponed, lectures were cancelled and workers demonstrated outside campuses. The action was organised by the University Trade Union Joint Committee following an earlier strike on November 18.

The workers are demanding restoration of salaries, overtime payments and allowances that were reduced under the 2025 Budget, as well as action on the distress-loan scheme and other unresolved service conditions. Union representatives stressed that they were seeking the restoration of previous entitlements rather than a new wage increase and said the government had failed to grant them meaningful negotiations. The unions announced a further two-day strike for December 1 and 2 if their demands remained unresolved.

Virgin Australia airport workers escalate stoppages

Check-in, boarding and gate staff employed by Virgin Australia walked off the job at Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide airports on Thursday, November 26. The workers, covered by the Australian Services Union (ASU), stopped work from 7 to 9 a.m. and 5 to 7 p.m. in Sydney and Brisbane, from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. and 4 to 6 p.m. in Melbourne, and from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. in Adelaide.

ASU official Scott Cowen said about 50 workers walked off in the morning and that Virgin was using managers to cover their work. The stoppages followed one-hour walkouts held on November 16.

The workers are opposing nine-hour shifts, cuts to days in lieu and Virgin's pay rise offer of 5 percent in the first and second years of a three-year agreement and 4 percent in the third. Virgin recorded an underlying net profit after tax of $404 million in the 2026 financial year.

Virgin cabin crew have also recently voted overwhelmingly for protected industrial action.

Fair Work Commission bans week of rail freight action

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) on November 26 suspended a week of industrial action by Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) workers on the New South Wales rail network that was due to start the following day. Members of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) and the ASU had planned to stop issuing work-on-track authorities from November 27 to December 3 and to impose alternating 24-hour bans on coal and other freight trains.

Acting on an application by the government-owned ARTC, the pro-business industrial tribunal suspended the action until February 26, 2027.

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Book Grocer locks out Melbourne retail workers

Book Grocer, a Melbourne discount bookseller, locked out workers without pay from 8 p.m. on Friday, November 20, at its Bourke Street, Spencer Street and Northcote stores and its Tullamarine warehouse. The lockout followed notice by the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU) on November 16 that its members would take protected action as limited as wearing union stickers and handing out leaflets.

The workers have been bargaining since May for their first enterprise agreement and are demanding permanent jobs, a safe workplace and protection from unfair treatment. Locked-out workers and supporters rallied at the Northcote store on November 21 and the Tullamarine warehouse on November 24.

Tasmanian nurses stop work at Mersey hospital

Nurses and midwives at the Mersey Community Hospital in Latrobe, in northwest Tasmania, stopped work at 12:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 25. The workers are members of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF).

On November 27, the state government tabled a revised offer that adds three personal impact days, extra structural adjustments in the second year and a professional development allowance of up to $500. The headline pay “rise” of 8.25 percent over three years, or less than 3 percent a year, compared with official inflation of 4.9 percent, is unchanged.

Tasmanian hospital theatre cleaners stop work

Operating theatre cleaners at Launceston General Hospital and Royal Hobart Hospital held a one-hour stop-work meeting on Friday, November 20. The workers, members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), are classified at the same level as general ward cleaners, despite the specialised work required to clean operating theatres. They are demanding to be reclassified and paid at a higher grade.

Tasmanian prison officers walk off over safety at new maximum-security unit

Correctional officers at Hobart’s Risdon Prison walked off the job on Thursday, November 26, and attended question time at the Tasmanian Parliament in uniform. The prison was locked down during the action. The officers are covered by the United Workers Union and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).

The officers say the design of the new Correa maximum-security unit, which is to hold 48 high-risk prisoners, puts their safety at risk. The CPSU also pointed to the Liberal government’s pay offer, chronic understaffing and a rising prisoner population.

National Pharmacies pharmacists reject offer and resume stoppages

Pharmacists employed by National Pharmacies in South Australia and Victoria held a two-hour stoppage on Thursday, November 26, and further stoppages on the morning and evening of November 27. The workers are members of Professionals Australia, which reported on November 24 that 85 percent of employees had voted against the company’s proposed agreement.

The pharmacists say the offer contains no backpay and a pay increase below the cost of living and does nothing about chronic understaffing. They are seeking 18 percent over three years.

Melbourne youth mental health workers hold stop-work rally

Workers at Orygen’s headspace youth mental health centres in Melbourne held a stop-work rally from 11 a.m. to midday on Thursday, November 26, outside Orygen’s Parkville headquarters. The workers, members of HACSU, had voted 97 percent against Orygen’s latest offer. They are demanding parity in pay, safety and conditions with workers covered by the public mental health agreement.

Cleanaway municipal waste drivers walk out in Melbourne

Cleanaway drivers who collect municipal waste for Melbourne councils walked off the job from 5 to 8 a.m. on Friday, November 20, delaying kerbside bin collections. The workers are members of the Transport Workers Union, which said they were fighting attacks on their wages and conditions.



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