

# 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.*

## Renault Korea workers maintain strike for wage increase

Renault Korea union members at the company's Busan auto manufacturing plant have been on strike since September 13 over stalled wage negotiations. The company is maintaining some production lines using other company workers.

A union spokesperson said wages have been frozen on four occasions since 2015, causing considerable hardship for workers. A tentative agreement between the union and management was rejected by 64.8 percent of workers on September 6. It included a basic salary increase of 73,000 won (US\$54.70) and a performance bonus of 3 million won.

## India: Sacked Maruti Suzuki workers renew their fight for reinstatement

On September 19, 117 sacked workers from the Maruti Suzuki assembly plant in Manesar, Haryana, renewed their struggle to get their jobs back. About 545 permanent workers and 1,800 contract workers were sacked during a wage dispute in 2012.

The 117 sacked workers were framed for the murder of Awanish Dev, a senior HR manager, who was in fact sympathetic towards workers. Part of the factory was damaged by fire and the protesting workers were attacked by company-sponsored thugs.

Thirteen workers were sentenced to life imprisonment following frameup charges orchestrated by Suzuki Corporation management, the police and judicial authorities, with the support of the Congress Party and the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Police blocked protesting workers from moving their picket closer than 500 metres from the Manesar plant. The Maruti Suzuki Struggle Committee is maintaining a protest picket near the factory.

## Samsung electronics workers in Tamil Nadu maintain strike

More than 1,500 workers from South Korea's Samsung electronics factory at Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, are maintaining an indefinite strike they began on September 9 for higher pay and union recognition. There have been three failed negotiations since the strike began.

Workers began the indefinite walkout with a charter of 33 demands. The strike is the first in 16 years at the factory, which produces air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines and other consumer goods. The Sriperumbudur factory contributes between 20 and 30 percent of Samsung's annual \$12 billion revenue in India.

## Bangladeshi garment workers and others protest for pay rise and entitlements

Thousands of garment workers, along with other workers, demonstrated on Sunday and Monday in Gazipur, 24 km north of Dhaka, over various demands including a wage rise, attendance bonuses and annual leave.

On Sunday, workers from several garment factories, including Net Asia, Dekko, Envoy and Vintage in the Ashulia industrial belt walked out to demand payment of the 25,000-taka minimum wage.

On Monday, 1,500 workers from the Seasons Dresses factory in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for around seven hours demanding full payment of their July salaries. Golden Refit Garment factory workers in the Sadar subdistrict also blocked the highway for payment of their 1,000-taka (\$US8.4) monthly attendance bonuses. Police and army were deployed to disperse the workers.

Cocola Food Products workers in Gazipur protested outside their factory following management's decision to shut down operations indefinitely. Workers presented 12 demands, including payment attendance bonuses and annual leave.

Factory authorities responded to the protests by suspending the operations of at least 70 industrial units, including 59 garment factories in Savar, Ashulia, and Gazipur, on Monday. At least 21 protesters were arrested on allegations of instigating labour unrest.

Qantas maintenance engineers kicked off two weeks of industrial action on Thursday with a walkout at Melbourne Airport. Further strike action is planned nationwide at all major airports in the workers' fight for higher pay in a new enterprise agreement.

The Qantas Engineers Alliance, comprised of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union, said the workers' skills have been devalued by the airline and wages gone back significantly. The alliance is calling for a 15 percent pay rise in 2024, and 5 percent a year after that, which they say would make up for 3.5 years of wage freezes.

About 1,100 aircraft maintenance workers are covered by the agreement under negotiation, which is about 45 percent of the airline's engineers. Action is planned for next Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

## Auriga Aviation maintenance engineers in Western Australia strike

**again**

Helicopter maintenance engineers from Auriga Aviation in Western Australia began three days of 22-hour stoppages on Thursday in opposition to the company's low pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. The action follows a 22-hour strike on September 12 by the 12 members of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers' Association (ALAEA).

Workers want industry standard pay rates and conditions. ALAEA claimed Auriga Aviation is the lowest paying helicopter company in the industry.

Auriga Aviation plays a critical role in transporting workers and goods to oil and gas offshore and onshore production plants on Western Australia's northwest coast.

### **CSR fibre cement factory workers in New South Wales strike**

Following a 24-hour strike on September 6 and the imposition of an overtime ban, fifty United Workers Union members at the CSR fibre cement cladding factory in Sydney struck for 48 hours on September 20 to demand higher pay. Negotiations for a new enterprise agreement began in April. In July workers voted unanimously for industrial action after rejecting CSR management's below-inflation pay offer.

Workers want a pay rise that keeps up with the cost of living, having received union-negotiated increases of only 2.5 percent in 2022 and 2023, well below the official inflation rates at the time of 7.2 and 4.5 percent respectively. They also want job security.

### **Etex plasterboard factory workers still on strike in New South Wales**

Thirty-eight Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at the Etex plasterboard factory in Matraville, Sydney, have been on strike since August 12 for a better pay offer from the company. They are maintaining a daily picket outside the factory. Etex has refused to negotiate and threatened to withdraw all previous offers.

In August, Etex offered a \$2,500 one-off bonus and pay increases of 4.5 percent in the first year, 4 percent in the second year with no third-year guaranteed rise. Workers rejected the offer and are calling for 6 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement and an increase to the minimum 11.5 percent superannuation employer's contribution.

Etex is a Belgian-owned multi-national company with factories in Sydney, Bundaberg (Queensland), Altona (Victoria) and Hazelmere (Western Australia).

### **G James building products factory workers in Queensland demand wage increase**

About 110 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members at the production plant of G James Extrusions (aluminium building products) in Eagle Farm, Brisbane, began industrial action on September 19 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. A revised

management offer made eight hours after industrial action was rejected by workers. They said protected action will continue until an acceptable offer is presented.

AWU members voted on September 9 to approve industrial action which could include strikes from between one and 24 hours and bans on overtime and working additional shifts.

### **Mt Isa City Council workers strike again over pay**

Administration workers from the Mount Isa City Council, northwest Queensland, walked out on Wednesday to demand a higher pay offer in the council's proposed work agreement. The action by members of The Services Union (TSU) followed a similar walkout on September 10.

Following the first strike, council made a slight improved pay offer of annual increases of 4 percent in a three-year agreement, which was rejected. Workers want annual increases of 6 percent from July 1, 2024, followed by 5 percent in 2025 (or CPI if higher) and 4 percent in 2026 (or CPI if higher).

### **TasNetworks admin workers strike for higher pay**

About 10 Australian Services Union members at Tasmania's government-owned power utility TasNetworks stopped work on Monday and protested outside state parliament in Hobart calling for an improved pay offer from the state Liberal government. Workers began industrial action on September 4 with low-level bans. In the latest action ASU members began a series of 15-minute stoppage.

Meanwhile, TasNetworks put its latest pay offer out to vote. ASU has directed members to reject it. Workers want pay parity with public sector workers in Australia's mainland states doing the same job.

### **Tasmanian WorkSafe inspectors protest low pay and staffing shortages**

Tasmanian WorkSafe inspectors walked off the job in Hobart and Launceston on Tuesday to demand higher pay and retention of staff. They rallied outside their respective workplaces holding placards stating, "Same work = same pay as the mainland" and "Unreasonable workloads put workers at risk." In 2023, more than 15 percent of workers left WorkSafe with the average stay just 71 months.

A Community and Public Sector Union spokesperson said that the inspectors are paid \$18,000 a year less than workers with the same level of experience in other Tasmanian public sector agencies and \$28,000 worse off than their counterparts in Victoria.

### **Hobart City Council workers reject council pay offer**

Australian Services Union (ASU) members at the Hobart City Council (HCC) approved taking industrial action on September 16 in opposition to the council's proposed "substandard" enterprise agreement, which they

say will leave them worse off. Council threatened to lock out workers after they gave notice of putting in place about 60 bans.

HCC offered a sub-inflation pay increase of 3 percent for the first two years in a four-year agreement. The Australian Bureau of Statistics in its June Employee Living Cost Index reports that employees' annual living costs have increased by 6.2 percent, double the council's paltry offer.

ASU says council management has rejected workers' claims and attempted to remove the CPI (consumer price index) uncapped wage protections and make changes to redundancy entitlements. Council put its proposed agreement out to vote on Monday.

### **More strikes at Essential Energy in New South Wales**

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members at 14 Essential Energy depots held a one-hour stoppage on Tuesday morning as part of industrial action that began on August 8, after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Over 1,800 ETU members from 92 regional depots in New South Wales are holding rolling one-hour stoppages on top of bans on switching for maintenance work, unlocking switch stations and electrical cabinets and several other bans.

Workers want 8 percent annual pay rises over three years to compensate for previous sub-inflation pay increases. The union claimed that wages have gone backwards by 8 percent since 2016. Their last union negotiated pay rise was only 2.5 percent in July 2023, when the consumer price index was 6.6 percent.

Essential Energy is a state-owned power utility that builds and operates electricity services to over 1,500 regional, rural and remote communities.

### **Ausgrid power distribution workers in New South Wales strike for pay rise**

ETU members from four Newcastle depots of the power distributor Ausgrid stopped work and rallied outside their depots on Tuesday to demand an improved pay offer in the company's enterprise agreement. Bargaining for a new agreement covering 1,500 workers started in May. Workers approved taking industrial action in July, including work stoppages as well as bans on overtime, switching and locking.

Workers want annual 8 percent pay increases in a three-year agreement. The union claimed their real wages had declined by 10 percent since 2016. Workers rejected Ausgrid's pay offer of 7 percent for the first year followed by 2.7 percent for the second and third years, or the consumer price index rate if it is higher.

Ausgrid serves around two million customers across most of Sydney's east, north and inner city as well as the Central Coast and Hunter Valley, north of Sydney.

### **Western Australia's public hospital pharmacists maintain industrial action**

Western Australia's public hospital pharmacists are maintaining rolling one-hour stoppages begun on September 13 in their campaign for an improved work agreement, which includes career pathway reform and higher wages. The 750 workers, which include pharmacy technicians and

assistants, are members of the Health Services Union WA branch. They have twice rejected new work agreement offers from the state Labor government.

The union said pharmacists have for over two decades been required to upgrade skills and clinical expertise and broaden their roles without having been commensurately compensated. They want the current pay scales reformed in line with their expanded roles and to reverse falling workforce retention rates. Pharmacist managers say they are losing 10 percent of their staff a year as cost-of-living pressures, professional insurance and ongoing training costs rise.

### **Western Australian hospital anaesthetic technicians and imaging workers strike**

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members from Asahi Beverages in Victoria imposed work bans on Friday in their enterprise agreement dispute with Asahi. The bans will mean beverage machines at KFC, HOYTS and Costco Wholesale will not be serviced during Victoria's AFL Grand Final long weekend.

The Selling Equipment Technical Team workers began industrial action in May and were continuing low-level bans. Asahi has retaliated by docking their pay by 29 percent and hiring scab contractors to maintain operations. Workers want Asahi to negotiate a "fair" pay rise with no trade-offs.

### **Canberra's public hospital doctors impose work bans**

About 300 Australian Capital Territory (ACT) hospital doctors imposed low-level admin bans on Monday in their pay dispute with the territory's Labor government over low pay and workload. Doctors said the government's 2 percent annual wage increase offer did not match the rising cost of living.

The Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF) said ACT doctors' pay has dropped from being amongst the highest 25 percent in Australia to the second lowest during three years of negotiations with the government. The union says uncompetitive working conditions and pay had contributed to staff shortages and excessive workloads.

### **Qube sues Port of Melbourne workers over work bans**

Logistics giant Qube is suing 20 of its workers taking industrial action in a dispute for a pay rise. Qube claims work bans imposed by the Australian Maritime Union and its members at the Port of Melbourne are illegal. Qube has been trying to renegotiate 19 enterprise agreements around Australia with its stevedoring workers.

On September 13, over 380 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) at Qube's bulk-handling facilities in Melbourne, Port Kembla and Brisbane banned overtime, work reassignments and other management demands.

Enterprise agreement negotiations started last October. Workers voted unanimously in August to approve taking industrial action, which would include strikes lasting from 1 to 24 hours, bans on overtime and pre shift starts, call-ins and on nominated shipping lines. Qube is contesting the

legality of the seven-day ban on handling cargo for certain shipping lines.

MUA members have rejected Qube's pay rises offer of 5 percent over each of the first two years of a new agreement, and 4 percent in each of the two subsequent years, as well as back pay for agreements concluded by September 30.

The MUA says its members' wages have declined by 14 percent in real terms while Qube profits have risen by 148 percent over the same period of the previous enterprise agreement.

### **Red Cross Lifeblood workers strike in three Australian states**

Over 100 Red Cross Lifeblood workers from four unions in Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia took combined industrial action on September 19 with a second walkout after enterprise agreement negotiations were paused in November 2022.

Members of the Community and Public Sector union, Health Services Union, Association of Professional Engineers and Medical Scientists of Victoria voted by large majorities to pursue industrial action and to oppose Red Cross Lifeblood's consolidation of five current enterprise agreements into one so-called Southwest Australia Agreement.

Workers claim that Life Blood is seeking to reduce previously hard-won benefits to the lowest common level, with cuts to entitlements for some workers costing thousands of dollars per year. Lifeblood is also proposing a change to current career progression based solely on decisions made by Lifeblood.

According to the Medical Scientists Association of Victoria, Red Cross Lifeblood have made surpluses of about \$110 million over the last three years but insist that it has no money to offer scientists a fair deal.

### **DHL warehouse workers in New South Wales and Victoria strike**

About 1,200 United Workers Union members at 23 DHL warehouses in New South Wales and Victoria stopped work for four hours on Monday demanding improved wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. Negotiations which began in March failed, after workers rejected DHL's attempt to bribe them with a one-off sign on bonus in return for establishing a two-tier wage system that put new recruits on a lower wage.

UWU wants to reach a deal with annual wage increases of 7 percent each year in New South Wales and 10 percent in Victoria in three-year agreements. UWU claimed that DHL wages are currently below industry standard.

DHL management told the media it would manage the effects of the industrial action using its 3,000 other workers who have already accepted the proposed agreement. Further industrial action is expected following a near unanimous vote by UWU members for 24-hour strike action for up to four consecutive days.

### **New Zealand doctors and nurses protest hospital cuts**

Nurses and doctors are marching on September 28 in Dunedin, on New Zealand's South Island, to protest projected cuts to the city's new hospital. A protest march, including the mayor and local councillors, will head from the university's dentistry school to the Octagon in the CBD.

With construction yet to begin, Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora (HNZ) is considering multiple cuts and changes to plans for the inpatient building of the hospital.

The cuts include moving emergency department (ED) short-stay bed numbers to acute wards, having only one operating theatre with specialist-grade ventilation, removing wall-mounted medical gas in some theatres and having only one high-spec "hybrid theatre." Nurse Linda Smillie said the cuts will result in substandard care, longer waiting times in ED and surgery delays.

The cuts are part of a sweeping assault on the health system by the right-wing National Party-led government. In July, the HNZ board was replaced with a commissioner, former private hospital chief executive Lester Levy, tasked with making \$1.4 billion in "savings." This includes mass staff sackings and a hiring freeze in many hospitals, despite a desperate shortage of thousands of nurses and doctors.

A fightback by health workers is under way. The protest coincides with nationwide strikes by ambulance staff, their second, after rejecting a pay offer from employer St John.



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