

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.

Bangladesh security forces shoot demonstrating garment worker; India

Law enforcers attacked protesting garment workers on Monday in Ashulia, on the outskirts of Dhaka, shooting to death one worker and injuring 30 others. The deceased man, Kawsar Hossain Khan, was a 27-year-old factory worker from Mango Tex Limited. Five workers were hospitalised with bullet wounds.

The Mango Tex plant is opposite the Mondol Group factory where workers had been protesting over wages. According to a Mango Tex worker, a large contingent of law enforcers, including police, industrial police, Rapid Action Battalion officers and army personnel used tear gas and live ammunition against the Mongol Group workers. They then open fired on the Mango Tex employees as they were leaving their factory.

Nationwide protests demand repeal of Indian government's anti-labour laws

Thousands of Indian workers protested on September 23, demanding the repeal of anti-labour laws introduced by the Modi government in 2019. Modi replaced 44 existing laws with four labour codes related to minimum wages, working conditions and factory safety standards. The laws constitute a major attack on the Indian working class.

The mass protests were held across India. Workers marched through major industrial cities, chanting slogans and carrying banners and placards denouncing the government. Farmers' unions expressed support for the demonstrating workers who have threatened to strike in November if the government attempts to implement the new laws.

On Tuesday, contract and outsourced workers at the Chamba Hydro Project in Himachal Pradesh held a sit-down protest against Modi's anti-labour laws. Workers demanded a minimum monthly wage of 26,000 rupees (\$US310), permanent jobs, along with access to Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance Scheme. The protest was organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Zilla Panchayat workers in Maharashtra demand minimum wage and entitlements

Thousands of workers employed in the state government's Zilla Panchayat scheme in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, marched and protested outside the scheme's office over the Maharashtra government's refusal to grant workers' long outstanding demands.

The protesters demanded recognition of gram panchayat (village council) workers as municipal employees, payment of minimum wages previously agreed in August 2020, and 57 months of arrears outstanding since March 2018.

They also called for monthly wages to be paid by the tenth of every month, the provision of provident fund and insurance to be provided to all gram panchayat employees and pensions for retired workers.

Punjab childcare workers from rural areas demand equal entitlements

Anganwadi (childcare) workers from rural areas in Punjab protested outside of the District Administrative Complex in Tarn Taran on September 30 over several demands. These included jobs protection and the provision of nutritious food for children under their care, as per established standards in Anganwadi centres. The Anganwadi Mulazim Union, which is affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, organised the protest.

PICT port terminal workers in Odisha strike for higher pay

About 250 dock workers at the Paradip International Cargo Terminal (PICT) in Paradeep, Odisha are on strike for increased pay and benefits. The workers, who have been employed for over six years as riggers, signal men and gear boys, are only given 10 to 15 days' work per month. The Paradip Port Mazdoor Sangh is demanding a minimum of 26 days' work each month.

The workers decided to strike after several fruitless discussions between the union and PICT management at the labour commissioner's office. The PICT workers said they are determined to stay on strike until their demands are met.

Tamil Nadu fishermen demand Sri Lankan navy release of 17 fishermen

Fishermen and their families in Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu held a sit-

down street demonstration in their village on Sunday over the detention of 17 fishermen and the seizure of two boats by the Sri Lankan Navy on September 28.

The fishermen were part of a flotilla of 309 fishing boats that put to sea from the Rameswaram coast. They were accused of crossing into Sri Lankan waters. The confiscation of boats and detention of Tamil fishermen is part of ongoing territorial disputes with Sri Lanka.

On September 21, 37 Tamil fishermen were detained by Sri Lankan authorities. The fishermen said they were attempting to rescue a Sri Lankan boat in distress but when they contacted Sri Lankan authorities for assistance with the rescue, they were arrested on the ground of crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line.

Pakistan: Sholam Hospital workers strike in Wana over unpaid salaries

Sholam Hospital workers, including those in emergency services, in Wana, South Waziristan remain on strike over the non-payment of salaries for the past three weeks. Workers marched on the Sholam-Angoor Adda Road, chanting slogans against the provincial government and the health department and demanding the immediate payment of their wages.

A protest leader said that the hospital, which was run as a public-private partnership with around 60 employees, was facing funding issues. The hospital employees' action committee has threatened to widen their action if their demands are not granted.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab school teachers protest privatisation

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province public school teachers demonstrated in Bajaur on September 27 against the provincial and national government's plans to privatise public schools and cut the teachers' pension scheme. The teachers said that as most students in the province were from poor families they could not afford to send their children to private educational institutions.

On the same day, hundreds of public-school teachers in Lahore, Punjab province, held a short stoppage with several demands, including an end to the privatisation of 13,000 public schools and the transfer to NGOs. The Punjab Grand Teachers Alliance and Punjab Teachers Union also demanded a review of new school timetables and removal of anomalies in their service and promotion rules.

Qantas maintenance engineers extend pay strike to key Australian airports

Over 1,000 Qantas maintenance engineers have extended strike action that began with a short walk out on September 26 at Melbourne Airport. They are demanding higher pay in a new enterprise agreement.

The Qantas Engineers' Alliance, which consists of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Electrical Trades Union and Australian Workers Union, announced that the engineers would stop work this week in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

The alliance wants 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.

Negotiations began in April prior to the expiry of the current agreement in June. The unions claim Qantas is refusing to agree to their demands despite making a \$1.25 billion profit public last year.

About 1,100 line-maintenance engineers, or about 45 percent of the airline's engineers, are covered by the agreement under negotiation. The striking engineers are responsible for the towing and marshalling of aircraft, and for critical aircraft safety turnaround checks.

Qube dock workers in Port Kembla widen industrial bans

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at Qube's bulk handling dock at Port Kembla, south of Sydney, imposed bans on all work between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. for 14 days, starting on September 27. The action is in response to Qube's sudden refusal, in the middle of negotiations, to discuss fundamental conditions around safety, fatigue and rostering, unless workers dropped some of their safety related claims and completely withdraw their wages claims.

Qube has been trying to renegotiate 19 enterprise agreements around Australia with the MUA. Industrial action began on September 13 with over 380 MUA members at Qube's bulk-handling facilities in Melbourne, Port Kembla and Brisbane banning overtime, work reassignments and other management demands.

The union rejected Qube's pay rise 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.

North West Private Hospital nurses in Tasmania begin industrial action for pay increase

Over 40 Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members from North West Private Hospital, in Burnie, Tasmania held a short stop work meeting outside the hospital on September 26 to demand Health Care improve its pay offer in a new work agreement. The ANMF has limited ongoing industrial action to nurses "wearing campaign materials" in their workplaces.

Nurses overwhelmingly voted to approve taking industrial action on September 18 after rejecting Health Care's sub-inflation pay rise offer of 3.5 percent in the first year, 3.25 percent in the second year, and 3 percent in the third year. The current consumer price index (CPI) rate increase is 3.8 percent.

The nurses' last pay increase was only 2.5 percent on July 1, 2023. The CPI at the time was 5.4 percent, putting nurses well behind the rising cost of living. The ANMF wants a minimum wage increase of 5 percent per year in the three-year agreement. Health Care has refused to revise what they claim is their final wage offer and is putting it to a vote.

Health Services Union calls off strike over job cuts at North Sydney Local Health District

On Tuesday the Health Services Union (HSU) suddenly called off one-hour stop work meetings of allied health workers to protest planned staff cuts at North Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) facilities. NSLHD covers a population of one million at 14 health facilities, including six large public hospitals.

The stop work meetings were called after the state Labor government announced harsh cost-cutting measures. These would reduce the full time equivalent (FTE) hours of 50 employees at Royal North Shore Hospital. Vacant positions will not be filled, expired or temporary contracts will not be renewed and some senior staff demoted. Mona Vale Hospital FTE will be reduced by 15 hours and the Mount Ku-ring-ai allied health department FTEs cut by six percent.

The HSU has announced that it is “surveying members” about how the cuts will affect them and its impact on healthcare delivery before it calls for a meeting with the government. The New South Wales Nurses and Midwives’ Association has not commented on the cuts.

ETU shuts down protest picket at Transgrid head office

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) announced on Tuesday that it was calling off the 24/7 protest pickets outside Transgrid’s main office in Sydney and said it will not oppose the company’s “intractable bargaining declaration.” The consortium-owned power transmission company in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory has agreed to a seven day period of mediation with the company in the Fair Work Commission.

ETU members have been taking industrial action, including work bans and several 24-hour strikes since January 5 in opposition to the company’s proposed enterprise agreement offer. The union wants a pay rise offer of 6.5 percent per annum for three years.

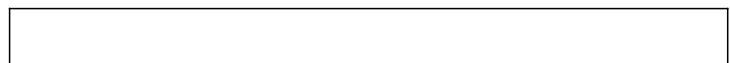
Workers originally demanded 8 percent annual pay increases to compensate below inflation pay increases since 2019. Transgrid originally offered 5 percent in year one of the new agreement, followed by 4 percent in each of the following two years. A slightly increased offer from Transgrid in July was rejected by workers.

New South Wales Fisheries officers protest workloads and unsafe conditions

Over 100 New South Wales Fisheries officers began industrial action on September 11 to demand the state Labor government fill an ongoing 10 percent job vacancy rate and provide self-defence protective equipment and investigative powers in line with other states.

The industrial action includes bans on inspections of estuary and offshore trawlers and hauling operations outside of daylight hours and bans on inspections of inland commercial fishing operations for the same period. They are also demanding police protection.

The workers are members of the Fisheries Officers Vocational Branch (FOVB) of the NSW Public Service Association. The fisheries officers say that are being subjected to ongoing and escalating daily threats and physical attacks. The union says its members have been shot at, run down, chased and threatened with fishing knives. Workers said they also fear being killed by drug gangs targeting NSW local trawlers and the state’s highly lucrative inland and coastal fisheries.





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