

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.

Construction workers in Thailand protest unpaid wages

Over 3,000 workers and employers from 24 Thai subcontracting companies held a protest march in Sriracha on October 18 and presented a petition to the Chonburi Province government and administrators of the Clean Fuel Project (CFP) over unpaid wages.

On October 15, the Federation of TOP Refinery Contractors held a press conference demanding that Thai Oil Public Company (Thaioil), the owner of the CFP project, clarify how they will proceed because the subcontractors cannot pay their workers' wages as they have not received any payments for over six months.

The Thaioil refinery in Sriracha is undergoing a massive upgrade and expansion under the name of Clean Fuel Project to improve the production processes and expand refining capacity.

South Korea: Seoul National University Hospital workers plan to strike

The union representing workers at the Seoul National University Hospital (SNUH) announced on October 17 that its members will strike indefinitely from October 31. Union delegates called for the strike in response to the Yoon Suk Yeol government's decision to reduce the number of beds in high-level general hospitals.

The union accused the government of promoting fake medical reforms that will force the SNUH to reduce its bed numbers by 15 percent. Workers are concerned about job security.

India: Tamil Nadu fishermen protest ban on selling fish in Chennai

On Wednesday, fishermen from Nochikuppam protested against the decision of the Greater Chennai Corporation to ban them from selling fish on the roadside in the city. About 300 stalls have been removed impacting the livelihood of about 800 fishermen. The fishermen expressed their anger because the corporation did not give any alternate places to do their business.

Punjab road transport contract workers strike for permanent jobs and equal pay

Thousands of Punjab Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) and PUNBUS contract workers held a two-hour strike on Wednesday to demand permanent jobs and equal pay for equal work with permanent workers. Workers decided to hold the unscheduled strike after an unsuccessful meeting with the transport minister.

Women and Child Development workers in New Delhi protest terminations

Commission of Women and Child Development (WCD) contract workers demonstrated in New Delhi on Wednesday to protest their sudden termination by the central government. Workers were demanding reinstatement.

The workers are suffering from the infighting of the Aam Admi party's Delhi government and Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP)-led central government who blame each other for the plight of these low-paid contract workers who play a major role in the development of children and mothers of poor families in the city.

Bangladeshi tea garden workers demand unpaid wages

Workers from 16 state-owned National Tea Company tea gardens in Sylhet began an indefinite strike on Monday to demand five weeks of outstanding wages. The workers said their provident fund contributions are not being deposited and they are not provided necessary medical treatment.

About 17,000 people are employed at the tea gardens whose wages support a total of 30,000 people. The workers are organised under the Bangladesh Tea Workers Union.

Workers participating in the strike are from Lakkatura, in Kamalganj, and Moulvibazar. "Our wages have been pending for the last five weeks, leaving us in severe financial distress. We will not return to work unless our outstanding wages are paid," one worker said.

Bangladeshi garment workers continue protests for unpaid wages

Several hundred workers from the closed Generation Next apparel factory in the Ashulia industrial area staged protests on Monday and Tuesday to demand unpaid wages. They blocked the Dhaka–Tangail Highway at Trimore for about 30 hours demanding the factory, which was closed last week for an indefinite period, be reopened.

Workers accused factory authorities of not paying wages for the past three months, even after repeatedly making commitments. In previous discussions officials of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, factory authorities and police fixed a deadline for payment of wages and reopening the factory, which were not met.

On October 17, about a thousand workers from Gilden Activewear Bangladesh Limited, in Ashulia protested to demand removal of the factory's director. They blocked the Nabinagar–Chandra Highway in the morning for several hours, causing three kilometres of traffic congestion.

The workers had previously protested over various demands, including the removal of the senior management official. Workers said factory authorities initially agreed to meet their demands, but reneged their promises.

Qantas maintenance engineers strike in Melbourne and Brisbane for pay rise

About 300 Qantas maintenance engineers at Melbourne and Brisbane airports walked off the job for 24 hours on Wednesday and held rallies at both airports in support of their demand for an improved pay offer in the airlines proposed enterprise agreement.

The Qantas Engineers' Alliance, which consists of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Electrical Trades Union and Australian Workers Union, 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 alliance claimed Qantas rejected all their demands and has refused to return to the bargaining table despite making a \$1.25 billion profit last year. The latest action followed a series of two-hour stoppages by 1,000 engineers at Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth in the first week of October.

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.

North Sydney Local Health District allied health workers take action to save jobs

Hundreds of Health Services Union (HSU) members at North Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) facilities imposed indefinite work bans on October 17 following the state Labor government announcement of harsh cost-cutting measures. NSLHD covers a population of one million at 14 health facilities, including six large public hospitals.

The plan is to reduce staffing at the Royal North Shore Hospital by up to 50 FTE (fulltime equivalent hours). Vacant positions will not be filled, expired or temporary contracts will not be renewed, and some senior staff would be 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 district-wide industrial action includes not completing auditing

documents, restrictions on accepting new referrals after 2:30 p.m., a ban on performing any work beyond contracted hours, only urgent referrals to be made if a department is understaffed, among other specific action in Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy and Social Work departments.

NSLHD has rejected a request from the HSU to hold off on the cuts and enter negotiations. Instead, it announced additional cuts to be made in administration with the loss of 21 positions held by permanent employees and five vacant positions to be eliminated.

New South Wales public hospital mental health doctors threaten to resign during pay dispute

Staff specialist psychiatrists in the New South Wales public health system have threatened to submit notices of resignation on November 1 amid a collapse in pay negotiations between the state Labor government and the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation (ASMOF). At a federation meeting on October 17, 74 percent of doctors attending voted for collective resignation.

Doctors are demanding a 30 percent pay rise to bring them on par with their counterparts in Victoria and Queensland and increased penalty rates for working unsociable hours. They are also concerned about persistent and chronic understaffing leading to safety risks.

There are 493 psychiatrists working in the NSW public health system, and 140 job vacancies. There were more than 114,000 mental health-related visits to NSW emergency departments in 2022–23. An ASMOF spokesperson alleged there was no way of filling the job vacancies with a 30 percent pay gap with neighbouring states.

Firefighters in Victoria protest low pay and dangerous equipment

Firefighters from Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) gathered from across the state and rallied in Melbourne's CBD on Wednesday as part of their long running battle with the state Labor government for a pay rise and replacement of outdated and unsafe firefighting equipment. FRV and the government claimed the protest by United Firefighters Union (UFU) members were illegal and said protesters would be docked four hours' pay.

The action followed a demonstration outside state parliament by firefighters from several Melbourne fire stations on October 10. The UFU claimed that half the vehicle fleet is obsolete and unsafe, its members have not had a pay rise in four years, and that firefighters with terminal illnesses from doing their job are cast aside by senior management.

FRV and the UFU are locked in intractable bargaining hearings at the Fair Work Commission after the parties failed to strike a deal. The government had offered a 12 percent pay increase over four years plus bonuses. The offer is a real pay cut. Considering the current annualised consumer price index (CPI) for Victoria is 3.7 percent, firefighters need a minimum pay increase over four years of 14.8 percent just to keep up with inflation.

SCT Logistics warehouse workers in Victoria strike for pay rise

About 40 United Workers Union members at the SCT Logistics

warehouse in Altona, Melbourne began 24-hour rolling strikes on October 17 in their struggle for a pay rise that keeps up with inflation and job security. The workers want a pay increase of 9 percent to lift their base rate from \$31.72 to \$35 per hour in the first year of a three-year agreement.

SCT Logistics owns and operates over 250,000 square metres of custom-built warehousing, provides rail and road line haul services and refrigerated transport services including a large proportion of work for supermarket chain Woolworths.

Brockman Engineering manufacturing workers in Victoria strike again for pay rise

About 40 workers from the Brockman Engineering factory at Geelong, Victoria continued rolling strike action on October 17 and 18 in opposition to the company's sub-inflation pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) members kicked off industrial action on October 4 with a 12-hour strike and imposition of indefinite bans on overtime followed by a 48-hour strike on October 10.

Workers rejected the company's 2.5 percent pay increase offer, which is a real pay cut compared to the current consumer price index (CPI) for Victoria of 3.7 percent. The AMWU claimed the company has refused to improve its pay offer and announced that members will begin a series of half-day stoppages next week.

Western Australian child protection workers protest over understaffing

In their year-long battle for increased staffing and resources, Child Protection and Family Support workers across Western Australia stopped work on October 17 to attend an online meeting to protest chronic understaffing and an impossible workload. About 150 Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association (CPSU/CSA) members rallied at Parliament House, in Perth holding placards saying, "Broken System = Broken Families."

The workers told the child protection minister, who met them outside parliament, that the record 1,000 child protection cases have not had a dedicated caseworker since December. A CPSU/CSA spokesperson told the rally that in some district offices there were vacancies of up to 25 percent due to staff burnout.

CPSU/CSA members have been holding ad hoc stop work rallies across Western Australia since August last year when workers at Bunbury, a port city south of Perth, walked off the job over understaffing. In July, workers at Armadale and Albany, in southern Western Australia, stopped work for half a day and locked their offices saying they had 139 open child protection cases that were unable to be allocated to a dedicated worker.

TasIVF specialists in Hobart strike for higher pay offer

Embryologists, nurses and administrative staff employed at TasIVF and Hobart Specialist Day Hospital, in Tasmania, have begun a campaign of

industrial action by striking for one hour on Monday. Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members are in dispute with TasIVF over a new enterprise agreement.

Workers want TasIVF wages and conditions brought into line with those of IVF workers doing the same work in Victoria, and for TasIVF to address a chronic staff shortage. HACSU said members are prepared to escalate industrial action if TasIVF fails to agree to their demands. Management threatened to dock the pay of workers participating in administrative bans.

TasIVF is owned by multi-billion-dollar investment firm Virtue Health.

Churches of Christ Aged Care nurses in Victoria strike for pay rise

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members at the Churches of Christ's, Arcadia Aged Care and Oak Towers Aged Care facilities took industrial action on Thursday in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Nurses stopped work for four hours and rallied outside the facilities. They have imposed bans on paperwork, computer operations and other administrative duties.

Management responded by offering an administrative wage rise of 1.5 percent if the ANMF suspended industrial action without any new agreement being reached. Nurses are demanding a new agreement that will protect their current conditions when a perspective new buyer takes over the facilities. Their previous enterprise agreement expired in 2020. They have not had a pay rise since July 2019.

Community Corrections workers in Tasmania strike over high workloads and poor workplace culture

Community Corrections workers, employed to provide a range of services including supervising offenders on parole, pre-sentencing advice and delivering offender intervention programs, took stop-work action at lunchtime at their offices in Hobart and Glenorchy on October 17.

They are in dispute with the Tasmanian Liberal government over under-resourcing, unmanageable workloads and workplace culture issues that are driving workers out of Community Corrections. At least 16 staff have left this year and state-wide there are 15 full-time positions unfilled.

The Community and Public Service Union (CPSU) says the government's plans for \$450 million cuts to public services will lead to offenders not being able to access services they need. It claims that cuts so far to rehabilitation programs are already being impacted by indefinite delays.

University of the South Pacific staff and students strike

University of the South Pacific (USP) Fiji-based staff and students struck and protested at the Laucala campus in Suva on October 18 and 21 to demand the USP Council remove vice-chancellor and president Professor Pal Ahluwalia.

Ahluwalia is currently suspended and under an investigation by the Council on undivulged matters. The Association of the University of South Pacific Staff (AUSPS) and the USP Staff Union (USPSU) are demanding the secretariat release the terms of reference for the

investigation as well as the unedited minutes of the last Council meeting.

The unions also want the reinstatement of AUSPS president Tamara Osborne-Naikatini, whose employment contract was terminated on 9 July. They reported that 96 percent of AUSPS members and 94 percent of USPSU members, covering both academic and support staff, who showed up to the ballot voted in favour of strike action.

Staff unions had been raising concerns for several months about Ahluwalia's leadership, according to a statement. They claim Osborne-Naikatini was terminated because he spoke to media about the vice-chancellor's contract renewal. As a result, Ahluwalia had 'launched a vicious attack on the staff unions and freedom of speech.' In what the unions are declaring a "breakthrough," the Ministry of Labour will now conduct an arbitration between them and the USP executives.



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