

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: Chandigarh power workers protest privatisation

Power utility workers in Chandigarh, the Union Territory (UT) capital of the northern Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, demonstrated on Tuesday against privatisation. Workers rallied outside offices in the city during the afternoon break against the handing over the local power sector to a private company without fixing any terms and conditions for existing workers.

The UT Powermen Union previously announced that if the assets of UT Power were handed over to a private company without protecting the service conditions of existing employees there would be protests and boycotts. The private company Eminent Electricity Distribution Limited will take over UT Power on January 1.

Samsung workers in Tamil Nadu protest management harassment

Workers at Samsung India's white goods plant near Chennai, Tamil Nadu, began a "canteen boycott" at the factory on Thursday to protest management harassment of 35 employees following the ending of a 37-day strike by 1,500 permanent workers on October 15.

The 35 workers led the September-October strike to demand recognition of a CITU (Centre for Indian Trade Unions) branch at the factory. One of the workers being harassed attempted to commit suicide when he was transferred from his department.

"[Management] have been consistently persuading the workers, under the pretext of holding training sessions, to shun the labour union and instead join the internal workers committee," a CITU member said.

ASHA workers in Hyderabad protest over compulsory exams

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Hyderabad, Telangana state, are protesting compulsory exams for Auxiliary Nurse Midwife and Multipurpose Health Care Assistants to be held on December 29. ASHA workers said they had been working for more than 20 years on low pay and that establishment of a competitive exam for their work was a definite attack on their jobs.

Bangladesh: Temporary rail workers demand permanent jobs and outstanding pay

A group of temporary workers from the Bangladesh Railway protested on Tuesday to demand five months of unpaid wages and regular jobs. They blocked the railway tracks in Dhaka's Tejgaon for about 2.5 hours, disrupting train transport between Dhaka and the northern and eastern regions of the country.

The temporary workers who have been employed as gatekeepers, waymen, and assistants said they decided to protest because repeated meetings with the Ministry of Railways and railway authorities had failed to resolve their demands.

The protest ended after authorities agreed to pay the outstanding salaries by Thursday. Workers warned they would resume their protest on December 22 if this pledge was breached. There are around 7,500 temporary rail workers in Bangladesh facing the same situation.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest to demand annual wage hike

Garment workers from at least 25 factories in Ashulia industrial belt walked out on December 11 to demand a 15 percent annual salary hike against the factory owners' offer of 9 percent. Workers want their monthly wage to be 25,000 taka, (\$US209). The current minimum wage of a garment worker is 12,500 taka.

The police and military personnel were deployed at key locations in the industrial area.

The factory owners' 9 percent increase was announced by the labour ministry on December 9, up from an existing 5 percent offer. The new offer was made at a meeting of the Minimum Wage Review and Annual Increment Hike for the RMG Sector committee.

Qube workers strike at 10 ports for better pay and conditions

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members from ten bulk-handling facilities of Qube Ports around Australia stopped work on Monday in an International Day of Action against Qube's refusal to hold genuine wage negotiations. The MUA has been trying to renegotiate 19 enterprise agreements covering 21 port facilities and over 1,000 workers since October 2023. The union accuses Qube of ignoring serious safety, fatigue and work-life balance concerns during negotiations.

Along with higher pay, the workers want earlier notification of shift start times, a 10-hour break between shifts and 48 hours off after maximum

consecutive shifts. Workers complained that they are regularly required to work within 8 hours of the conclusion of their last shift, leaving them exhausted on the job as they get thrown from evening shifts to day shifts and back again at the whim of roster managers. Workers are told at 4 p.m. each day if they're required to work the next day and face the prospect of up to 20 different shift start times each day on shifts between 7 and 12 hours.

MUA members 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 union says its members' wages have declined by 14 percent in real terms while Qube profits have risen by 148 percent since the last agreement.

The industrial action at Qube's bulk facilities includes bans on night shifts, shift extensions, work on ships for the first 8 hours in port, shifts longer than 8 hours, and start times for all shifts apart from 7 a.m., 3 p.m. and 11 p.m. Workers are also holding one-hour daily work stoppages at 5:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

The MUA is escalating industrial action and scheduled 24-hour rolling stoppages between December 23 and January 12 at Port Kembla, Brisbane, Fremantle and Darwin. The union claims Qube has cancelled bargaining meetings because junior managers wanted to go on leave around Christmas.

Western Australia: Weatherford offshore oil and gas workers take industrial action for new work agreement

Thirty-six members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) employed by oilfield services company Weatherford took industrial action on Wednesday in opposition to Weatherford's proposed enterprise agreement. Weatherford presented its proposed agreement to the workers but the workers' bargaining unit Offshore Alliance (OA) (comprising the AWU and Maritime Union of Australia) has directed workers to reject the deal.

OA claims Weatherford's "baseline" agreement was below industry standards and if accepted would lock workers into base salaries of only \$60,000 a year with reduced conditions. The Weatherford workers' industrial action includes seven different work bans and rolling one-hour stoppages.

Weatherford is an American multinational oilfield services company operating in 75 countries across oil and natural gas producing regions.

Rheem factory workers in New South Wales locked out

Over 160 workers from Rheem's hot water systems factory at Rydalmere in Sydney have been locked out for two weeks, after notifying management that they intended to stop work for 24 hours on December 13. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Australian Workers Union are in dispute with Rheem over its proposed enterprise agreement.

The unions said Rheem had rejected their main demands for back-pay and CPI (consumer price index) wage adjustments in the new agreement. The workers' current agreement expired on September 9 this year.

Gladstone Ports workers in Queensland strike against extended

workday

More than 100 workers from Gladstone Ports, 500 km north of Brisbane, walked off the job for 24 hours on Monday to oppose the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Strikers protested outside the port facility holding signs saying, "GPS refusing to negotiate" and "8-hour day here to stay."

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union have been in negotiations with Gladstone Ports since May. Management refused to continue negotiations after workers rejected its latest offer. On December 10, the workers unanimously voted to approve industrial action, which could include up to nine work bans and unlimited stoppages of 1, 2, 4, 12 and 24 hours.

The workers' main opposition to management's proposed agreement is the introduction of 12-hour shifts. Workers complained that their current work/life balance would suffer and that they would be forced to give up commitments to community voluntary organisations.

Northern Queensland AMSA emergency tow vessel crew begin industrial action

Ten crew members employed by Smit Lamnalco on the emergency tow vessel AMSA (Australian Maritime Safety Authority) began 10 days of industrial action Wednesday. Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members are opposed to Smit Lamnalco's attempt to reduce wages and conditions in its new enterprise agreement.

According to the MUA, Smit Lamnalco recently won the \$190 million contract to manage the vessel by under-cutting the previous contract holder and is now seeking to strip away hard fought for working conditions.

The MUA alleged the company wants to convert the current 8-hour shift into a 12-hour shift with no additional wages, i.e., a 33.3 percent pay cut. Other attacks on conditions include a cut to income protection insurance, removal of all current allowances for living on the vessel, ending the status quo on annual pay increases tied to CPI (consumer price index), and to remove shipboard television and internet connections.

The AMSA provides emergency support when one of the hundreds of mainly internationally flagged vessels which transit through the Great Barrier Reef has an incident or requires assistance. The vessel is also used to perform maintenance on the thousands of navigational aids throughout the waters between the Torres Strait and Cairns.

Essential Energy workers continue strikes in five-month pay dispute[subhead]

About 100 United Workers Union members at the Martin Brower cold-storage warehouse in Wetherill Park, Sydney walked out for 24 hours on Thursday to demand improved pay and conditions in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers want a wage increase that keeps up with the cost of living and protection of hard-fought for conditions, which they say are under threat.

Ipswich council workers to hold more strikes for higher wages

Following a one-day strike on December 13, about 200 workers from the Ipswich Waste Services and Ipswich City Council, in southwest Brisbane, have walked out on December 20 and plan to strike again on December 23 and 24 after the council refused again to increase its pay offer. About 30,000 waste bins go uncollected each day the workers go on strike. They are covered by the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Transport Workers Union (TWU).

Workers rejected council's offer of a pay increase of 12.73 percent over three years and transition to a 36.25-hour working week by July 1, 2026. An AWU spokesman said the offer would not stop the standard of living of members from "backsliding." The TWU claimed council's field staff's real wages have gone backwards in real terms by 8 percent over the last three years.

Workers want the new agreement to include a superannuation increase to match other council employees, along with a pay rise to keep up with "cost-of-living pressures" and allowances for working with dangerous poisons and chemicals.

St Vincent's Private hospital nurses in Victoria escalate strike action

After a weekend of four-hour rolling stoppages by nurses and midwives on the wards at St Vincent's Private hospitals at Kew, East Melbourne, Werribee and Fitzroy, theatre and recovery nurses at the private company's 29 operating theatres walked out again on Wednesday afternoon.

On November 18 about 800 Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members instituted work bans and began four-hour rolling stoppages on December 13 in opposition to St Vincent's proposed enterprise agreement. Their ongoing action includes overtime bans, taking the full meal break, bans on redeployment between wards, wearing ANMF t-shirts and not collecting administrative data.

The ANMF rejected St Vincent's latest proposed enterprise agreement earlier this month. The union said the offer included some improved conditions but that the original pay offer had been reduced by 0.5 percent to 4 percent as a trade-off. It also said the offer failed to address safe patient workloads and ratios, improved allowances and did not contain improvements that were recently included in the 2024–28 public sector nurses and midwives' agreement.

ANMF members want pay parity with public sector nurses and midwives, including new and improved allowances and more than 40 improved entitlements and working conditions.

Baptcare aged care workers in Tasmania strike for higher pay

On Wednesday, workers from Baptcare Karingal aged care facility at Devonport, Tasmania stopped work and protested outside the facility to demand a higher pay offer. The 23 Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members and 55 Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members rejected Baptcare's latest pay rise offer of only 95 cents per hour on average.

Negotiations for a new agreement have been ongoing for more than a year. Baptcare's original pay rise offer was just 2.5 percent per annum, well below the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimate of a 4.7 percent cost-of-living rise for an "employee household" over the year to September.

HACSU members say Baptcare's low wages are contributing to low-

staffing levels and higher care workloads and that they will be taking more industrial action during the next two weeks.

Queensland professional lifeguards voting on industrial action

Over 450 Lifeguards employed by Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLQL) are voting on taking industrial action after overwhelmingly rejecting a second low pay rise offer from SLSQ.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU), and SLQL have been in negotiations for seven months. The workers say their rate of pay is unsustainable under the current high cost of living pressures, especially in the coastal tourist areas where their jobs are based. The workers are seeking pay parity with lifeguards employed by Gold Coast City Council, who the ASU claim receive \$10,000 a year more. The AWU has only asked for 3 percent annual wage increases, just slightly ahead of the current consumer price index rate of 2.8 percent.

Maurice Blackburn law firm workers strike for better pay and conditions

Close to 400 workers from the Maurice Blackburn law firm are taking industrial action in their fight for better pay and conditions. Australian Services Union (ASU) members walked off the job on December 12 and on Tuesday held a coordinated "coffee break" stoppage across the country.

After seven months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement, workers overwhelmingly voted on November 29 to take protected industrial action. The ASU have called for a 19 percent pay rise over three years, better work/life balance options, and 10 days of reproductive health leave in the new agreement. The Labor Party aligned company has only "offered" 10 per cent.

Future action could include work stoppages between 5 minutes and 24 hours, nine different work bans and various union publicity campaigns, such as posting union messages in social media and in emails, wearing casual clothes at work, wearing and displaying union branded material.

New Zealand WorkSafe employees oppose job cuts

More than 50 people, including health and safety experts, protested outside New Zealand's WorkSafe head office in Wellington on December 17 as the agency confirmed plans to cut another 54 jobs.

The jobs being axed include dissolution of the health team whose remit is to prevent health-related harm and deaths in workplaces. Every year, 750–900 workers die of chronic harm or health issues on the job.

Public Service Association (PSA) Acting National Secretary Fleur Fitzsimons said the sackings "build on repeated job cuts at WorkSafe over the past 18 months" and meant that the agency "can no longer do the job we need it to do." NZ Council of Trade Unions spokesperson Erin Polaczuk offered similar platitudes. This posturing is fraudulent.

The National Party-led government's assault on the public sector has seen 10,000 jobs slashed, with more to come. This job destruction has been imposed with no united action by the unions, which issued appeals for increased "consultation" over the sackings.

New Zealand public servants begin limited action over zero pay offer

Nearly 3,000 workers at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) began partial strike action on December 17 after months of negotiations, beginning in March, resulted in a zero percent pay offer from the ministry.

While the Public Service Association (PSA) denounced this as “offensive,” it has responded with token bans, including workers refusing unpaid or unessential work and synchronising meal and rest breaks. This is expected to run until late January and include Border Operations staff in the New Year.

Attempting to keep a lid on the growing anger of public sector workers, PSA acting national secretary Fleur Fitzsimons warned of future strike action by MBIE workers but insisted the union would be bargaining for “improvements” to collective agreements for public service workers in the coming months.



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