

# 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.*

## South Korea: Industrial Bank of Korea workers announce strike

Hundreds of members of the Industrial Bank of Korea (IBK) branch of the National Financial Industry Workers' Union demonstrated in Seoul on December 17 to demand increased wages and performance bonus. The union announced that a general strike was planned for December 27.

In a vote on December 12, 95 percent (6,241) of the 88 percent of members who voted approved the strike. About 8,000 members were expected to participate. The IBK is state-owned along with the Bank of Korea (BOK).

The IBK union argues that the government sets wages 30 percent lower than those at commercial banks and fails to offer fair compensation. BOK union members are supporting the strike.

The union wants payment of special performance bonuses, an increase in the amount for employee stock ownership plans and cash payments for accumulated compensatory leave (overtime pay). It also claims that overtime pay, totalling about 6 million won (\$US4,118) per employee, has not been provided.

## India: Agartala General Medical College cleaners protest unpaid wages

Hundreds of outsourced cleaning workers at the state-owned AGMC (Agartala General Medical College) and GBP hospital, in Agartala, the Tripura state capital, demonstrated outside the hospital premises on December 24 over late payment of wages. The workers, who are led by the Akhil Bharathiya Safai Mazdoor Sangh, said there had been repeated representation to the hospital and outsourcing company Sulabh Sanitation without resolving the issue.

## Assam state animal husbandry and veterinary workers protest overdue wages

Nearly one thousand Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department workers at Guwahati in Assam protested delayed payment of wages and their temporary job status on December 20. The temporary workers are involved in artificial insemination techniques for cattle breeding and

responsible for cattle census and livestock branding. They have been employed in the department since 2005 without being offered permanent jobs and do not receive entitlements and incentives.

## Dibrugarh tea estate workers oppose oil exploration on estate

Workers from the Maijan Tea Estate in Dibrugarh, Assam, held their second protest this month on December 20 against oil and gas drilling by Oil India Limited (OIL) in the grounds of their tea estate. Workers oppose the drilling because of soil erosion and pointed to the danger of pollution to agricultural land around the Brahmaputra River due to flooding. The Assam Cha Mazdoor Sangh (Assam Tea Workers Union) organised the protest.

## Puri Municipality sanitation workers demonstrate against job outsourcing

On December 23, sanitation workers from Puri Municipality in Bhubaneswar city, Odisha, held a protest march over the outsourcing of their jobs. It was organised by the Puri Municipal Workers' Union. Their jobs are being outsourced to a private company for a cost of 24.2 million Indian rupees (\$US284,100), much higher than the previous budget of 6.5 million rupees.

A union spokesperson said that the workers were never paid the meagre wage of 400 rupees in their original contract and Provident Funds deposits from the municipality were not regular.

## Bangladeshi postgraduate trainee doctors demand higher pay

Hundreds of Bangladeshi postgraduate trainee doctors rallied on Tuesday over a meagre 5,000 taka (\$US42) increase in their monthly stipend. They demanded the current 25,000-taka stipend be increased to 50,000 taka. The protest followed a seven-hour national work abstention campaign by about 3,000 trainee doctors on December 22.

The doctors blocked the Shahbagh intersection in the capital Dhaka on Tuesday, halting traffic, and demonstrated at various healthcare institutes. They suspended the protests following assurances by senior officials from the Ministry of Health and the Family Welfare and Directorate General of Health Services to address their demands.

### **Bangladeshi garment workers demand reopening of Gazipur factories**

Factory workers from MM Knitwear and Mamun Knitwear protested on Monday by blocking the Dhaka-Tangail Highway in the Konabari area of Gazipur to demand the two factories be reopened. A day earlier workers gathered at the factory gates to demand their reopening but suspended the protest after factory authorities agreed to discuss the matter later in the afternoon. However, the authorities demanded certain conditions which workers rejected.

The factories closed for an indefinite period on December 18 after workers stopped work to protest charges of assault filed by industrial police on November 3 against five named people and 50–60 unidentified workers.

### **Bangladeshi garment workers protest unpaid salaries**

Over 100 workers from Khantex Fashion Factory, part of the KFL Group, demonstrated outside the factory at Bartopa village in Gazipur District on Tuesday morning over unpaid salaries for October and November.

The workers also demanded payment of various entitlements including overdue night bills, tiffin bills, incentive bonuses, Friday duty allowances, earned leave compensation and production bonuses.

The workers held intermittent protests over the past six months against the irregular payment of salaries.

### **Qantas engineers strike again for higher pay**

Qantas engineers, responsible for towing and marshalling aircraft and performing turnaround checks on aircraft to ensure they are safe to take off again, stopped work for 24 hours at airports in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide on December 20 in a dispute over wages and conditions. It was the fourth strike at major Australian airports since September and involving about 1,000 workers. It followed the collapse of wage negotiations over the airline's proposed enterprise agreement that have been dragging on since April.

The workers are covered by the Qantas Engineers' Alliance (QEA), an umbrella alliance for members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU), Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). The QEA says Qantas continues to refuse to change its initial offer of a 3 percent per annum wage rise in a three-year agreement. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that the cost-of-living rise for an employees' household over the year to September was 4.7 percent.

Workers want a 15 percent wage rise in the first year and 5 percent for every year thereafter to compensate for three and a half years of wage freezes agreed to by the unions during the COVID pandemic. The increase would boost their wages in line with the aviation industry standards.

Electrical Trades Union members from Coca-Cola's Northmead factory in Sydney held a 24-hour strike on December 19 for the second time in two weeks. They protested in front of the company's headquarters in North Sydney. The ETU, which represents over 130 workers at the factory, accused Coca-Cola of trying to drive down wages and working conditions in its proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers are demanding an end to Coca-Cola's two-tiered wage system which the union says means that some workers are paid significantly less than co-workers doing the same job. The ETU says the workers are paid a lot less than employees at the nearby Pepsi factory. Workers want improved rostering and job progression at the company.

### **Chep logistics workers strike in Queensland**

Over 30 United Workers Union members at Chep logistics walked off the job for 24 hours on December 20 to demand higher pay. Workers rejected the company's 9.5 percent increase over a three-year agreement and on December 13 voted near unanimously to take industrial action. The unions says that Chep pocketed more than a billion dollars in profit globally last year and its local CEO is the 15th highest paid in Australia.

### **BlueScope steel plant workers in Victoria strike for pay rise**

About 400 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members at BlueScope's Western Port steel manufacturing plant in Victoria walked off the job on December 20 to demand an improved pay rise. Workers rejected BlueScope's offer of 12 percent over three years saying it did not make up for years of only 2 percent pay rises, when inflation peaked at over 7 percent. Workers are demanding a 20 percent pay rise over the three-year agreement.



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