

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.

Costco workers in South Korea strike again for better pay and conditions

Costco Korea Workers Union members stopped work and demonstrated outside Costco's Kwangmyong branch store, the head office in Seoul, on April 27. They demanded better pay and conditions and protested management's lack of action following the death of a young worker at the Hanam City store in June 2023 from heat exhaustion.

The 29-year-old deceased worker, Kim Dong-ho, was forced to retrieve store trollies from the car park during a heat wave without any shelter. His last text message to his family on the day he died was, "My chest is tight, and I can't breathe well." Workers complained that there was no air conditioning or thermometer where Kim was working.

Workers struck in February and made some gains in higher wages and the creation of union branches, but Costco refused their demand for a new collective agreement. At the April 27 protest strikers shouted slogans like "Apologise for Workers' Accident Deaths," "Stop Unfair Labour Practices," "Improve your working environment" and "Win a collective bargaining agreement."

India: Air India Express workers strike over new employment terms

About 300 workers from low-cost airline Air India Express, a subsidiary of Air India owned by the Tata group, called in sick and switched off their phones on Wednesday, leading to large-scale flight disruptions. A total of 76 flights were impacted.

Workers are protesting modification of their compensation package and new employment terms, such as lack of equality in the treatment of staff. They claim some staff members have been offered lesser job roles despite clearing interviews for senior positions.

The Airline responded with sacking at least 25 cabin crew a day after the mass sick leave campaign. The termination letters said that the mass leave "clearly points to a pre-meditated and concerted abstention from work without any justifiable reason."

The Air India Express Employees Union accused management of "departure from commitments" but has not called for escalating strike action. The Regional Labour Commissioner in New Delhi reportedly pointed to "blatant violations of labour laws" by the company and said staff's grievances were genuine. Air India Express said it does not recognise the union.

Punjab brick kiln workers in Sangrur win fight for minimum wage

Brick kiln workers in Sangrur, Punjab state, called off their protest on Monday, following assurances from the Brick Kiln Owner Association that their minimum wage demand would be accepted. The Lal Jhanda Punjab Bhatha Mazdoor Union negotiated the deal.

Workers had threatened that if the minimum wages act was not implemented soon, they would boycott the ruling Aam Admi Party in the upcoming elections.

Tamil Nadu garment workers near Chennai strike for wage rise

Around 100 female garment workers from the Jeans Knit factory at SIPCOT Apparel Park in Irungattukottai, near Chennai, held a sit-down strike on Wednesday demanding wages be lifted to 1,500 rupees (\$US18) per day. The workers are currently paid less than 1,000 rupees a day. The company is also called FFI Global.

Pakistan: Vaccinators at Dera Ghazi Khan city strike for travel allowance

Vaccinators from the anti-polio and expanded programme on immunisation (EPI) stopped work on Tuesday and occupied the health CEO office in Dera Ghazi Khan. They vowed to maintain the protest until they were paid three months of overdue petrol allowance.

An EPI Welfare Federation Association spokesperson said the vaccinators work in remote areas and need the allowance to do their job.

Sindh province primary school teachers protest

All Sindh Primary Teachers Association members demonstrated outside the Larkana Press Club on Tuesday to protest injustice in promotions and lack of furniture in flood-hit schools. Protesters alleged that the director of schools (secondary) had denied promotions to 104 senior primary teachers and 75 female teachers who met all conditions of the government's promotion policy.

They also said that about 500 primary schools had suffered large-scale damage during heavy rains and floods in Qambar-Shahdadkot and needed new furniture but alleged that the funds had been siphoned off through

bogus bills. They vowed to continue protesting until their demands were met.

Bangladeshi tobacco workers protest sackings

Police were deployed to the Akij Biri cigarette and tobacco factory in Lalmonirhat district, Rangpur, on Sunday morning when about 600 workers stopped work and demonstrated outside the factory to protest sackings. They alleged that factory authorities laid off two workers Sunday morning without giving any reason. It followed the sacking of ten workers last month who were involved in protests to demand a wage rise. Workers demanded reinstatement of their sacked colleagues.

Sri Lanka: Village level service officers and development officers strike

Grama service officers (representatives of the Sri Lankan village level government) and development officers walked out nationally this week. Grama service officers in Anuradhapura in North Central Province, Puttalam in North-West Province and Matara in Southern Province, struck on Monday and Tuesday to demand uniforms, offices and field visit travel allowances. Workers stayed away from reporting to their respective regional secretariat Offices.

Development officers boycotted decentralised functions around the country on Tuesday demanding a special allowance and withdrawal from the Aswasuma National Program (program of monetary support for low-income groups). Other demands were for recruitment or promotion and various allowances.

Submarine maintenance workers in South Australia down tools

About 350 trades workers from the government-operated ASC submarine maintenance and sustainment facility at the Osborn Naval Shipyard in Adelaide walked off the job for an hour on Monday morning and rallied outside the facility. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union are in dispute with ASC over its proposed enterprise agreement.

The highly skilled workers who refurbish Australia's Collins Class Submarines want pay parity with their colleagues in Perth, Western Australia, who do repair and maintenance on the submarines but are paid 17 percent more. ASC has offered only a 6.75 percent pay rise. Negotiations for a new agreement began in November. The AMWU claimed ASC is refusing to negotiate on pay parity.

Wilmar Sugar workers in Queensland strike for pay increase

About 700 workers from eight mills owned by Australia's largest sugar producer, Wilmar Sugar, on Queensland's east coast, stopped work for 12 hours at 6 a.m. on Thursday to demand higher pay. Members of the

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union rallied outside their respective mills holding placards saying, "Wilmar workers have had enough" and "Wilmar is pushing workers into poverty."

Their last pay rise was 2.25 percent in December 2022. This was well below the annual CPI (consumer price index) rate at the time of 7.8 percent, which represented a real pay cut. The unions have not said what their current pay rise claim is. The current CPI is 3.6 percent with rents and food inflation much higher, meaning workers need a pay rise in a three-year agreement well above 10.5 percent to keep up with inflation and compensate for previous below inflation pay rises.

Kone Elevator electricians in Queensland strike for new work agreement

About 50 Electrical Trades Union members employed by Kone Elevators walked off their construction site at Broadbeach, Southeast Queensland, for 24 hours on Wednesday in a dispute for a new work agreement.

Workers in April voted unanimously in a protected action ballot to approve taking industrial action that could include an unlimited number of work stoppages from one hour to 24 hours, bans on overtime and other actions.

Educators at a private electrical trades teaching college in Melbourne strike for higher pay

Educators from the National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA), a private company, began industrial action on Thursday that could include strikes and overtime bans. The Independent Education Union (IEU), representing the 18 instructors, said it has been in negotiations with NECA administration since 2022 for a new enterprise agreement. It is more than a year since the union lodged its log of claims with the company. The workers' last pay rise was in 2022.

The IEU said it is seeking wage parity with their counterparts in the Victorian Technical and Further Education sector, especially since its members are working substantially longer hours.

Bonza Airlines puts company into administration while standing down workers without pay

Administrators for Australian budget airline Bonza have put the company into voluntary administration and sacked 302 workers without pay. The decision has left 60,000 creditors waiting to be paid.

Workers were told in a virtual staff meeting that they had not only lost their jobs but would not be paid wages for April. Workers were shocked and angry at having worked for a month for nothing. According to the Flight Attendants' Association of Australia, these workers were paid only minimum rates and struggled to live from pay to pay.

Bonza arrogantly declared that because workers were stood down and not technically sacked that they were entitled to government emergency assistance. The Transport Workers Union made a useless appeal to administrators that "workers and their entitlements must be prioritised."

New South Wales child protection workers maintain industrial action

Industrial action by more than 2,000 New South Wales child protection workers is continuing with a half-day strike on Wednesday and demonstrations outside Community Services Centres across the state.

Workers are protesting low wages and chronic understaffing. The Public Service Association (PSA), which covers the largest group of workers, is demanding that the state Labor government approve an “immediate and substantial pay rise” and increase recruitment.

NSW Community Services reported it is having difficulty retaining and attracting workers with only 25 percent vacant positions filled in some regional towns. Staffing short falls are contributing to an unsustainable workload and a crisis situation for children at risk of significant harm.

The NSW Department of Community Services data for 2023 shows that 113,668 children and young people to be at risk of significant harm in NSW. However, due to staff shortages just a quarter or 26,143 of those children were seen by a child protection worker. In some NSW areas only 15 percent of endangered children are contacted by a caseworker.

Workers say the department needs an additional 500 caseworkers and want foster care placed back in the public sector instead of being outsourced to NGOs and charity organisations. The PSA wants child protection workers’ wages lifted from an average starting rate of \$76,000 a year to \$88,000, which the union claims is the going rate in the private sector.

Fiji Water bottling plant workers strike

Workers at Fiji Water went on strike at the US-owned company’s water bottling plant in Yaqara and the Naikabula depot in Lautoka on Fiji’s main island Viti Levu on Tuesday. Media reports showed them holding signs with messages stating: “pay rise now,” “follow the law, pay overtime now,” and “no more wage theft.”

The National Union of Workers log of claims includes cost of living adjustments, the failure to pay overtime work since 2018, failure to negotiate a shift allowance, the employment of casuals on rotation for permanent jobs on individual contracts with lesser conditions and transport arrangements to the remote plant.

NUW general secretary Felix Anthony claimed that they were close to an agreement when talks with local Fiji Water executives and their US counterparts broke down. Workers called for action following a secret ballot.

Fiji Water is owned by US billionaires Stewart and Lynda Resnick and is the top imported premium bottled water in America. It is imported to over sixty countries around the world.



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