

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.

Indonesia: Thousands protest forced wage cut for national housing scheme

Thousands of workers in Indonesia rallied outside the Presidential Palace in Jakarta on June 6 to oppose a government plan to take contributions from their salaries to support a national housing scheme.

Under the Public Housing Savings Program, introduced last month by outgoing President Joko Widodo, all workers on at least a minimum wage have to contribute 2.5 percent of their salary from 2027. Employers are to contribute 0.5 percent. Workers will be able to access the funds when they buy a property. If they do not buy a property or already have one, they can withdraw the funds when they turn 58 or retire.

Workers told the media there was a lack of transparency in the scheme and they feared their contributions could be used for other government projects. Others questioned how it will help, given the cost-of-living crisis and the price of homes in the country.

Until now, only full-time government workers had to contribute into the scheme. One civil servant said \$US1 was taken from her salary each month for the scheme, but after 30 years she had only 4.4 million rupiah (\$420) in her account.

“You can’t even afford a Barbie house. They probably cost six or seven million rupiah now,” she said. The average house price in Jakarta is 18.2 million (\$1,110) per square metre.

Most workers will not be subject to the policy because over 47 percent of Indonesia’s workforce—or about 24.8 million people—are earning less than the minimum wage, according to 2023 official data. The average minimum wage also varies between about \$200 to \$500 per month depending on the province.

India: Karnataka female gig workers protest slave-like working conditions

Hundreds of female gig workers from the Urban Company rallied outside the company’s headquarters in Bengaluru on June 12 to protest auto assignment of jobs and harsh working conditions. The workers mainly perform salon or beauty parlour work at home which is booked by a customer through the Urban Company platform. They are designated as service partners which leads to exploitation and slave-like working conditions.

Workers complained that the “auto-assign” feature doesn’t offer a choice to accept or reject a booking or job based on location, order value, and even personal emergencies. They can be penalised for not showing up for orders due to personal or family emergencies.

The protest was coordinated by the Gig and Platform Services Workers Union (GIPSWU). Workers tweeted on X platform that the protest might spread to Hyderabad. In July 2023, Urban Company workers in Hyderabad accused the company of wage theft, illegal termination and discriminatory labour practices.

Punjab teachers protest delay wage payments

Primary and secondary school teachers demonstrated in Amritsar on June 10 to demand the payment of wages for May. The Democratic Teachers Front (DTF) said teachers suffer as their wages are regularly paid 10 to 15 days after the due date.

Research hospital workers in Chandigarh strike for pending wages

About 4,000 contract workers from the Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research hospital in Punjab’s capital Chandigarh stopped work on June 11 to demand payment of a wage increase pending for two years. It was due to be paid by June 7. Workers called off the strike in the evening after authorities agreed to pay the arrears.

Retired Rajasthan University teaching and non-teaching staff oppose delayed pension payments

Retired teaching and non-teaching staff from the Rajasthan University protested against the delay in pension and gratuity payments on June 10. Retired workers demanded that the responsibility for these payments be taken over by the state government, claiming that the university lacked the resources to make payments on time. Workers said the state government was paying current employees on time.

Mumbai health workers demand higher wages

About 4,000 community health workers and 2,000 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers demonstrated at the Azad Maidan in Mumbai on Tuesday. They demanded their monthly wage be increased to 18,000 rupees (\$US215), a minimum stipulated by the government. These workers are currently paid a meagre 12,000 rupees a month.

Pakistan: Sindh water and power workers protest privatisation

The All-Pakistan Water & Power Development Authority (Wapda) Hydro Electric Workers Union called rallies in several Sindh towns, including Badin and Nawabshah, on Wednesday to protest the proposed privatisation of Wapda as dictated by the International Monetary Fund. They protested the closure of powerhouses and excessive workloads.

At a rally outside the local press club, the union claimed that 80,000 positions were vacant in Wapda, which meant the existing workforce had to bear the burden and that often led to fatal accidents. The union has called for a performance payment allowance to members with additional workloads. Workers condemned plans for privatisation of distribution companies and demanded the government withdraw the decision of selling off national entities.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa hydroelectric workers protest high workload and non-payment of bonuses

On Wednesday, members of the All-Pakistan Wapda Hydroelectric Workers Union demonstrated outside the Peshawar Press Club in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to protest staff shortages, delays in recruitment and the non-payment of bonuses. They threatened to boycott work on Eidul Azha if their demand for payment of the bonus is not granted.

Pakistan government workers demand higher pay and pensions

Railway workers demonstrated outside the Lahore Press Club on Monday to demand a 100 percent increase in salary, pensions and allowances in the government budget. The Railway Premium Union also demanded a reduction in the price of electricity, gas, food and beverages.

On Wednesday, members of the All-Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions also rallied outside the same club carrying banners urging the government to raise pay and pensions in government and semi-government departments. They want the upcoming federal budget to include a 50 percent pay rise for workers in the water, power, railway departments as well as for private sector employees and bank workers.

Pakistan public works department workers oppose closure of their department

Pak-Public Works Department (PakPWD) workers protested last week in Islamabad against government plans to wind up the department and threatening the termination of around 10,000 workers. The protest was called by the Joint Action Committee, an alliance of all six unions in the

department.

Workers made the point that PakPWD has expertise in building construction and maintenance, but that other state-owned entities which will supposedly take on this work only have expertise in infrastructure development. Workers fear this is opening the way for PakPWD work to be handed over to private contractors.

Police in Karachi use water cannon against protesting paramedics and clerks

Karachi police on Monday used water cannon and batons in an attempt to break up a protest of 500 workers called by the Covid-19 Doctors and Paramedic Association and All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA). When workers attempted to march from the Karachi Press Club to the chief minister's house, they were blocked by police who had been deployed in surrounding roads. The protest began at 10 a.m. and ended at 8.00 p.m.

Workers were campaigning for job permanency and an increase in pay and allowance. A spokesman for the paramedics said around 200 doctors and an undetermined number of paramedics were recruited to serve during Covid-19 but their services were not being made permanent.

Workers demonstrate in Karachi for minimum wage increase and end to employment contract system

The National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), the Home-Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF) and other organisations rallied on Sunday in Karachi over several demands. These included an end to the third-party labour contract system, the minimum monthly wage to be fixed at 50,000 rupees (\$US180), and social security and pensions to be provided to all citizens.

The rally began at the Karachi Press Club with workers waving red flags and carrying placards. They demanded that all employees be given a written appointment letter at the time of employment, illegal contracting system in factories and workplaces be abolished and concrete steps be taken to ensure compliance with labour laws.

Sri Lankan public sector workers still fighting for outstanding demands

On Monday, hundreds of All-Ceylon School Development Officers Union members marched towards the Colombo Fort railway station to demand that the government absorb their service into the teaching profession with immediate effect. Workers complained that they have been employed on lower wages than those in the teaching profession for four years.

Meanwhile, thousands of educators demonstrated outside the ministry of education at Battaramulla, on the outskirts of Colombo, to demand resolution of salary anomalies still outstanding after 27 years. They chanted slogans and held placards saying, "Allocate 6 percent of GDP for education," "Education is a right not a commodity," and "Tear down the national education reform framework that kills free education."

Educators held another demonstration on Wednesday outside their

respective government offices at Borella in Colombo, Gampaha in the Western Province, Kalutara in the Southern Province, Kurunegala in the Northwestern Province and Anuradhapura in the North Central Province over the same demands. Teachers stopped marking G.C.E.(O.L.) answer scripts as part of the protests.

Also on Wednesday, hundreds of Colombo port workers rallied at the Fort Clock Tower to oppose the privatisation of the Eastern Container Terminal (ECT). Workers chanted slogans and held placards saying, “Stop privatising ECT” and “Give back ECT to Colombo port.” The All-Ceylon Port Public Employees’ Union says that 8,000 port workers are at risk of losing their jobs.

Sydney light-rail workers strike for higher pay and increased leave

Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members, employed by commuter transport contractor Transdev, which operates Sydney’s light-rail network, walked off the job for 24 hours starting midday Wednesday to demand a pay rise in a new enterprise agreement. Lines servicing Dulwich Hill, Randwick and Kingsford came to a standstill until midday the following day.

RTBU members on Monday overwhelmingly rejected the company’s pay offer of an 18 percent pay increase in a four-year agreement—only 4.5 percent annually—saying that it did not compensate for huge increases in the cost of living. Workers want 23 percent over four years, plus an additional five-days sick leave.

TAFE teachers in Victoria strike for pay rise and reduced workloads

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teachers at 12 standalone TAFE colleges in Victoria stopped work on Wednesday to demand higher pay and reduced workloads. The action was in addition to selected work bans imposed in April. The Australian Education Union (AEU) has been in enterprise agreement negotiations with the state Labor government for two years.

Teachers want excess workloads addressed, class assessment to count as teaching time, education qualifications recognised, classifications fixed, and wage parity with similarly qualified teachers at state-funded schools. According to the union, TAFE teachers in July will be paid \$7,742 a year or 7 percent less than similarly experienced teachers. They also want an end to chronic understaffing, unpaid and excessive overtime and high teacher turnover.

The latest Productivity Commission Report on Government Services says that the Victorian Labor government has underfunded TAFE for over a decade, making its facilities the lowest funded in Australia.

Quantem bulk fuel supply workers in Victoria escalate industrial action in pay dispute

United Workers Union (UWU) members from bulk fuel supplier Quantem, at Geelong Port, escalated action for an improved enterprise agreement offer on June 15 with a series of work stoppages and slowing the unloading of liquids from ships by 50 percent. They began industrial action on June 8 with overtime bans.

The union minimum claim is to maintain current conditions and an inflation-aligned pay rise. The UWU claimed that management responded by tabling an agreement that would see each worker worse off by up to \$33,000 per year in wages and superannuation.

The workers are highly specialised and do extremely dangerous work providing critical fuel to Tullamarine Airport, Australia’s second largest. Enterprise negotiations are also underway at Quantem port facilities in Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Ballarat council workers still taking industrial action for new work agreement

More than 200 Australian Services Union members from the Ballarat City Council in central Victoria are maintaining ad hoc stoppages and work bans begun in early May for an improved pay offer in the council’s proposed enterprise agreement. The council had only offered annual wage rises of 3.5 percent over the term of the new three-year agreement, a real pay cut compared to the current consumer price index of 3.8 percent in Victoria.

The workers, from waste collection, parks and gardens, childcare, leisure, parking, administration, art gallery, libraries, tourism and customer service departments, want wage parity with workers employed by the Greater Geelong and Greater Bendigo councils who they say are paid \$4,000 more a year. The union is demanding a 5 percent pay increase or \$62 (whichever is the greater) from September 2023, 6 percent or \$65 in June 2024 and 6 percent or \$70 in June 2025.

Asahi beverage machine servicing workers take industrial action for pay increase

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members are continuing with protected industrial action begun on May 22 in a dispute with **Asahi** Victoria over wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The workers maintain and install beverage dispensers at KFC, HOYTS and Costco Wholesale.

Workers in Asahi’s Victorian Selling Equipment Technical Team have banned installation work and callouts. Asahi has retaliated by docking their pay by 29 percent and hiring scab contractors to maintain operations. Workers said they are determined to defend their current hard-won conditions and want a fair pay rise and no trade-offs to keep up with the rising cost of living.

New South Wales patient transfer ambulance officers re-impose work bans

Patient Transfer Officers (PTO’s) employed by Healthshare, a government body providing health services for public hospitals, resumed industrial action this week in their dispute with the state Labor government for a new award. The Ambulance Division of the Health Services Union (ADHSU) ended several weeks of industrial action in late May after the government agreed during talks at the Industrial Relations Commission to provide “concrete responses” to the union’s log of claims.

The government’s response was rejected on June 5, with the ADHSU

claiming that after three meetings there was little commitment from the government outside of a desire to keep basic matters, such as safety and training, outside the new agreement. The union claimed that after 18 months of negotiations HealthShare was unable to provide rosters that balanced the needs of the community, patients and PTOs and had rejected most of its claims.

Bans imposed on Monday include not engaging in roster reform and internal training processes until award negotiations are satisfactorily completed. PTOs will apply additional bans if negotiations stall. Their current award is due to expire at the end of June.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

Sacked workers from collapsed Bonza Aviation owed thousands in wages

When Australia's low-cost airline Bonza was put into voluntary administration in late April, the company's administrators told its 302 employees that they would be immediately stood down and not be paid their April wages. Administrators advised workers to seek financial assistance from Centrelink and other aid bodies.

On Tuesday, Bonza's administrator terminated the workers, telling them they would not be able to access owed wages or termination benefits (if at all), until a second creditors meeting in late June.

The Transport Workers Union, which said its members were already living payday to payday on minimum award wages prior to the company's collapse, has done nothing to fight this. Likewise, the Flight Attendants' Association of Australia which has cynically launched a GoFundMe campaign, 'Support Bonza Cabin Crew in Crisis.'

New Zealand rail workers take industrial action

Rail workers in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, have refused to work overtime or change to rostered hours after talks on a new collective agreement reached an impasse. It is possible these bans could last a month if an agreement is not reached, according to Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) general secretary Todd Valster.

The RMTU has been bargaining with Auckland One Rail for the last eight months since the last agreement expired. Valster said, "We've been working away trying to reach a compromise, and there's been a couple of major issues that we haven't been able to get past." These issues include removing a clause guaranteeing train drivers get a majority of their weekends off and "a lack of trust" to resolve workload issues for three major work groups.

Mediation was due to proceed this week. Indicating that the RMTU is preparing to "compromise" Valster declared, "The last time I put in strike notices for collective negotiations was well over 20 years ago, so I know how relationships can be built up."

While the action is proceeding, Auckland One Rail has warned of some cancellations across the network and peak-time services running at a reduced 20-minute frequency.

A Wellington rail worker told the WSWS; "Wellington rail workers don't know what's happening in Auckland. The RMTU, the unions aren't interested at all in unifying workers in the same industry in an industrial campaign, they have used the Employment Relations Act (written by the Council of Trade Unions) to divide and control workers."