

# 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: Hyundai Motor workers vote to strike over failed wage talks

On Monday, almost 90 percent of the 43,000 union members at Hyundai Motor's Ulsan plant, 300 kilometres south of Seoul, voted in favour of taking strike action following the collapse of negotiations for wage increases and extension of the retirement age.

The union called off negotiations after failing to reach agreement in eight rounds of negotiations. If the strike proceeds it will be the first in six years.

The union wants a minimum basic monthly pay increase of 159,800 won (\$115.14) and performance pay equating to 30 percent of Hyundai's 2023 net profit. It is also demanding an increase in the retirement age to 64, up from 60, as South Korea's rising life expectancy and inadequate retirement pension payments prompt demands to be able to work for longer.

Hyundai has offered a basic monthly salary increase of 101,000 won (\$US73.5) and an additional bonus package, which includes an incentive of 350 percent of an individual's monthly salary, as well as the issuance of 20 shares of company stock.

## India: Punjab Roadways bus drivers and conductors strike over unpaid wages

Around 230 contract workers from Punjab Roadways held a one-day strike on June 19 in Ludhiana. A Punjab Roadways' Punbus Contract Union representative said drivers and conductors had not been paid for the past month. He said the state government had not released their wages despite repeated requests and forcing workers to resort to strike. Around 114 buses were parked in the depot because of the walkout.

## Punjab water and sanitation workers protest privatisation

Punjab Water Supply and Sanitation Contract Workers Union members met in Mohali on June 23 to protest the planned privatisation of water and sanitation services and the rural water supply board. The outsourced workers, who have been employed at the board for 15 to 20 years, would be terminated. They demanded a stop to privatisation and for permanent

jobs.

## Punjab social health workers protest in Ludhiana

In response to the cancellation of incentives, Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers protested in Ludhiana on June 26 threatening strike action on July 7 if their demands were not met. They want restoration of incentives worth 1,500 rupees (\$US17.95), the honorarium raised by 100 percent, increase in the retirement age from 58 to 65 years and a monthly pension of 10,000 rupees after retirement.

The action followed a similar protest in Tarn Taran district last week by ASHA workers with the same demands.

## Pakistan: Punjab hospital medics remain on strike over false arrest of colleagues

Doctors and nurses at Punjab government hospitals are maintaining their strike begun on June 14. They are protesting the arrest of senior medics at the Sahiwal Teaching Hospital, in Sahiwal, and suspension of nurses at the Khanawal District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital.

Nurses at the DHQ stopped work to protest the arrest of a colleague, Apsa Afaq, who has been accused of negligence for the alleged reaction of antibiotics which caused the death of three children at the facility. The Khanawal Young Doctors' Association (YDA) blamed poor medicines for the children's deaths and demanded immediate release of the arrested nurse.

A fire broke out in the Sahiwal Teaching Hospital due to an electrical fault causing the death of 11 children. YDA and major associations and societies of the medical fraternity, including the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), called for strike action.

The PMA Lahore president said, "It has been established that the fire [in Sahiwal hospital] broke out due to faulty wiring, hanging wires and poor-quality air-conditioning [system] and it was all part of the revamping spectacle."

Doctors and paramedics spoke about the death of children due to the antibiotic injection and accused the government of supplying the medicine to the hospital that is responsible for the deaths. PMA leaders demanded a judicial inquiry into the Sahiwal and Khanawal incidents and release of all arrested hospital medics.

## Thousands of Sri Lankan public sector workers continue strike action

More than 13,000 public sector university non-academic workers remain on strike after fifty days of industrial action and a sit-down protest outside the University of Peradeniya and other universities. The workers are protesting a 15 percent salary cut imposed on non-academic employees, salary anomalies and non-receipt of allowances, among other issues.

Hundreds of public sector workers across Sri Lanka held sick leave strikes on Monday and Tuesday over long outstanding demands. Western Province workers struck on Monday and were joined on Tuesday by workers from Kandy District of Central Province, North Central Province and North-Western Province.

Non-academic workers struck on Wednesday to demand a national policy for non-academic service in education. The strikers have accused the government of dividing education workers by integrating some into the government service and placing others in non-integrated services, such as provincial and national schools.

School development officers are also on strike and protesting outside Colombo's Fort Railway Station. They want absorption into the teaching profession with immediate effect and complain that they have been employed on lower wages than those in the teaching profession for four years.

Government executive officers held a national sick leave strike on Tuesday and Wednesday. Those participating include accountants, state engineers, agricultural and local revenue officers and 18 other government services. They demonstrated outside the ministry of finance in Colombo carrying a banner that called for economic justice.

### **Nepal: Federal parliament workers strike for overtime payments**

Workers employed at the federal parliament in Nepal are refusing to work longer than seven hours a day without being paid overtime. According to the Employee Union of the Federal Parliament Secretariat, the government is refusing their request after many approaches. The industrial action prevented the government from passing the federal budget on Sunday evening and other parliamentary functions have been disrupted or cancelled.

### **Quantem bulk fuel supply workers at Australian ports strike for pay rise**

United Workers Union (UWU) members from bulk fuel supplier Quantem held one-hour work stoppages and imposed indefinite overtime bans at four ports around Australia in their dispute for a pay increase. Stoppages were held at Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

Workers want Quantem's proposed new enterprise agreement to include a cost-of-living pay rise, wage parity at all ports and maintenance of existing conditions. UWU claimed that Quantem is not only refusing fair pay rises, but is trying to decrease some workers' take-home pay by more than \$20,000-a-year.

The workers are highly specialised and do extremely dangerous work providing critical fuel for aviation and general transport from 12 storage sites in Australia and New Zealand.

### **Callide power station workers in Queensland begin industrial action**

About 60 members of the Mining and Energy Union from the Callide Power Station, 400km north of Brisbane, began protected industrial action on Thursday as negotiations for a new enterprise agreement have dragged out. The power station, which is slated to close in 2027, is state owned and managed by CS Energy.

Workers want guarantees from CS Energy and the state Labor government that they will be able to operate the power station safely to closure and fulfil their obligations to provide fair redundancy and training to transition their workers. Industrial action could include work stoppages, bans on overtime and the use of technology and devices in relation to work.

### **Union shuts down Air Liquide strike after accepting pay deal**

Fifteen members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) employed by Air Liquide in Victoria have been taking 24-hour stoppages and holding protests in front of the company's headquarters in Melbourne since June 20 demanding \$18,000 in back pay and better conditions.

The workers' previous agreement expired in February. Their last pay rise in March 2023 was only 3 percent, an effective pay cut compared to the consumer price index rate at the time of 7 percent.

On Thursday, the union announced it had accepted the company's latest pay offer, claiming the offer included back pay, a \$9,750 wage increase over three years, enhanced leave provision, improved overtime conditions and voluntary redundancies options. The workers are yet to vote to accept the deal.

Air Liquide operates in 75 countries, employing 67,800 workers. Last year it reported a net income of \$US4 billion from the processing and transporting of oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen and other gases.

### **Western Australian TAFE teachers take industrial action for pay rise**

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teachers in Western Australia began a campaign of industrial action on June 10 in support of a pay rise and reduced workload in a new enterprise agreement. Teachers' current agreement expired six months ago but the State School Teachers Union (SSTU) has been unable to reach a deal with the state Labor government after nine months of negotiations.

Teachers want reduced workloads, a reduction in growing class sizes and more support to meet the increasing demands for digital, literacy and numeracy needs. Another demand is for wage parity with state public school teachers. The union claimed that TAFE teachers are paid around \$5,000 a year less than public school teachers with similar experience and that many of their students are earning more than its members.

The SSTU has restricted industrial action to bans on entering student results into IT systems, not attending meetings, and not answering internal emails.

### **DM Road maintenance workers in Victoria strike for better pay and conditions**

About 90 workers from road maintenance and management contractor DM Roads in Melbourne stopped work for 24 hours at 6 p.m. on Thursday

over stalled negotiations for a new work agreement. The Australian Workers Union has been attempting to reach a deal with DM Roads since November.

Workers want wage increases, increased allowances, five weeks annual leave for shift workers, the ability to swap shifts and same job-same pay. The union claimed that some workers are paid up to \$10,000 a year less than others doing the same job.

DM Roads is part of the asset management company Downer. It claims to be Australia's largest road maintenance provider with 17 different contracts to manage 28,000 km of roads across Australia.



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