

# 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: Samsung Electronics workers to hold three-day strike for pay rise**

The National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), representing 28,400 of the company's 125,000-strong workforce, announced on Monday that it will hold a three-day strike on July 8 for increased pay and bonus. A union representative told the media, "We will fight with a full strike, without pay and without work, until our demands are met." The action follows a one-day strike on June 7 and a protest outside the company's Seoul office.

Negotiations for a pay increase began in January. After nine rounds of failed negotiations, almost three quarters of union members voted for strike action. The NSEU is demanding a 6.5 percent pay rise, a bonus pegged to the company's earnings, a one-day vacation for all employees, additional paid leave and compensation for economic losses incurred during unpaid strikes. Samsung rejected the union's demands and offered only a 5.1 percent wage increase.

## **Hyundai Motor Korea workers to strike after wage talks fail**

The union representing 43,000 workers at Hyundai Motor's Ulsan plant, 300 kilometres south of Seoul, have called a two-day strike next week, following 11 rounds of failed negotiations. Workers will strike for four hours on Wednesday and Thursday. If it 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 106,000 won (\$US77) 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: Pondicherry agricultural workers protest low pay and lack of tools**

The All-India Association of Agricultural workers protested in Karaikkal, Pondicherry on Tuesday to demand daily wages for workers in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee (MNREGA) program be lifted from 250 rupees (\$US3) to 600 rupees. Other demands were for 200 days of guaranteed employment instead of 100 days, and allocation of funds towards MNREGA to pay workers and provision of necessary work tools.

## **Tamil Nadu sanitary workers in Rasipuram strike for delayed wages**

Contract sanitary workers in the Rasipuram municipality, in the city of Namakkal, stopped work on June 27 to protest delayed payment of wages by their contractor SR Enterprises. Some 92 workers complained that their daily wage is 480 rupees but only receive 390 rupees (\$US4.7) after deductions. They said they are facing financial difficulties because they used to be paid around the eighth to tenth day of the month, but it has now been extended to the 26th day.

## **Samsung factory workers in Tamil Nadu protest victimisation of union leaders**

Around 300 Samsung factory workers in Sunguvar Chathiram Kanchipuram district protested on July 1, accusing management of suspending 15 workers who were union office bearers. Some had worked at the plant for 12 years. Protesters demanded the suspended workers be reinstated and asserted their right to form a union.

## **National Institute of Technology workers in Kerala on strike over job cuts**

National Institute of Technology contract workers in Calicut began an indefinite strike on June 26 to protest job cuts. The low-paid non-academic workers include drivers, security staff, sanitation and horticulture workers. Of the 312 workers, some 169 lost their jobs. The workers said they decided to strike after management refused to discuss the issue with them.

## **Pakistan: Power utility workers in Lahore protest unsafe conditions**

Power utility workers in Lahore demonstrated on Monday to protest the critical shortage of field staff which they say is responsible for the fatal deaths of 14 line-workers within one month.

The All-Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Hydro Electric Workers Union demanded that the prime minister and the federal minister for energy intervene and make efforts to control the number of accidents by line and field staff caused by impossible workloads. The union claimed that there had been no recruitment for the last six years, leaving the existing workers overburdened with dangerously unsafe workloads.

### **Bangladesh: University workers hold national strike over new pension scheme**

Teachers, officials and staff members from 35 public universities across Bangladesh have been on strike since Monday over a proposed new pension that they say will cost more and reduce entitlements. The Prottoy pension scheme will apply to workers recruited on or after July 1.

Teachers said that no money is deducted from their basic salary for pensions under the current system, but that the new scheme mandates a 10 percent deduction from the basic salary or 5,000 takas. They also said that the current scheme entitles a gratuity facility during retirement, but the new scheme does not mention it. The current scheme facilitates a 5 percent annual increment in pension and allows encashment of earned leave. The new scheme, however, is unclear on this issue.

There are over 16,000 teachers and 34,382 staff members at 50 public universities. Teachers are organised under the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association while other staff belong to the Inter University Officers Federation. They are calling on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to intervene.

### **Protesting Bangladeshi garment workers attacked by police**

Around 2,000 garment workers from the Anwara Net Composite Factory demonstrated on Tuesday. They blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Sreepur, Gazipur to demand their annual leave payments. The demonstration caused a traffic jam, stranding hundreds of goods carriers and public transport. Police ruthlessly intervened firing rubber bullets and tear gas, leading to seven people being injured. A protester alleged some workers were shot by police.

A factory worker said they had been paid annual holiday pay for 16 years, but this year factory management claimed high costs prevented them making the payment.

### **Sri Lanka: Thousands of public sector workers remain on strike over wages and conditions**

About 12,000 village-level Sri Lanka government workers (Grama Service officers) across the country have been holding a work-to-rule campaign since June 26 over several demands. Workers complained that the allowance of 600 rupees per month for duties in the field is insufficient and that payment of allowances must be paid immediately and not delayed until next year's budget.

On Wednesday, state bank workers protested in front of their respective banks in several districts, including Kegalle in Sabaragamuwa province and Kurunegala in north-western province. Workers want revision of their contracts and a salary rise to compensate for increased taxes.

Health workers also protested on Wednesday demanding a five-day week as promised by the government, immediate filling of vacant positions, a system of promotions and transfers and additional allowances, along with six more demands. Workers at Colombo general hospitals and Kandy hospitals joined the protests, along with workers at other hospitals around the country.

Joint administration officers gathered at Colombo independence square and marched to the state administration ministry on Wednesday chanting slogans to rectify lost executive status and correct salary discrepancies.

Custom officers held a work-to-rule campaign on Tuesday and Wednesday followed by a sick leave campaign on Thursday and Friday as a direct response to grievances related to the transfer of the account responsible for disbursing overtime pay, incentives, and rewards. The change is proposed in the Sri Lanka Revenue Authority Bill.

Survey officers have begun a 21-day work-to-rule campaign after authorities failed to respond to their demands. Ayurveda doctors began a sit-down strike on Wednesday outside the Borella ayurvedic hospital protesting non-payment for additional services rendered.

### **Industrial court orders suspension of Wilmar Sugar mills strike**

The Fair Work Commission last week ordered a six-week suspension of industrial action at Wilmar Sugar's eight mills in northeast Queensland following a successful application by the company, Australia's largest producer and exporter of sugar. The three unions covering immediately suspended all industrial action.

About 700 members of the Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union began rolling stoppages and an overtime ban in early May to demand higher pay in a new enterprise agreement. Although their action delayed the seasonal sugarcane crush, Wilmar has flatly refused to improve its pay offer rejected by workers in several ballots.

Wilmar's pay offer includes 14.25 percent over four years, or 3.56 percent a year and a \$1,500 sign on bonus. The 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.

The current CPI is 3.6 percent with rents and food inflation much higher, meaning workers need a pay rise in a four-year agreement well above 15 percent with extra to compensate for previous below inflation pay rises. The unions are demanding a 22 percent pay rise over four years.

### **Victorian ambulance paramedics intensify industrial action**

Paramedics from Ambulance Victoria (AV) have voted almost unanimously to intensify their campaign of industrial action in pursuit of improved pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The vote by more than 5,000 members of the Victorian Ambulance Union (VAU) follows an earlier ballot in March that approved taking industrial action.

Negotiations between VAU and the state Labor government have been dragging on for more than a year but no agreement has been reached after 99 meetings.

Starting today, paramedics are to introduce 70 additional bans targeting

the administrative operations in patient transport, communications, air ambulance, triage, rostering, management, and education departments, together with bans affecting Ambulance Community Officers and Non-Emergency Patient Transport.

Workers want an end to unsafe overtime, currently running at 800 hours a day due to chronic understaffing. Workers rejected the government's offer of a one-off payment of \$5,546 and sub inflation 3 percent annual wage rises in a four-year agreement. The union is demanding annual increases of 6 percent.

### **New South Wales child protection workers strike again over staff shortages**

Child protection workers in New South Wales walked off the job on Wednesday to demand a pay increase and protest the "unacceptable risk" posed to vulnerable children across the state due to a critical staff shortage. Caseworkers protested outside the Redfern Community Services Centre in Sydney holding placards saying, "Child protection in crisis."

The action followed a half-day stoppage by more than 2,000 caseworkers across the state in May. 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 increased recruitment. NSW Community Services reported it is having difficulty retaining and attracting workers with only 25 percent vacant positions filled in some regional towns.

Department data from 2023 shows 113,668 children and young people were reported as at risk of serious harm, but only 23 percent of those were seen by a caseworker. In some parts of the state, just 15 percent of children were seen.

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 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.

### **Western Australia public servants strike for pay rise**

Western Australian public servants in Perth stopped work on Wednesday and held a lunchtime rally in the Supreme Court Gardens as the first of rolling stoppages in their campaign for an improved pay offer from the state Labor government. The next walkout will be July 10 with a rally at Wellington Square in Perth.

The Community and Public Sector Union and the Civil Service Association want a 12 percent pay increase over the next two years for about 40,000 public sector workers, a trial of a four-day working week and higher allowances for staff in regional Western Australia. The government's current pay offer stands at 11.5 percent over three years and it has not responded to the union's other demands, which also include improved superannuation entitlement and parental leave and a pay equity review.

### **Virgin Australia airline pilots reject union pay deal**

Virgin Australia pilots have rejected an enterprise agreement deal from the Australian Federation of Airline Pilots (AFAP) and Virgin. About 61 percent of more than 1,000 pilots rejected the deal, which offered pay increases worth more than 20 percent over three years.

According to the AFAP, pay increases were up to 22.6 percent for captains and up to 24.3 percent for first officers over three years. However, one pilot claimed on social media that the overall deal was "sub-CPI and sold by including allowances as part of salary," adding that the loss of decent working conditions far outweighed the benefits.

The Transport Workers Union, with members covered by the agreement, claimed the deal failed to address members' genuine concerns over rostering fatigue, which would be worsened by the deal which reduces pilots' annual vacation days from 156 to 150.

### **New South Wales ambulance control centre workers impose bans**

Ambulance Division Health Services Union (ADHSU) members at four NSW Ambulance control centres increased their number of current work bans on June 28, after state Labor government health representatives said they were too busy to meet with union delegates to continue enterprise agreement negotiations. The union has restricted the bans to target management and KPIs (key performance initiatives), rather than the safety of paramedics and the community.

Control centre workers want a pay rise and pay parity within the centres. According to the ADHSU, the government's current pay offer will increase the gap between a Clinical and Non-Clinical Emergency Medical Dispatcher to an average of 22 percent by January 2025. The gap in 2023 was only 6.9 percent. Workers want the gap closed to an average of 6.56 percent.

Other demands are for increased sick leave, fair rostering and reduction of night shift for workers over the age of 50 or after 20 years' service, increased allowances including a missed crib allowance, among other demands. The union has not reported details of the government's pay increase offer.

### **Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology vocational educators increase work bans**

About 1,100 members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) applied additional work bans on Tuesday as part of their long running struggle for a new enterprise agreement. As well as bans on RMIT's Work-Day SATS and SAMS administrative systems, NTEU members will not participate or prepare for RMIT's "Open Day" on July 11.

While union members have rejected all RMIT management offers, the union and RMIT have dragged out negotiations for over 22 months. Workers have not had a pay rise since their current agreement expired in June 2021. NTEU want wages raised above the CPI and an end to increasingly exploitative working conditions.

The NTEU is demanding improved rates for casual staff, annual wage increases of 5 percent and reduced workload. Workers are most concerned about job security. About 50 percent of vocational educators are casual and living precariously with many forced to take two or more jobs to survive.



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