

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

12 July 2024

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

South Korea: Thousands of metal workers strike in support of proposed labour law

Around 60,000 members of the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) held an eight-hour strike and rallied outside the Federation of Korean Industries headquarters in Seoul on Wednesday to support a parliamentary revision bill of the Trade Union and Labor Relations Adjustment Act. Proposed by the opposition Democratic Party of Korea, the bill seeks to make it illegal for management to demand compensation from workers for damages incurred from alleged illegal strikes.

Media reported that the strike caused setbacks in the production of cars, ships and steel products at manufacturing plants across the country. Subcontractors at Hyundai Motor and Kia joined the strike, along with workers from GM Korea, Hanwha Ocean's shipyard and Hyundai Steel.

The KMWU has threatened that if the government and company management failed to approve the legislation it will call a second and third round of general strikes.

India: Tamil Nadu power distribution workers protest privatisation

About 10,000 workers from the Tamilnadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) demonstrated outside the corporation's head office in Chennai on Tuesday to oppose the government's plan to privatise the state-owned entity through bifurcation. Workers put forward 20 other demands including for the filling of about 35,000 vacancies.

Their union, which is affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, closed down the protest after "assurances" from the corporation. The assurances were not reported.

Tamil Nadu sanitation workers in Thoothukudi protest

Sanitation workers from across the Thoothukudi district protested outside the Thoothukudi City Municipal Corporation on Monday for 19 demands. They were confronted by the presence of a large contingent of police.

Demands included a wage increase, a day off each week, the provision of toilets and medical facilities and other issues. The city mayor cynically

told the media that five demands will be implemented right away.

Sanitation workers in Madurai, Tamil Nadu protest ill treatment by employer

Sanitation workers from the Anaiyur area held a sit-down protest on Tuesday against the "ill treatment" of women workers from the private company which employs them at the Madurai Municipal Corporation. Other demands were for a wage increase and removal of the bio-metric attendance system which workers said is oppressive. They complained that if they are late for work by just a few minutes it is recorded as half a day's leave.

The protest was organised by the sanitation workers union which is affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Pakistan: A two-week protest by teachers in Karachi attacked by police

On Wednesday, Karachi police used water cannon, teargas and batons to attack about 300 government schoolteachers as they attempted to march to the Sindh Assembly. At least 19 teachers were taken into custody.

Primary school teachers have been protesting outside the Karachi Press Club for two weeks demanding permanent jobs. They had made almost daily attempts to march on the provincial assembly without success. On Wednesday, they managed to break through barricades resulting in the police attack.

The teachers are now holding a sit-down protest some distance from the provincial assembly. They have been joined by other teachers from the Sindh province. Teachers are demanding that the government prioritise giving them permanent jobs based on the new job announcements made in this year's budget.

Sindh power utility workers protest work fatalities

Power utility workers across Sindh province observed Youm-i-Shuhada (Martyrs Day) at their workplaces on July 4 to protest the high number of work fatalities. The All-Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) Hydro Electric Workers Union said that as many as 66 line staff lost their lives while performing their duties last year.

In Hyderabad, Wapda employees and workers from other power utilities

marched from Labour Hall to the local press club and held a rally. In Larkana, workers marched from the superintendent engineer's office to the Labour Hall. On July 1, power utility workers in Lahore protested the critical shortage of field staff which they said was responsible for the fatal deaths of 14 line-workers in one month.

Union spokesmen said many workers suffered different disabilities and some workers were denied off-day allowance, medical bills, marriage grants and other due benefits. They said that there has been no recruitment for the last ten years in power utility companies which had heavily increased workloads and unsafe conditions.

Bangladesh: Chemical workers in Dhaka protest factory closure and unpaid wages

Hundreds of factory workers from the National Chemical Manufacturing Company and Abeco Industries demonstrated outside the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries in Dhaka on Tuesday demanding outstanding wages and reopening of the factories. Workers also marched to the Department of Labour building where they protested. On July 2, they handed a memorandum of demands to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina seeking her intervention.

A National Chemical Sramik Union spokesperson said the factory owners closed the two factories in March before Eid-ul-Fitr without paying wages.

Bangladesh university workers' strike in second week

Teachers, officials and staff members from 35 government universities across Bangladesh are maintaining strike action they began on July 1 over a proposed new pension scheme they say will cost more and reduce entitlements. The Prottoy pension scheme will apply to workers recruited on or after July 1.

Under the current scheme no money is deducted from their basic salary for pensions. The new scheme mandates a 10 percent deduction from the basic salary or 5,000 takas. 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.

Teachers are organised under the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association while other staff belong to the Inter University Officers Federation. They decided to stay on strike until Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina responds to their call for her intervention.

Wilmar Sugar workers resume industrial action

Over 700 workers at eight mills owned by Wilmar Sugar, in northeast Queensland, resumed industrial action after winning an appeal against a Fair Work Commission ruling that ordered a six-week suspension of all action in their long-running pay dispute. Workers celebrated the win by walking off the job on Monday.

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. 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 unions are demanding a 22 percent pay rise over four years.

Maritime officers at Western Australia's largest port vote to strike

About 20 pilot boat operators and vessel traffic service officers at Fremantle Port, in Perth, near unanimously voted on June 24 to take industrial action in their dispute with the state Labor government and Fremantle Port Authority for a pay increase in a new enterprise agreement. A spokesperson from the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) said port operations would stop altogether if the specialist workers walked off.

Pilot boat operators and vessel traffic service officers are demanding a \$20,000 upfront increase to their base salary. AMOU claimed that these officers are paid about \$50,000 below the base salary of their counterparts in the Pilbara region. The port authority has offered two annual increases of \$2,500, a pay increase of only 1.7 percent.

Workers have said that industrial action would be significant with stoppages at least of 12 hours. The inner Fremantle Port handles containers while its associated Kwinana jetties process fuel, ammonia, and fertiliser imports, as well as bulk exports.

Serco workers strike at naval bases in Western Australia and the Northern Territory

Over 30 Maritime Union of Australia members employed by contractor Serco engaged under the Defence Maritime Support Services contract walked off the job on Wednesday at HMAS Stirling (Garden Island WA) and HMAS Coonawarra (Larrakeyah Defence Precinct NT). They are fighting for a new national enterprise agreement that will deliver conditions and pay parity similar to their counterparts working at Svitzer, Polaris and Sydney Ferries, who they say are paid industry standards.

Victoria's Alpine resort workers strike for improved pay and conditions

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) took industrial action last weekend for improved wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. About 50 workers at Mount Baw Baw, Mount Bulla, Falls Creek, and Mt Stirling resorts are fighting to come under a single agreement with all workers on the same rates and conditions. Currently only some workers receive weekend penalty rates, higher rates for working between 7pm and 7am and compensation for extreme weather conditions.

Their duties include snow making, clearing and grooming, managing traffic, ski patrol, waste management, asset and property management and facilitating alpine leisure activities.

Negotiations for a new agreement have been ongoing for four months. The union wants workers who receive penalty rates to retain them, and for the same penalty rates to be extended to all ARV workers. Workers also want wage and entitlement parity with other Victorian public servants.

Industrial action by Transgrid electricians in NSW and ACT enters seventh month

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from Transgrid, a consortium-owned power transmission company in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, are maintaining industrial action begun on January 5 in opposition to the company's proposed pay offer in a new enterprise agreement. Action includes overtime bans and ad hoc stoppages. On Monday, ETU members set up a 24-hour protest tent in front of Transgrid's head office in Sydney.

The ETU leadership has permitted only limited industrial action in the dispute, since negotiations for a new agreement began in October, as a means of wearing down workers' resolve and imposing a sell-out deal.

In April, the ETU presented a revised pay rise demand of 6.5 percent per annum for three years, down from the 8 percent workers had originally demanded. Since 2019, Transgrid wages have increased by only 8 percent, while inflation was 18 percent over the same period. Transgrid has offered only 5 percent in year one of the new agreement, followed by 4 percent in each of the following two years.

New South Wales firefighters protest low pay offer and increased workloads

Hundreds of firefighters demonstrated outside the New South Wales parliament in Sydney on Thursday to demand a higher pay offer in the state Labor government's proposed enterprise agreement. The government offered a sub-inflation increase of only 10.5 percent over three years.

The Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU), which submitted its log of claims to the government in November, wants a 20 percent pay rise over a three-year agreement, comprised of an 8 percent increase in the first year, followed by two 6 percent increases in the following years. It also wants additional types of cancer to be included in workers compensation in line with other states, increases in the workforce and training, and an update of aging trucks and equipment.

The FBEU's 6,800 members protested at parliament house in March and imposed low-level work bans after the government refused to make a pay offer. Bans including not wearing regulation T-shirts and for supervisors who are FBEU members not to take any action against members who participate in industrial action. Firefighters said on Thursday that due to increased workload they have put a ban on assisting ambulances unless the call is urgent.

Ampol aviation refuellers at Sydney Airport vote for industrial action

Ampol aviation refuellers at Sydney Airport voted unanimously on July 5 to approve taking industrial action in their fight for improved wages and conditions in a new work agreement. Action could include an overtime

ban and strikes of 4, 8, 24 hours and 7 days.

The 50 workers, who are members of the Transport Workers Union, want comparable pay to Ampol's competitors, guaranteed part-time hours and a preference for full-time jobs. Other demands are for "genuine consultation and inclusion" with workers and an improved dispute resolution process.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact