

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

2 August 2024

South Korea: Samsung Electronics union calls off four-week strike

The National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), which covers more than 30,000 Samsung Electronics workers, directed its striking members to return to work by early next week, after three days of negotiations during the week for a new pay deal failed to reach agreement.

Samsung Electronics' workforce comprises around 125,000 workers and management claimed the four-week strike was having little effect on production.

Union members walked off the job on July 8, demanding a 6.5 percent pay rise, a bonus pegged to corporate earnings with transparent guidelines on the company's bonus system, a one-day vacation for all employees, additional paid leave and compensation for economic losses incurred during unpaid strikes.

Samsung had flatly rejected the union's demands, offering a 5.1 percent wage increase and threatening to replace the striking workers.

After shutting down the strike, the NSEU leadership proposed shifting the fight to a "long term plan" that will include staging "blitz" walkouts and compliance actions.

India: Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital workers demand permanent jobs

More than 900 daily wage and contract health workers at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital protested in front of the Medical Superintendent's Office in Agartala on Tuesday, demanding permanent jobs. The workers have been employed for more than ten years at the hospital with no guaranteed job security.

The BJP government, which came to power in 2018, had assured these workers permanent jobs. Workers threatened that they would expand their protest to include "fast unto death" if the state government does not fulfil their demands.

National Health Mission workers in Haryana and Telangana strike over poor pay and job security

Nearly 14,000 National Health Mission (NHM) contract workers have been on strike across Haryana state since July 26 with several demands including higher wages and permanent jobs. Health services affected are largely in infant care, gynaecology, TB, HIV and ambulance operations. Staff nurses, as well as ambulance drivers and operators, are participating in the strike, which was called by the NHM Karmachari Sanjha Morcha, Haryana.

In Telangana state, NHM workers demonstrated at the NHM Commissioner's office in Koti on Tuesday. There are more than 17,000

contract NHM workers in Telangana. According to the NHM Contract and Outsourcing Employees Union their salary is 15,600 rupees (\$US186) a month, but field-level healthcare workers receive only 7,000 to 8,000 rupees per month.

Demands include job permanency, implementation of the 7th pay commission benefits approved in principle by the former chief minister in 2021, reviewing issues in leave approvals and compensation for wages deducted during strikes.

The federal government launched the NHM in 2013. It plays a critical role in providing health services in rural and urban areas, aimed at reducing maternal and child mortality, preventing and controlling communicable and non-communicable diseases, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology vocational teachers on two-week strike

About 1,100 members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) walked out for two weeks on July 25 as part of ongoing industrial action for a new enterprise agreement. The NTEU has allowed negotiations to drag on for nearly two years with members rejecting all RMIT's offers.

Workers have not had a pay rise since their current agreement expired in June 2021. NTEU members 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.

The NTEU declared that if agreement cannot be reached by August 11, the strike may be extended.

Public hospital biomedical engineers in Victoria apply bans for improved pay offer

Around 50 biometrical engineers, who maintain electronic medical equipment in Victoria's public hospitals, implemented work bans on Tuesday. They want a better pay offer in the state Labor government's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers are members of Professionals Australia (PA), which had previously agreed "in principle" to a 3 percent wage increase offer in line with the Labor government's public sector wage-cap policy. However, under pressure from workers, PA didn't sign the agreement.

The engineers' current enterprise agreement expired in September 2023 and they haven't had a wage rise since a 2 percent nominal increase in

September 2022, an effective pay cut compared to the inflation rate at the time of over 6 percent.

The proposed EA covers biomedical engineers and technicians working at Victoria's twelve major public hospitals, doing crucial work installing, maintaining, repairing, testing and evaluating medical equipment. The limited industrial action called by the union includes workers not using personal phones and vehicles for work and refusing to submit written reports.

Ramsay Health Care nurses in New South Wales continue strike action for pay rise

As part of a statewide campaign for a pay rise in a new enterprise agreement, New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) members at Ramsay Health Care's Lake Macquarie Private Hospital have implemented an overtime ban and walked off the job for four hours on Monday, protesting outside the hospital.

The action followed a three-hour statewide stoppage on July 23. The strikes are in addition to the NSWNMA's 2,600 members at Ramsay's 70 hospitals in the state wearing union badges and distributing leaflets to patients and visitors.

The union has allowed negotiations for the new agreement to drag on since March last year. Nurses rejected Ramsay's pay offer of 11 percent over a three-year agreement, saying they are currently paid up to 14 percent less than their Queensland counterparts and want an improved offer. Their last pay rise was a meagre 2.4 percent in July 2022 when the inflation rate was 6.1 percent.

The NSWNMA is calling for an 18 percent pay rise over three years and improvements to conditions, including increases to paid parental and personal leave entitlements, protection of existing conditions and improved staff rostering to reduce workload.

Ausgrid power distribution technicians in New South Wales strike for pay rise

About 1,500 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the power utility Ausgrid commenced industrial action on Thursday in their fight for an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. In a ballot on July 22, workers approved taking protected industrial action including work stoppages as well as bans on overtime, switching and locking.

Bargaining for a new agreement started in May. Workers want annual 8 percent pay increases in a three-year agreement. More than 90 percent of workers rejected Ausgrid's pay offer of 7 percent for the first year followed by 2.7 percent for the second and third years, or the consumer price index rate if it is higher.

Ausgrid serves around two million customers across most of Sydney's east, north and inner city as well as the Central Coast and Hunter Valley, north of Sydney. The union warned that the action will affect more than four million people.

Transgrid electricians in NSW and ACT reject latest pay offer

More than 400 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from Transgrid, a consortium-owned power transmission company in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, have been taking industrial action, including work bans and several 24-hour strikes since January 5 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement offer. This week, workers rejected a revised pay offer from Transgrid.

The ETU wants to reach a deal that includes a pay rise offer of 6.5 percent per annum for three years. Workers originally demanded 8 percent annual pay increases to compensate for the fact that since 2019, Transgrid wages have increased by only 8 percent, while inflation was 18 percent over the same period. Transgrid's original pay offer was 5 percent in year one of the new agreement, followed by 4 percent in each of the following two years.

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. Following the rejection of the company's last pay offer, the union has not called for intensifying industrial action but is promoting the illusion that members can secure a better deal by maintaining their 24-hour protest tent set up on July 8 in front of Transgrid's head office in Sydney.

Pernod Ricard winery workers in South Australia hold second strike in a week

More than 120 workers from global winemaker Pernod Ricard in regional South Australia held a 24-hour strike over three shifts on Tuesday, seeking an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. United Workers Union (UWU) members stopped work for four hours last week accusing the company of trying to force a short-term, low-wage deal on them after it signed an agreement to sell its wine brands and assets in Australia, New Zealand and Spain to Accolade Wines.

Pernod Ricard's wine portfolio includes seven wineries that produce famous wine brands such as Jacob's Creek, Orlando Stoneleigh, Brancott Estate and others.

UWU claimed that over the past three years the CPI has gone up almost 16 percent, while Pernod Ricard workers' wages have gone up a mere 7 percent. Workers are concerned about the future of their jobs and want their work agreement to include job security and a pay increase that compensates for inflation. They endorsed taking further action.

Worker at Brisbane's Cross River Rail construction site sacked for refusing to cross picket line

While 150 striking Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at Brisbane's Cross River Rail construction site are maintaining a picket at the site, a worker employed by labour hire company Rocktown was sacked this week for refusing to cross the picket.

CFMEU members, who are directly employed by building contractor CBD who manages the site, walked off the job on July 16 as part of an ongoing campaign for higher pay and improved safety in a new work agreement. The CFMEU also wants equal pay and conditions for the 2,500 subcontracted workers at the project's 16 construction sites. Other demands are for a heat policy and a subcontractors' clause to improve job security, the inclusion of traffic controllers and cleaners in the agreement and industry-standard rostered days off.

Heat stress is an ongoing concern for workers. Daniel Sa'u, a 29-year-old labour hire worker, allegedly died of heat stress at the site in late December. The CFMEU claims that 25 workers have been hospitalised due to heat stress since Christmas.

Queensland: Toowoomba Regional Council workers strike for pay rise

Members of the Services Union (TSU) from the Toowoomba Regional Council, in southern Queensland, walked out on July 25 and protested outside the city's Town Hall to demand a higher pay offer in a new work agreement. The union claimed the council paid the lowest rates compared to other regional councils. Striking workers voted to strike again until wage parity is achieved.

Western Australian child protection workers strike over chronic staff shortage

Child protection staff in Armadale and Albany, in southern Western Australia, stopped work for half a day and locked their offices on Wednesday over concerns that the system is "drastically" under resourced and understaffed. The Community and Public Sector Union and Civil Service Association (CPSU/CSA) claimed that the attraction and retention of staff working in child protection was "very dire."

A union spokesperson said that in the Armadale office there are 84 children who don't have an allocated caseworker because "there simply aren't enough staff." The crisis extends throughout the state. At Bunbury, a port city south of Perth, caseworkers walked off the job in August last year over the issue. The CPSU/CSA said at the time that there were 139 open child protection cases that were unable to be allocated to a dedicated worker.

Victorian paramedics protest Labor government wage cuts

The Victorian Ambulance Union (VAU) has been in negotiations with the state Labor government and Ambulance Victoria (AV) for a new enterprise agreement since February 2022. Around 150 paramedics protested outside the electoral office of Labor Minister Mary-Anne Thomas on July 26, the day after nearly 4,200 paramedics polled by the VAU returned a vote of no confidence in the minister and AV management.

The VAU has assisted in dragging out the dispute by limiting industrial action to writing messages on ambulances, stopping work to speak to the media, refusing to collect billing details and activating beacons if they are ramped at hospitals for more than 40 minutes, along with other low-level bans.

Paramedics in April overwhelmingly rejected a below-inflation nominal wage increase of 3 percent per annum, plus yearly lump sum payments of \$1,800. The union accused AV of trying to cut sick leave, overtime and travel allowance entitlements, and called for a nominal pay increase of 6 percent per annum or the consumer price index (CPI).

The government's wages policy restricts pay rises in the public sector to 3 percent per annum. The current consumer price index for Victoria shows

a rise of 3.7 percent over the past year. Under the cap, any pay increase over 3 percent per annum must be paid for through productivity improvements.

A major issue paramedics want resolved is excessive overtime worked. Workers want increased staffing resources to relieve their heavy workload and improved end-of-shift management to end hours of forced overtime. VAU claimed that paramedics work a total of 800 hours of forced overtime each day, mostly due to low acuity cases or being ramped in a hospital corridor.

Western Australian offshore natural gas platform workers strike for industry standard agreement

About 25 maintenance workers on offshore natural gas processing platforms off the north coast of Western Australia are taking low-level industrial action, begun on July 22. Australian Workers Union members, including painter-blasters, scaffs, riggers, mechanical and electrical trades, panel operators and supervisors, are employed by contractor UGL-AIS on the Montara, Pyrenees and Stag platforms.

The workers are currently employed on a baseline agreement with a minimum pay rate of \$29.80 an hour. UGL has made three attempts to get the workers to accept its new low-pay agreement. The Offshore Alliance (OA), consisting of the AWU and the Maritime Union of Australia, is negotiating for an industry standard enterprise agreement. OA announced this week that industrial action will be stepped up and will directly affect production.



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