

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 union calls four-day strike

The National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU), which covers more than 31,000 of Samsung Electronics 125,000 workers, began a four-day strike on Thursday for a pay rise and additional bonuses.

The action followed a four-week strike that ended on August 2 without reaching agreement. The NSEU leadership decided to shift the fight to a “long term plan” that includes staging “blitz” walkouts and compliance actions.

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 has flatly rejected the union’s demands, offering only a 5.1 percent wage increase.

Philippines: Jeepney drivers strike against modernisation program

Thousands of jeepney and small mini-bus drivers and operators in Manila and other cities struck for three days on Monday as part of ongoing action to demand President Marcos Jr scrap the public transport modernisation program (PTMP). The drivers’ unions, mainly Manibela and PISTON, have been holding strikes since early 2023 over the issue that included a two-week national strike in December by 200,000 drivers.

The Marcos government claims modernisation is needed to reduce the number of polluting vehicles in high-density cities. The unions have called PTMP a “false and bogus” modernisation scheme. All but one of 23 sitting senators signed a resolution urging Marcos to suspend its implementation.

Drivers and operators are being forced to consolidate into corporations and cooperatives of no less than 15 vehicles. Drivers say they are being forced to borrow large amounts to pay for the modern vehicles that each cost at least 2 million pesos (\$US36,300). More strikes are planned for August and September.

India: Karnataka government hospital resident doctors strike for pay rise

Around 10,000 resident doctors at government medical college hospitals in Karnataka stopped work on Monday and are maintaining a protest rally in Freedom Park, Bangalore. Members of the Karnataka Association of Resident Doctors want higher wages or a higher stipend. Emergency services are not affected. The strike followed a silent protest wearing black badges from August 5.

RMC Prism Johnson concrete ready-mix plant workers in Karnataka protest lockout

RMC Prism Johnson workers locked out from the company’s ready-mix concrete plants at Veerasandra and Yelahanka, Bangalore, protested at the company’s head office in Kasuthrinagar on Tuesday. The workers said they were illegally locked out at both plants on the morning shift on July 19. The company had closed both plants with no prior notification to workers.

Workers demanded the company immediately provide them with work. RMC Prism Johnson is among the top three companies in the ready-mix concrete sector with 93 plants at 44 locations across India.

Kerala workers at Ernakulam protest railway infrastructure neglect

Several hundred railway workers and supporters marched to the Ernakulam South Railway Station on Wednesday to protest the Modi government’s neglect of Karala state’s railway infrastructure.

Workers highlighted the absence of dedicated plants for treating waste, including toilet discharge, an overdue Palakkad coach factory promised in 2007, and the lack of a dedicated railway network for Kerala. They also demanded construction of critical railway lines, including Guruvayur-Kuttippuram, Nilambur-Nanchankode and Kozhikode-Mysuru, for which surveys have been completed.

Tamil Nadu conservancy workers in Chennai protest privatisation

Conservancy workers from the Chennai Municipal Corporation protested outside the Rippon Building in Chennai on August 12 against the privatisation of their jobs and services by the state government. Workers accused the government of planning to give their jobs to private operators through outsourcing, which would be an attack on their jobs and livelihoods.

Last month around 8,000 conservancy workers called off their protest after the state's chief minister agreed to raise their daily wages from 687 rupees (\$US8.18) to 753 rupees.

National Health Mission workers' strike in Haryana enters fourth week

Nearly 14,000 National Health Mission (NHM) contract nurses in Haryana state have been on strike since July 26 over several demands, including higher wages, permanent jobs and social security. Workers are holding sit-down protests near medical facilities in several cities.

The strike has impacted on infant care, gynaecology, TB, HIV and ambulance operations. Staff nurses as well as ambulance drivers and operators are involved in the strike. Workers said their strike would continue until demands were met.

Bangladeshi garment workers in Gazipur protest factory closure and unpaid wages

Over a thousand garment workers from the Apparel Plus factory at Chandana Chowrasta in Gazipur, demonstrated on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for more than an hour on Monday to protest closure of the factory and for payment of all outstanding wages. Workers later continued their protest outside their factory. Police claimed the factory owner could not be contacted.

The plant closed on July 17 as nationwide mass protests erupted against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and forcing her to resign and flee to India.

Sri Lankan grama service officers strike for a living wage

Hundreds of grama service officers (representatives of the Sri Lankan village level government) held a nationwide strike on Monday for a living wage and immediate payment of grants approved by the Ministerial Committee. The strike was called by Grama Nila Dhari Trade Union.

Workers demonstrated outside the Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Council and Local Government ministries chanting slogans and carrying placards. These included, "Defeat the gazette published for village officers' constitution death trap," "Payment of allowances equal to executive officers for village officers and administrative officers" and "Increase monthly travel allowance to 600 rupees."

Nepali casino workers begin industrial action against pay cut and terminations

Over 400 casino workers from the Tiger Palace Resort in Bhairahawa, Nepal, began industrial action on August 5 over the resort's new owners' refusal to implement a collective agreement signed in December. The workers, organised by the Casino Workers Union, affiliated with the Nepal Tourism, Hotel, Restaurant, Casino and Allied Workers, are holding a peaceful demonstration in front of the casino.

The conflict began when the casino's new owners, a US-based Non-Resident Nepali (NRN) group unilaterally broke an existing work agreement soon after they acquired the casino from the Silver Heritage Group. The NRN group offered new terms of employment with reduced benefits and fired workers without due process.

The union said it had exhausted all legal avenues, including labour court intervention, without success. Workers said they would maintain their action until all terminated workers are reinstated, outstanding wages are paid, and the previous negotiated agreement adhered to.

Fremantle Port maritime officers strike for higher pay

Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) members, who include pilot boat operators and vessel traffic service (VTS) officers at Fremantle Port, Western Australia (WA) have told the state-owned Fremantle Port Authority (FTA) that they will walk off the job for 48 hours at 5.30 a.m. on Sunday.

The action will halt all shipping movements at the port, affecting container terminals and outer jetties at the Kwinana industrial hub. About 20 ships were due to enter Fremantle Port over the two days.

The AMOU is in dispute with the state Labor government and FTA over the authority's pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. The union claims that the workers are paid up to \$50,000 a year less than their counterparts at other WA ports and wants the gap reduced. It wants a \$15,000 base salary increase for vessel traffic service workers and a \$10,000 increase for pilot boat operators.

Workers rejected an offer of 3.5 percent annual increases (in line with the government's wage increase cap) and a series of one-off payments the union said were just \$3,000. The government claims the workers are technically public servants and pay increases are to be limited to within its 2017 wage cap policy.

Western Australian public hospital anaesthetic technicians strike again

On August 8, Anaesthetic Technicians from the Perth Children's Hospital and the Sir Charles Gardner Hospital stopped work and rallied outside the QEII Medical Centre in Perth to demand higher pay and an improved pay structure to ensure the retention of anaesthetic technicians in public hospitals.

The workers are covered by the Health Services Union, which in June rejected the state Labor government's pay rise offer of 4.75 percent in the first year and 3.5 percent in the second year, saying the offer was not a real pay rise.

Industrial action at Wilmar Sugar enters 16th week

Rolling stoppages and an overtime ban at eight mills owned by Wilmar Sugar, in northeast Queensland, which began in May, will continue after the company last week rejected a Fair Work Commission (FWC) pay recommendation agreeable to the unions.

Over 700 Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union members are demanding a 22 percent

pay rise over four years to compensate for previous sub-inflation pay increases. The FWC's recommendation included a pay increase of 21.33 percent over four years which Wilmar rejected. Wilmar's last pay rise offer was 14.25 percent over 4 years and a sign on bonus of \$1,500.

Negotiations have been dragging on for 16 months. The last pay rise agreed to by the unions was 2.25 percent in December 2022, well below the then annual CPI (consumer price index) rate of 7.8 percent.

Attempting to cover for the previous low pay deals, the unions claim Wilmar has failed to keep its promise that workers who missed out on pay rises during the downturns and COVID would get compensated when the market picked up.

Toowoomba Regional Council workers hold second strike for pay rise

Administration workers from Toowoomba Regional Council, in southern Queensland, walked out for the second time in two weeks and protested outside the city's Town Hall on August 7 to demand a higher pay. The Services Union (TSU) has been in negotiations with the council for over four months. It claimed the council paid the lowest rates compared to other regional councils. It wants parity wages, resolution of gender pay gaps and increased recruitment.

Upper Lachlan Shire Council workers protest job cuts

Over 100 United Services Union members from the Upper Lachlan Shire Council in regional New South Wales, walked off the job for three days on August 6 after the council's general manager refused to meet with staff or the union over the axing of 25 jobs. The strike affected waste management, kerbside garbage pickup and administrative offices.

Workers are concerned that they will be expected to pick up the extra work from the positions cut in the organisational structure. Management has not provided any reason for the cuts. The NSW Industrial Relations Commission has ordered conciliation between the union and council.

Etex plasterboard factory workers in New South Wales take industrial action for higher pay

Five Electrical Trades Union members at the Etex plasterboard factory in Matraville, a suburb of Sydney, began protected industrial action on Monday for higher pay. Action could include stoppages from 30 minutes to 24 hours and an overtime ban.

Workers want 6 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement and an increase to the minimum 11.5 percent superannuation employer's contribution. Etex has offered only pay increases of 4.5 percent in the first year, 4 percent in the second year and a \$2,500 one-off bonus.

Meanwhile, 33 Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union members at the factory voted on August 5 to approve taking industrial action in their pay dispute with the company.

New South Wales child protection workers strike again over staff shortages

Child protection caseworkers on the Central Coast, north of Sydney, walked off the job on Wednesday as part of a state-wide campaign for better pay and chronic staff shortages. Over 2,000 Child Protection Services workers across the state walked out in May and July over the issues and individual ad hoc stoppages are being held in regional centres.

The Public Service Association (PSA), which covers the largest group of workers, claimed that only one in five children reported to Child Protection Services as at risk of serious harm are being seen by a caseworker. PSA wants the state Labor government to approve an "immediate and substantial pay rise" to retain staff and increase recruitment.

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.

New South Wales Sheriff Officers hold state-wide strike

Sheriff Officers from the NSW Department of Community and Justice walked off the job for the day on Thursday to demand a pay increase and increased staffing. The action followed a series of two-hour stoppages at eight regional districts over the past month and in the Hunter and Illawarra regions.

The workers' duties range from maintaining security at courts, like scanning individuals upon entry, responding to altercations, assisting in medical emergencies and evictions. Workers want increased recruitment in regional areas, saying that it is common to have only one sheriff on duty without backup in a regional court.

A Public Service Association spokesperson said that pay scale for sheriff officers is no more than "someone working in the back office," adding that the top pay for a sheriff is \$70,000 per year compared with workers in corrective services who are paid \$85,000.



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