

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 August 2024

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

India: Tamil Nadu tea plantation workers protest job losses

About 540 workers at the Manjolai tea plantation in Tamil Nadu began a fasting protest on August 26 to protest the government's declaring the plantation a reserve forest two months ago and making them jobless. Police intervened on the second day of the protest and workers agreed to "pause" their action.

Workers at the privately-owned plantation had long demanded the government put it under control of the TANTEA corporation. The workers are demanding 10 acres of land in Manjolai, 2.5 million rupees (\$US30,000) compensation, and 10,000 rupees monthly until the case with the government in the High Court comes to an end.

Tamil Nadu construction workers demonstrate for social benefits

Construction workers across Tamil Nadu demonstrated outside labour welfare offices at Erode, Dindigul, Trichy and other cities on Tuesday chanting slogans in support of 14 demands. These include inclusion in State Health Insurance social security and non-interference of bureaucratic apparatuses in the Construction Workers Welfare Board.

The protest action was coordinated by the All-India Trade Union Congress. Protesters submitted their demands to the commissioners at each welfare office.

Tamil Nadu police arrest protesting retired transport workers

Around 350 retired transport workers demonstrated at Villupuram on Tuesday to demand payment of outstanding pensions. They blockaded the national highway connecting Villupuram and Trichy until police intervened and forcefully removed and arrested them.

Pakistani power utility workers oppose privatisation

The All-Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union called

demonstrations across Pakistan on Tuesday in opposition to the planned privatisation of three profitable power distribution utilities—(Discos)-Iesco, Geeco and Fesco.

At a rally in Lahore, union bureaucrats demanded recruitment of line staff to save the lives of workers who have been forced to double their workloads due to staff shortages. Workers in Hyderabad called for the government to reject the International Monetary Fund's privatisation demands.

Union members protesting at the Hyderabad Press Club were told the government planned to privatise 12 power distribution companies and that bidding for three companies at Islamabad, Gujranwala and Faisalabad would start on September 16, to be followed by others.

In Larkana, Wapda workers locked their offices and walked out whilst in Nawabshah, Tando Adam, Mirpurkhas, Digri, Jhuddo, Samaro, Kunri and other cities, Wapda union members staged similar protests. They demanded salary increases and filling of more than 80,000 vacancies.

Punjab college teachers demonstrate against transfers and delayed pay rise

On Tuesday, thousands of college teachers across Pakistan protested outside more than 30 district press clubs over the recently announced Higher Education Department (HED) e-transfer policy and other demands.

Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association members also demanded the approval of pay and service protection, immediate issuance of promotion orders, withdrawal of transfer orders and immediate review of the college cadre under the four-grade formula to facilitate timely promotions across all grades.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand unpaid wages

Over 300 workers from Peacock Garments and Print in Gazipur demonstrated for an hour outside their factory on Monday morning demanding the immediate payment of three months' outstanding wages. They also complained that they were not paid their full salaries several times during the past two years.

Workers ended the protest when Gazipur Industrial Police intervened and the factory management "pledged" that two months' salaries would be paid on Thursday, and that starting next month salaries would be paid by the 10th of each month.

Taiwan: Teachers demand sustainable pension fund

National Teachers Association (NTA Taiwan) members are protesting in Taipei over the government failing to properly fund teachers' pensions. NTA President Hou Chung-Liang, who began a hunger strike on August 20, has since been hospitalised.

The crisis over the pension funds began with the implementation of new pension policies which resulted in funding gaps as new teachers entered the system. The union wants the government to make up for gaps in a 20-year funding plan or switch to a 10-year fund. They are demanding that there will be no further pension reforms due to unresolved deficits that would require cuts to the Public Service Pension Fund.

Indonesian app-based motorcycle taxi drivers strike over low pay

Over 1,000 motorcycle taxi drivers took strike action in several Indonesian cities on Thursday over low pay. Protesters gathered outside the Communications Ministry and near the Jakarta offices of GoTo and Grab, a ride-hailing and food delivery firm.

One protester told the media that he worked 10 hours every day but made less than 150,000 rupiah (\$US9.70) most days, which is well below Jakarta's minimum monthly wage of 5 million rupiah (\$323).

Drivers called on the government to provide more protection against what they say are unfair practices by ride-sharing companies. The transport ministry ignored the drivers, saying it did not regulate fees and that platforms should listen to drivers.

The National Online Taxi Coalition wants ride-hailing firms to increase how much share drivers get for every trip and for the government to give special status for their terms of employment so they have more bargaining power over fees.

Australia

Schindler Lifts construction workers walk out in Queensland

Over 100 Electrical Trades Union members employed by Schindler Lifts in construction, installations, repairs and services walked off the job at 9 a.m. on August 22 in Brisbane, the Queensland capital, to demand higher pay. Nearly 100 percent of workers voted on August 9 to take strike action after nearly two months of negotiations reached deadlock.

Workers want industry-standard wages, conditions that align with other industry players and improved job security and sub-contractor clauses in the new agreement.

Brisbane Airport baggage handlers strike for pay rise

About 30 workers employed by Alstef Group, a baggage handling company, at Brisbane Airport struck for 24 hours on Monday to demand higher pay. Due to a combination of fog and the strike several incoming flights were diverted and 40 departure flights delayed.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members and Australian

Manufacturing Workers Union members rallied outside the airport at 6 a.m. The workers, who install and service baggage handling equipment, want higher pay than is being offered in Alstef's proposed enterprise agreement. A union spokesperson said further action including rolling stoppages would begin if workers' demands were not met.

Sydney Metro electricians fight for pay parity

About 20 ETU members employed by subcontractor Alstom at the new Sydney Metro rail commuter network began industrial action on Tuesday to demand pay parity with their colleagues employed directly by Metro Trains Sydney. The ETU claims that Alstom workers are paid \$10 an hour less but are doing the same job.

Industrial action includes a ban on pre-departure checks, overtime, and the shunting or driving of rolling stock. Workers are also opposing a proposed 24-hour roster cycle, which they say threatens their time with family and friends on weekends.

Qube dock workers prepare to extend industrial action

Workers from Qube Ports terminals at Port Kembla, Brisbane, Adelaide and Darwin are currently voting on whether to take protected industrial action in line with action being taken by their Maritime Union Australia (MUA) colleagues at the Port of Melbourne.

On August 16, MUA members at Qube's Melbourne terminal imposed bans and limitations, which includes delaying berthed ships for eight hours, not accepting shifts of less than eight hours, bans on shift extensions and other industrial measures. The MUA claims that Qube has rejected almost 100 percent of the workers' claims.

Public sector workers in Western Australia rally for pay rise and increased staffing

Over 800 Western Australian public sector workers rallied outside the Perth Cultural Centre on August 24 to demand wage rises, improved working conditions and increased staffing. The rally was part of a long-running campaign coordinated by the Public Sector Alliance of WA, a conglomeration of eight public sector unions covering health, education, child protection, firefighting, emergency and other services.

In July, 1,000 union members walked off the job after rejecting the government's wage rise offer of only 11.5 percent over three years, an effective pay cut compared to the rising cost of living. Workers are demanding wage rises that will address seven years of union-government deals that suppressed wages leaving public service wage rises well below cost-of-living increases.

Workers from critical government services, such as child protection and environment, are facing staff shortages, loss of skilled workers and are unable to fill vacancies because of the government's uncompetitive wages.

Workers want a 7 percent wage rise in the first year and 5 percent in the second year of a two-year agreement, and the trial of a four-day week. When finalised, the new agreement will replace multiple public sector enterprise agreements that expired on or after October 1, 2023.

Uber drivers in three Australian state capitals strike over pay cut

Hundreds of Uber drivers at airports in Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne went off-line on Monday to oppose Uber's slashing of fare scales. Drivers said this would see a 30 percent cut in fares in many locations.

One worker told the media that Uber was exploiting its drivers, knowing many had no alternative work. Drivers said the changes would make it impossible to earn a living. Many drivers already worked 12 hours a day but were living below the poverty line, with some forced to live in their cars.

The federal Labor government's new "Closing Loopholes" legislation, which came into effect on Monday, is meant to regulate minimum standards for workers on digital labour platforms. Uber drivers had expected a wage rise of up to \$5.39 per hour, or up to \$95 a week, but with Uber reducing its fares drivers say they would not see any wage increase.

Uber reported earnings of \$US1.4 billion before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation, for the first quarter of 2024.



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