

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.

India: Striking Hyundai workers arrested

Police arrested more than 200 striking workers occupying Hyundai Motors' Sriperumbudur plant in Chennai as the strike entered its second day on June 8. Management called in the police, complaining that the workers had declared a sit-in-strike, causing all production to cease. The Hyundai Motor India Employees Union (HMIEU) is calling for the reinstatement of 67 workers who were dismissed last year during a dispute over a new work agreement and union recognition.

Nearly 10,000 workers are employed in the Hyundai plant, which has a production capacity of around 50,000 units per month. The HMIEU says it has the support of around 1,200 permanent employees at the plant.

West Bengal tea workers strike

Tea workers in West Bengal's Siliguri District struck for a day on June 7 to demand a wage increase. Tea garden workers are paid only 67 rupees (\$US1.42) per day. Other demands included repair of their quarters and the re-opening of closed tea gardens. Last June, workers rallied in Siliguri against the closure of 14 tea gardens in the Terai-Doars region, which cost over 17,000 jobs.

Nearly 35,000 workers are employed in about 440 tea gardens in Terai-Doars region and the Darjeeling hills. Long-standing complaints include no sanitation in the tea gardens and the run-down state of the local hospital.

Karnataka health workers protest

Members of the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Workers Association protested at the District Health and Family Welfare Office in Udupi, Karnataka on June 8 to demand regular salaries and facilities. Under the Indian government's National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) nearly 50,000 ASHA workers are providing various health services in the state of Karnataka without a regular salary. Instead they are paid "incentives" for providing different services.

Other demands include making the NRHM a permanent program, job regularisation with a 1,000-rupee monthly salary plus allowances,

restrooms in primary health centres and social security.

Pakistani public sector workers demand salaries

Azim Workers Union members at the Pakistan Works Department (PWD) in Islamabad rallied at the Prime Minister's Secretariat and PWD office on June 8 to protest the non-payment of salaries since last year. Protesters warned they would observe a hunger strike if their demands are not accepted.

Pakistani doctors protest

Young doctors from various Lahore hospitals launched a protest and sit-in at the city's Assembly Hall on June 5. Demands included a pay rise, security for doctors during duty, a regular service structure and pay protection for recently regularised doctors. Doctors also want pay increases for house and medical officers, and an end to annual cuts to the health budget.

The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) and the Young Doctors Association (YDA) said they would continue the protest movement until the acceptance of their demands.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest for minimum wage increase

On June 6, the Bangladesh Garment Workers Unity Council, representing garment factory workers, rallied at the labour and employment ministry in Dhaka and handed a memorandum to the ministry with six demands. The demands include introducing trade unionism in garment factories, scrapping the government's proposed formation of an industrial police force and increasing the minimum wage from 1,662 taka (\$US24) per month to 5,000 taka (\$US71.50).

The seventh meeting of the Minimum Wage Board for the garment sector ended this week in deadlock, with employers offering to raise the minimum wage to just 1,989 taka, but workers' representatives are holding firm on their demand for 6,200 taka a month. The board will resume negotiations on June 21.

On less than \$1 a day, Bangladeshi garment workers are the lowest paid in the world and manufacturers do not want to lose that competitive advantage. An entry-level worker's monthly salary is \$90 in Vietnam and \$135 in India.

Australian sugar mill workers strike

Workers at seven Sucrogen sugar mills in Burdekin, Ingham and Mackay on Queensland's north coast struck for 24 hours on June 10 over a new work agreement. It was the second stoppage since May 31. Several unions, including the Australian Workers Union (AWU), the Australian Metal Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union, have proposed a "roll-over" enterprise agreement with a 10 percent annual pay increase. Sucrogen, an arm of the sugar giant CSR, has offered a 3.75 percent annual pay rise for two years in return for more control over the timing of rostered days off. Negotiations have been ongoing for over six months and are currently being supervised by the Fair Work Australia industrial tribunal.

AWU northern district secretary Rod Stockham admitted that throughout the past decade, while sugar prices had been low, unions had accepted only minimal gains and often zero increases.

Striking Queensland rail workers ordered back to work

Almost 1,000 Queensland Rail maintenance workers in Redbank and Townsville returned to work on June 9, half-way through a planned 48 hour strike, following orders from the Fair Work Australia tribunal. Workers were protesting the state Labor government's plan to sell Queensland Rail's (QR) coal and freight arms, despite polls showing that 85 per cent of Queensland people are opposed to the sell-off.

After an earlier protest in March against the planned \$15 billion sale of public assets, including QR, forestry and ports, Premier Anna Bligh declared that the government would not be deterred by industrial action and was determined to proceed.

Australian community workers rally for equal pay

The Australian Services Union convened protests in 17 locations across Australia on June 10 to demand equal pay for women in the non-government community services sector. The union is conducting a case in the Fair Work Australia tribunal seeking a 25 percent pay increase that will cover about 200,000 mostly female workers. For years the unions have allowed workers in the sector to be among the lowest paid in the country.

New Zealand: Rail workers protest loss of work

Around 100 workers from the government-owned KiwiRail Hillside workshops in Dunedin rallied in the city on June 8 to protest the government's decision to prohibit Hillside from tendering for a \$500m contract to build electric trains for Auckland. The Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) said KiwiRail is planning to outsource the work to overseas. However, the RMTU is not opposing the outsourcing but demanding that some of the subcontracting work be completed at Hillside.

Papua New Guinea university staff strike

Members of the National Academic Staff Association and the Non-Academic National Staff Association at the University of Goroka in PNG's Eastern Highlands walked off the job last week. They protested the inclusion of the university's ex-vice-chancellor Dr Gairo Onagi and a sidelined top management team (TMT) on a committee to investigate the alleged misuse of finances and what the unions claim is a discriminatory selection process for new students.

Onagi and two pro-vice chancellors stepped aside in March following an eight-week boycott by staff and students over alleged mismanagement. Striking staff, fearing a cover-up, want the newly appointed vice-chancellor Benias Sabumei and the TMT to resign.

Census coordinators withhold data

Twenty-two census coordinators in PNG's Chimbu province are demanding that their full allowance be paid before they hand over housing listings and council ward mappings to the 2010 provincial census coordinator. A spokesman for the group alleged that the National Census Office also underpaid them for attending an induction workshop in April. He told the media that the coordinators would destroy the listings and mappings if they are not paid soon.

Meanwhile, census workers in the Morobe district claim they have not been paid wages or allowances for their work in preparation for the June 11 census. Tukari Zozingao, a supervisor for the Huon Gulf district, said the preparatory work was undertaken without any logistic and financial support and they had to resort to borrowing, expecting to be paid on completion of the work.

General strike in French Polynesia over austerity program

On June 10, thousands of workers responded to a call by French Polynesia's 11 largest unions to strike to protest the government's austerity programs. A spokesman for the union group called Collective for Peace said 9,000 jobs had been lost in two years, the economy was about to collapse, public service pensions were being cut and soon 70,000 people in French Polynesia would be below the poverty line. The collective wants fewer redundancies, secure pensions, political stability and for France to honour its commitment to provide compensation for victims of radiation exposure during nuclear weapons tests.



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