

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: Lockout at Maruti Suzuki auto plant

Over 920 regular workers at Maruti Suzuki India (MSI), India's largest auto manufacturer, have been locked out at its Manesar plant in Haryana since Monday for refusing to sign a "good conduct" bond. MSI claimed an unannounced go-slow by assembly line workers had caused production losses and affected quality control. Around 1,500 casual workers have been ordered to report to their respective contractors, and apprentices have been put on leave.

The alleged industrial action followed suspension of 26 workers, after a 13-day strike in June. The locked out workers claim that the suspensions were revenge for the June action. The suspended and dismissed workers included office-bearers of the Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU), a new union that led workers during the June walkout.

Around 2,000 workers struck on June 4 over union recognition and job security for contract workers. Isolated by India's two peak union bodies, the All India Trade Union Congress and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, the workers eventually succumbed to company and government pressure and returned to work. Maruti Suzuki agreed to reinstate 11 employees sacked during the strike, but refused to accede to the main demand for a new labour union and instead said it would form a "governing council" with workers' representatives.

The plant, which produces models such as Swift, DZiRE and SX4, has moved all non-automated production work from the plant to its sister plant in Gurgaon.

Punjab health workers protest

Around 30 contracted multipurpose health workers at the Ludhiana Civil Hospital held protests on three consecutive days, starting on August 26, to demand regularisation. Contract Multipurpose Health Workers' (Female) Union members began with a sit-in hunger strike at the hospital and on the following days held a street protest and then a temporary road blockade and mock begging. Money raised was handed to the health minister to symbolically protest the government's claim to have no funds.

A union official said the health workers were fed up with the government's false promises and that if the minister failed to publish a list of workers to be regularised in 20 days that there would be indefinite strike action.

Assam workers protest for revision of pension scheme

Government workers led by the Assam unit of the Centre of India Trade Union (CITU) rallied outside the Regional Provident Fund Organisation in Guwahati on August 26 in protest against low pensions. According to CITU, a third of retired workers in Assam are receiving monthly pensions below 500 rupees (\$US10.86) and over 80 percent get less than 1,000 rupees. The workers are demanding the government increase pensions.

Karnataka rural health workers protest

Karnataka Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) Workers Association members rallied outside the state office of the Deputy Collector in Udipi on August 30 to demand revised pay recommendations and outstanding salaries. The recommendations, which were approved in July, include monthly salary payments and social security. They also want regular payment of travel expenses, bus passes and mobile phones.

ASHAs are local women trained to act as health educators and promoters in their communities. Their tasks include encouraging women to give birth in hospitals, bringing children to immunisation clinics, encouraging family planning, treating basic illness and injury with first aid, keeping demographic records, and improving village sanitation.

Gujarat firefighters walk out

Firefighters at the Ahmedabad Fire and Emergency Services station walked off the job on Sunday to protest unsafe living quarters. The strike was sparked when one side of a home on the fire station premises collapsed. Firefighters blamed years of neglect and inadequate maintenance.

Demonstrations continue in Korea over shipyard sackings

Over 5,000 demonstrators held separate rallies throughout central Seoul on Saturday and Sunday to oppose the mass layoff of 400 workers by Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction (HHIC) at their shipyard on Busan Island. Over 9,000 police were deployed to restrict the demonstrations. Before dispersing, the protestors united and rallied outside the HHIC Seoul office on Sunday to demand reinstatement of all

sacked workers. Police used water cannon to bring an early end to the protest.

The rallies were the fourth in a long-running campaign called “Hope Buses for a World without Layoffs and Temporary Work”. The first three were centred on the HHIC shipyard in Busan, where a local union official has been occupying a 35-metre high crane since December, in defiance of a Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) directive for workers to end the dispute. The shipyard has not been fully operational since December when industrial action over the layoffs began.

Indonesian retail workers demonstrate

At least 500 workers at Carrefour, one of Indonesia’s largest retail outlets, demonstrated at its Jakarta store last Saturday to demand an improved contract and the revoking of penalties against union officials.

According to a Carrefour Indonesia Workers Union (CIWU) organiser, the supermarket chain has been suspending union members during work contract negotiations. Carrefour is Europe’s largest retailer and the biggest operator of hypermarkets in Indonesia.

Queensland bus drivers strike

Long-running pay disputes between the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and bus companies covering Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and Redland Shire escalated into three separate 24-hour stoppages on Thursday. Surfside Busline, Veolia and Sunbus services were all affected.

The TWU allowed bus companies to implement Saturday timetables and maintain school bus services during the walkout. The avoidance of a full-scale strike was to safeguard contract payments from Translink, which is responsible for providing public transport in Queensland. Earlier in the month Translink threatened to stop payments to Sunbus after it locked out its drivers and suspended all services.

Sunbus and Surfside Busline drivers want 4 percent annual pay rises over three years in new work agreements, with current entitlements maintained. Veolia drivers want 5 percent annual pay increases to bring them on par with other drivers and a 7.6 hour day. The disputes have been ongoing for over six months.

New South Wales outback nurses impose work bans

Cobar Hospital nurses in western New South Wales imposed work bans on August 26 to protest staff shortages. A NSW Nurses Association official said members were concerned over excessive workloads and decided to follow the award and take meal breaks and claim all overtime worked. Two six-hour shifts were withdrawn last week because of staff shortages. The Western Local Health District management has begun negotiating with the nurses over proposals that will be put to the association next week.

Victorian milk processing workers reach agreement

About 200 maintenance workers and boiler attendants at six Murray Goulburn milk processing plants in Victoria ended industrial action on Wednesday after endorsing an in-principle agreement reached between the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the company for a new work agreement. The new agreement provided a 13.5 percent wage increase in installments over three years, improved redundancy payments and an increase to the payment covering out-of-hours callbacks. Other existing entitlements were retained.

Workers walked off the job on August 18 for 24 hours and imposed work-bans in protest against Murray Goulburn’s attack on employment conditions and its attempt to introduce a two-tier agreement with new employees on seven-day shifts to be paid \$100 a week less than current employees on same shift rosters.

New Zealand technical college teachers walk out

Tertiary Education Union (TEU) members at the Wellington Institute of Technology (Weltec) walked off the job on August 29 against plans to increase working hours and reduce conditions. Weltec wants to increase staff weekly duty hours and remove all discretionary leave from new staff. It also wants to impose new rules on how staff can use their discretionary leave and demand employees work any hours between 7.00 am and 9.30 pm Monday to Sunday.

The TEU claimed victory in an 8-month wage dispute with Weltec in a deal for a new work agreement that delivered a 1.5 percent annualised pay increase—well below the annual inflation rate of 4 percent. Teachers’ main concern, however, was significant changes in working hours. The union and Weltec management convinced the teachers that a working party would investigate “enhanced productivity.”

Solomon Islands public sector employees end strike

After two days of strike action by doctors, nurses, paramedics and teachers in a wage dispute, public sector union members returned to work following negotiations with government department heads and the prime minister. Previous negotiations failed because several department heads and the prime minister refused to attend.

A Solomon Islands National Teachers Association (SINTA) official claimed that the return to work came after the government agreed that to withdraw its referral of the dispute to the Trades Dispute Panel and agreed that all future negotiations would involve all departmental heads and a representative of the prime minister.

In March the public sector unions called for an 11.5 percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) and Long and Dedicated Service Benefit (LSB). The government responded with a 2 percent increase offer, which the unions rejected.



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