

Thousands of beedi cigarette workers strike in India, Sri Lankan tea plantation workers demand higher pay, South Korea finance workers plan national walkout

## Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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### India: Beedi cigarette workers strike indefinitely in Mangalore

Over 200,000 beedi cigarette workers strike in Mangalore after walking out on August 7 for higher piece rates. The workers, who are members of the Centre for Indian Trade Unions Beedi Workers Federation, are only paid 190 rupees (\$US2.72) for 1,000 beedis rolled. The Communist Party (Marxist)-controlled union has only asked for a 20-rupee pay increase, which would take the rate to just 210 rupees per 1,000 beedis.

The poverty stricken beedi rollers, who are mainly women, are only employed for three days a week. They are demanding payment of the state-mandated minimum wage and a dearness allowance. These long outstanding demands have been rejected by the Karnataka state government. Beedi Workers Federation leaders have threatened mass protests if the government does grant the union's demands.

### India: Transport workers protest in Punjab

Punjab Roadways and PUNbus contract workers held a protest march on August 14 to demand abolition of second- and third-tier wages for PUNbus employees, permanent jobs and an end to the use private buses on state roads.

The contract workers have struck six times this year, forcing about 1,200 PUNbuses off the road during the walkouts. The protesting workers said they would wear black armbands to work and strike on September 10 if their demands are not met. The demonstration was organised by Punjab Roadways/Punbus Contractor Union.

### Contract sanitation workers on strike in Odisha, India

About 100 contract sanitation workers remain on strike at the Sonepur Municipality in Odisha state to demand pensions, provident fund payments and other benefits.

Even though the contractor and the municipal council are supposed to contribute 50 percent apiece towards a provident fund, the council is not paying its share. "We are forced to resort to agitation because the

municipal authority has not contributed its share to our provident fund," one worker told the media. Garbage is not piling up in 11 wards in Sonepur city.

### India: Construction workers in Kakinda demand better working conditions

Several hundred construction workers in Kakinda, one of the largest cities in Andhra Pradesh, have been holding a sit-down protest outside the Deputy Commissioner of Labour's office since August 10. They are demanding the government pay a range of benefits to construction workers.

The protest was called by the Kakinada Construction Workers Union, which is affiliated to the Indian Federation of Trade Unions.

The building workers want the provision of a Provident Fund and Employee State Insurance benefits, 1 million rupees accident insurance, a 100,000-rupee marriage incentive and a 100,000-rupee maternity benefit to female construction workers. The protesting workers have submitted a memorandum with their demands to labour department authorities.

### Sri Lankan tea plantation workers strike for wage increase

Almost 2,000 tea plantation workers from Waverly and Glasgow estates in Sri Lanka's central province went on strike and held a protest on August 14 in support of two plantation workers undertaking a hunger strike. The tea plantation workers want a pay rise and other demands.

The main unions covering Sri Lankan plantation workers are the Ceylon Workers Congress, National Union of Workers and the Up Country Peoples Front.

The strikers, who picketed the Dayagma-Talawakelle Road, are demanding the basic daily wage be increased from 500 rupees to 1,000 rupees. The hunger strikers—Karupaijah Tharmalingam and Suppaijah Sathiyenthira—began their fast on August 11.

## **Pakistan: Council workers strike in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) workers in Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, held a pen-down strike on August 8 to demand the immediate payment of outstanding wages for July. The Municipal Workers Union called off the strike on Sunday after the administration agreed to pay the outstanding amounts.

TMA authorities have said the necessary money would be deducted from its development fund. Frequent and prolonged delays in payment of wages and dues are a common problem for federal and provincial government workers and contract employees.

## **Bangladesh garment workers demonstrate for salaries and festival bonus**

Hundreds of garment workers rallied on Friday outside the National Press Club in the capital Dhaka to demand payment of the Eid festival bonus, last month's salaries and an 18,000-taka (\$US243) minimum monthly wage for all garment workers.

The workers, who were organised by the Garments Sramik Front, marched along different city roads after the rally, demanding that they be paid seven days before Eid festival, which is observed on August 22 or 23.

## **South Korean finance workers vote for mass strike**

Workers employed in South Korea's financial sector have voted overwhelmingly for an industry-wide strike next month.

The stoppage will involve up to 100,000 workers, including from major firms such as KB Kookmin, KEB Hana and Woori Banks. Around 93 percent of unionised workers voted for the action. It will be the first such action in the sector since the introduction of a performance-based pay system two years ago.

The strike is over employer resistance to the official implementation of a recently introduced shorter work week. The regulation calls on companies with more than 300 employees to limit maximum working hours to 40, plus 12 hours of overtime, down from the previous 68 hours.

The financial union claims companies continue to require employees to work an average 52.4 hours per week. Half of them are forced to do night overtime every day.

## **Chinese workers protest at Jasic Technology**

Workers at Jasic Technology, an electronics manufacturer in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, continued their public protests last week in a bid to have their union officially recognised. Twenty-nine workers have been arrested during the course of the dispute and seven sacked.

On August 6, student members of Utopia, a Maoist grouping in the Chinese Communist Party, joined rallying workers to demand the unconditional release of workers from police custody. The students called for the punishment of security and police who previously threatened workers.

## **Hong Kong bus drivers protest over pay dispute**

Bus workers staged an impromptu strike Tuesday morning at a busy terminus in Sha Tin. They were protesting a paltry pay rise by the company, which failed to meet the Motor Transport Workers General Union's demands.

Kowloon Motor Bus Co. (KMB) increased salaries by 5 percent after the seventh round of negotiations Monday, but fell short of workers' calls for a 5.5 percent increase.

The protest disrupted traffic near the Sha Tin Central Bus Terminus for 30 minutes. Forty members of the KMB union participated, including bus drivers and station supervisors.

## **Aurizon train crews campaign for wage increase**

Train crews at Aurizon's coal haulage operations in New South Wales (NSW) have begun a campaign of industrial action in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. It involves limited work stoppages and bans.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) is demanding a 3 percent per annum wage increase, barely above the company's offer of a paltry 2.5 percent. Workers have voiced opposition to the push for camera monitoring equipment in locomotive cabs and driver only operations.

The campaign includes crews at depots in Mayfield and Antiene in the NSW Hunter Valley and Quirindi in the state's North West Slopes, which provide coal haulage services to mines in those areas.

## **North Queensland council workers strike for pay increase**

Around 350 workers at the Cairns Regional Council in Northern Queensland are taking industrial action in a dispute for new enterprise agreements.

The workers, who are members of the Australian Workers Union, the Services Union and the Transport Workers Union, held a brief stop work in April this year over the same issue and rallied outside the council chambers.

The unions have called for a 4.5 percent pay increase backdated to the expiry of the last agreements. Workers have rejected the council's pay offer of just 2.5 percent.

## **Unions end industrial action at NPA print plant in Melbourne**

Three unions covering about 120 workers at Printing Australia (NPA) in Melbourne called off all industrial action this week and pushed through a sellout enterprise agreement that does not meet the original pay claim. The unions had restricted industrial action at the plant over the last three months to limited work bans.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), the Electrical Trades Union and the Finance Sector Union had initially demanded a 3.5 percent per annum increase. The unions' deal, however, only provides for

a 2.5 percent rise.

AMWU assistant state secretary Tony Piccolo admitted to the media that cosmetic changes to domestic violence and casual conversion provisions were aimed at making the reduced pay offer, which barely keeps pace with the official rate of inflation, “more palatable.”

The company is owned by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) and is responsible for producing banknotes for Australia and other countries, along with the polymer sections of Australian passports.

The First Union cancelled further strikes planned for the rest of this week and said they would continue negotiations with the company.



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### **BlueScope steel workers take action in New Zealand and Australia**

Workers at BlueScope Pacific steel in Auckland, New Zealand, struck for 24 hours on August 15. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) says its Port Kembla members will vote to strike later this month.

The Australian-based BlueScope, which also operates throughout the Asia-Pacific region, has more than doubled its profits in the last year, primarily by cutting hundreds of jobs. In 2015 the company threatened to close its Port Kembla plant in Australia if workers did not accept a wage freeze.

Workers in Australia and New Zealand have been in negotiations for a pay rise for the last five months. The AWU says workers want a 10 percent pay rise, but the company has only offered 7.5 percent and a \$1,500 bonus. New Zealand's E t? union says their workers were offered the same. Workers in Auckland voted to strike after the company withdrew an offer from the union on August 10. Workers have also banned overtime since then.

Neither the AWU nor E t? have coordinated trans-Tasman industrial action to fight for the company.

### **New Zealand quarry workers' strike ends with new pay deal**

First Union have ended industrial action by 14 quarry workers at Atlas Quarry in Northland. It follows a lockout imposed by the company from August 6 to August 12. Negotiations with the company have dragged on for over 10 months.

The union announced on Tuesday that a deal had been reached offering a \$2–\$4 wage increase, putting workers in line with the “market rate.” At \$22 per hour, this puts some workers just \$1.45 above the supposed “living wage” of \$20.55.

Truck drivers, who work up to 88 hours a week, also demanded a reduction in hours. The union announced that workers will receive overtime rates for weekends and “agreed hours of work” but provided no details to the media.

### **New Zealand: Second strike by bus drivers in Hamilton**

Around 120 Go Bus drivers in Hamilton went on strike from 5 a.m. to midnight on Tuesday to demanding better pay and working conditions. The Go Bus drivers in Hamilton and Te Awamutu struck earlier this year.

According to the First Union, the drivers are only paid as little as \$17.35, with the top rate at \$19. The minimum wage is \$16.50. Go Bus is offering a 75 cent increase to the top rate. Drivers also complained that buses were poorly maintained and unsafe to drive.