

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

22 April 2022

## South Korea: Webzen online game workers to strike

The union representing around 600 workers at the online game production company Webzen demonstrated in front of the company's offices in Bundang, in the Seoul Capital Area, to announce a walkout on May 2 as part of the workers' struggle for higher pay.

Webzen and the union began negotiations in December but reached a deadlock and negotiations ended. The union said it will only re-enter talks if management improves its offer.

The union first demanded a 16 percent rise, an increase of 10 million won (\$8,100) in the annual salary of all employees. Management offered only an average 10 percent increase, depending on the personnel evaluation of individual employees. The union then withdrew its demand for an average 16 percent rise and demanded an instant cash handout of 2 million won for everyone. The company said that the cash handout depended on individual grades. The union rejected that offer.

According to an internal union survey, the median annual salary was about 47 million won, which the group says is 10 million won lower than the average in the game industry.

The union claims that Webzen employees generate 100 billion won in operating profits annually, allowing the company last month to set the remuneration limit for six executives at 10 billion won. Webzen is mostly known for Mu Online, a massively popular 3D multiplayer online role-playing game.

## South Korean commuter bus drivers vote to strike

Public transport bus drivers in several major Korean cities have voted to strike on April 26 if wage negotiations with management fail. Drivers demonstrated outside the Transportation Centre on Thursday waving placards denouncing an ongoing wage freeze.

The Seoul Bus Union said 15,800 of its 18,000 members voted on Wednesday to strike. Some 98 percent of buses that run in Seoul will be affected.

## Cambodian garment workers protest sudden factory closure

Around 300 workers from the Canteran Apparel factory in Phnom Penh's Por Sen Chey district demonstrated outside their factory in Trapeang Thleung village on Tuesday following closure of the factory without notice.

Workers said they discovered that the factory was being closed after

returning from visiting relatives for the Khmer New Year. All the plant's sewing equipment had been removed along with a large generator.

One worker said that factory authorities had signed a contract on April 6 stating that they would not close the plant. They now fear that the factory owners will disappear without paying severance entitlements.

The district governor became involved after the protest spilled onto the road blocking traffic. He convinced workers to end the protest saying a meeting would be arranged at the Town Hall that would include the workers, factory owner and the government.

## India: Tamil Nadu government medical college technicians demand reinstatement

Sacked technicians who were working temporarily at the Government Mohan Kumaramangalam Medical College Hospital in Salem, Tamil Nadu protested in front of the Collectorate on Tuesday to demand reinstatement and permanent jobs. The temporary technicians were recruited during the first peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Protesters demanded the government issue a list of vacancies of technicians across the state with experienced technicians considered and preference given to those who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Karnataka arts university non-teaching staff demand wages

Non-teaching staff at the Dr Gangubai Hangal Music and Performing Arts University in Mysuru, Karnataka state began a hunger strike on Tuesday to demand payment of pending salaries and job permanency. Workers said they have not been paid for the last 10 months.

The workers have been demonstrating outside the university for the past two months. They claim that there are 21 temporary non-teaching staff at the university who were appointed after securing approval from the University Syndicate ten years ago.

## Puducherry auto-rickshaw drivers protest high fees

Auto-rickshaw drivers protested near the Puducherry Road Transport Office (RTO) against the huge fee increase for vehicle fitness certificates on Tuesday. They said that the pandemic-induced economic slowdown and recent petrol price hikes had severely impacted on their livelihood.

They denounced the silence of the Modi government and the territorial

administration about the recent increases in petrol prices. They complained that the Puducherry government had failed to constitute a welfare board for auto-rickshaw drivers.

### **Kerala water utility workers demand a wage increase**

Kerala Water Authority (KWA) workers began a five-day protest and demonstrated outside the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram on April 18 to demand a pay rise. The Kerala Water Authority Employees Union claimed workers have been denied their rights and allowances. Workers have accused Secretariat officials of “playing spoilsport” in delaying implementation of the pay revision for KWA employees.

### **Tamil Nadu refuse collection workers in Salem protest against corruption**

Conservancy (refuse collection) workers protested outside the Salem City Municipal Corporation office on Monday to demand payment of outstanding salaries and for action to be taken against corrupt sanitary officials. The workers said they had not been paid for two months.

Workers alleged that sanitary inspectors and supervisors were demanding job retention bribes or not to transferring them to different wards. They also claimed that only a few workers were being deployed to the Kondalampatti and Hasthampatti zone ward, while the work required 25 to 30 workers twice a day.

Conservancy workers also allege that sanitary officials were demanding bribes of 5,000 rupees (\$US65) to 10,000-rupees, as well as payment for issuing birth and death certificates and to forge attendance records.

### **Childcare workers in Delhi protest for higher wages**

Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union members demonstrated and surrounded the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department office in Delhi on April 18 demanding the release of pending honorarium and on time payment. WCD officials met with workers' representatives and assured payment of arrears within a week.

The anganwadi (childcare) workers also alleged that the central and state governments were dismissing workers for their involvement in their indefinite strike for higher pay which began on January 31.

The workers ended that strike, which involved thousands of workers, on March 14, after the government imposed its anti-strike Essential Services Maintenance Act. Over 1,000 workers were terminated during the strike.

There are about 10,700 anganwadi centres and 20,000 anganwadi workers and helpers in Delhi. The current monthly honorarium for anganwadi workers and helpers is 9,678 rupees (\$US128) and 4,839 rupees respectively, apart from minor incentive payments for selected programmes. Strikers were demanding a monthly wage of 25,000 rupees (\$US330) for anganwadi workers and 20,000 rupees for helpers.

### **Gujarat teachers demand reinstatement of old pension scheme**

Teachers protested on April 14 in various districts across Gujarat, including Panchmahals, Chhota Udepur, Vadodara, and Narmada, to demand reinstatement of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) which was withdrawn in December 2003. Teachers submitted a memorandum to members of parliament in their respective constituencies.

The teachers have threatened more protests if the OPS is not restored. The old scheme did not require a 10 percent contribution from employees' salaries. Under the new scheme families do not receive any benefits in the event of an untimely death by a teacher.

### **Pakistan: Islamabad bank workers protest extension of working hours**

Workers from government banks in Islamabad protested in the city on April 8 to demand a return to traditional business hours. On the orders of Pakistan's incoming federal government, the State Bank of Pakistan directed its branches to observe a six-day working week with extended opening hours. Saturday, which was formerly a holiday, is now a working day and branches must open at 8 a.m.

The new policy is a signal to investors and international lenders, especially the International Monetary Fund, of the government's willingness to further attack working conditions and intensify exploitation.

### **Bangladeshi garment workers protest pay cut**

Fifty-nine Bangladeshi garment workers from the Yong Jin International factory in Ashulia protested on April 16 to demand an end to a 50 percent pay cut and for payment of lost wages.

The factory authorities justified the cut saying that workers had ignored a directive to not wear the hijab or burqa during work on safety grounds. This was a directive that factory authorities knew could not be observed.

Monthly wages were reduced from 10,000 taka (\$US116) to 12,000 taka to just 5,000 to 6,000 taka. After discussions with the Chinese factory owner, he agreed to compensate for the reduced wages, as well as full payment of salaries and bonuses.

### **Bangladeshi garment workers demand unpaid wages and festival bonus**

About 100 garment workers from several factories in Ashulia demonstrated on April 14 to demand pay in arrears, the basic festival bonus and their full salaries before April 20. Organised by the Bangladesh Revolutionary Garments Workers Federation, the workers formed a human chain in front of the Ashulia's Sreepur bus stand.

The state minister for labour and employment had recently directed factory owners to pay the first 15 days' salary for April. Protesters said rising commodity prices meant they could not properly celebrate Ramadan.

### **Seven West Media lifts ten-week lockout at Western Australia print facility**

Seven West Media (SWM), which owns the West Australian Newspaper print facility in Perth, Western Australia, lifted its ten-week lockout of 102 workers at the facility on Monday. The lockout was lifted because the company was having difficulty maintaining production with scab labour.

The indefinite lockout began on February 7 after a one-hour strike by the workers who had rejected the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) immediately directed the locked-out workers to return and restore production.

The AMWU members are fighting to for a pay rise and to defend existing working conditions. SWM's proposed deal, which workers had rejected three times, would strip away current redundancy entitlements and attack wages and conditions.

Despite SWM workers' wages being frozen for more than two years, the union is only seeking 2 percent sub-inflation annual wage increases, an effective pay cut. The workers have not had an increase for two and a half years, following a deal between the AMWU and SWM management to extend the current expired agreement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The AMWU is re-entering negotiations with SWM without giving any assurance to the returning workers that a pay increase is in sight.

### **Cleanaway waste disposal workers in Victoria strike again**

Waste disposal truck drivers from the Cleanaway Operations depot at Tullamarine in Victoria walked off the job for two hours on Tuesday in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The action by 20 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members followed a two-hour stoppage last week.

According to the union, the workers have not had a pay increase for nearly two years and Cleanaway wants to trade off conditions in return for a wage increase. Cleanaway wants to end the probationary period limit for new workers and make it indefinite and to not pay wages during training. The workers have voted to take further strike action.

### **New Zealand allied health workers vote to strike in May**

Ten thousand health and disability professionals in New Zealand public hospitals have voted overwhelmingly to strike in May. The results of the strike ballot were released by the Public Services Association (PSA) at the same time that a government pay equity deal with the Nurses Association broke down.

The health workforce, which includes over 70 different occupations, will work to rule from May 9 to 20, and hold a 24-hour strike on May 16. The work-to-rule involves not working extra unpaid hours and taking all entitled breaks. This action could be scaled up to include paid overtime and on-call duties. During the 24-hour strike elective surgeries are likely to be affected.

The vote comes after 18 months of waiting for district health boards (DHBs) to "table a decent offer to settle their collective agreement," according to the PSA. Many workers earn barely above the minimum wage, now \$21.20 an hour.

A planned strike in March was called off by the PSA after DHBs took the union to the Employment Court and the strike was ruled illegal because it related to a pay equity claim being negotiated separately. The PSA has removed any reference to pay equity from its claim to avoid a second injunction.

### **Air New Zealand suspends cabin crew over rolling strikes**

Air New Zealand management have responded to rolling strike action by cabin staff by "selectively targeting" 44 striking workers and suspending them from duties. Some striking crew have been suspended for six days and are not being paid, the E Tu union said.

The strike coincides with the Easter holiday period and New Zealand's border opening to Australians this week, and to travellers from visa-waiver countries from May 1.

The 44 cabin crew leaders were striking for better conditions for crew that had returned to work after a period of redundancy during the pandemic. Over 800 staff were either furloughed or laid off during the last two years. Many of the returning workers are only paid about the minimum wage, now \$21.20 an hour.

A company spokesperson said there had been rolling strike action over 37 days since March 7. It has included a ban on training, recording results and signing off the training of other employees. More than 100 training and sign-off events had been disrupted.

Air NZ claims it has made a pay offer of a 4 percent increase in year one and 3.5 percent in year two for all new and returned crew. This is well below the rate of inflation which is forecast to top 7 percent by mid-year. It has also made two awards of \$1,000 worth of shares or cash and \$1,400 cash in the past seven months.

A Givealittle donation page to support striking workers has attracted several thousand dollars in donations.



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