

Workers Struggle: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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

India: Uttar Pradesh social health workers strike India: Sanitation workers in Chennai on indefinite strike for permanent jobs

Hundreds of accredited social health activists (ASHA) workers and helpers (Sanginis) demonstrated in Lucknow, the Uttar Pradesh capital, on June 14 and gathered outside the Vidhan Sabha (legislative assembly) building. ASHA workers from across the state joined the protest which was organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions.

A delegation of workers submitted a memo of ten demands to the chief minister's office calling for ASHA workers assigned to COVID-19 duty to be classified as frontline workers and all workers engaged in pandemic management be provided with protective gear.

Other demands include five million rupees insurance cover for all frontline workers who died on duty, coverage of medical expenses for COVID-19 treatment for their families, additional COVID-19 risk allowance of 10,000 rupees (\$US128) per month and distribution of other outstanding payments. They also demanded a wage increase and state-government employees to be upgraded.

Indian workers demand reopening of National Textile Corporation mills

Hundreds of textile workers protested in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu and other parts of India on Tuesday to demand the reopening of National Textile Corporation (NTC) mills across the country. Workers in nine states, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Karnataka and Kerala, participated in the demonstrations.

The NTC was incorporated in 1968 to manage the production of private sector mills to be nationalised by the Indian government under the Sick Textile Undertakings (Nationalisation) Act 1974. By 1995, the corporation took control of 119 mills but under a so-called rationalisation program it closed 77 of these manufacturing facilities.

Tamil Nadu power station workers protest in Neyveli

Neyveli Lignite Corporation Tamil Nadu Thermal Power Station

workers demonstrated outside the plant's main entrance on June 14 to demand basic amenities. Workers said that there was no proper canteen or dining hall at the facility.

The workers also called for safe drinking water facilities, toilets near the workplace for female workers, properly equipped first-aid boxes at all places and a two-wheeler parking bay with shade. In addition, they complained that those employees who worked for six days were not given a paid day's holiday or religious festivals and other national holidays.

The protest was organised by members of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions who alleged that a court decision directing management to provide contract workers with interim relief was being delayed by legal appeals.

Tamil Nadu: Sanitation workers in Chennai on indefinite strike

Over 1,900 sanitation workers walked out and protested outside the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) head office on June 8 demanding to be made permanent. The workers ended an earlier protest after the administration falsely promised to resolve the issue. The sanitation workers said they will maintain their protest indefinitely.

Tamil Nadu Ration Shop workers end week-long strike

Unions representing Ration Shop workers across Tamil Nadu called off a week of protests and strikes on June 10 claiming the government had given "assurances" it would settle the dispute.

The major unions involved included the state government's Labour Progressive Front, the All India Trade Union Congress, the Centre for India Trade Unions and several other unions.

Workers want a 31 percent increase in the dearness allowance, in line with other state government employees and renewal of earned leave provisions. The current ruling DMK state government promised it would grant these demands during the last state election campaign.

Government-audited Ration Shops (or Fair Price Shops) employ 1.2 million workers as part of a public distribution system of fixed priced essential commodities available to eligible card holders in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu retired workers demand payment of dearness allowance

Retired workers organised by the Pensioners Association protested near the Collectorate building in Madurai on June 13 to demand payment of the dearness allowance, which includes a three percent increase and is due to be provided on January 1, 2022.

Although the dearness allowance was suspended for two years due to COVID-19, the Tamil Nadu state government had not yet paid it even though the national government had done so. Protesters also demanded that the health insurance scheme cover more ailments and that the list of specified hospitals in the scheme be expanded.

Punjab: Tarn Taran municipal sanitation workers protest over delayed wages

Tarn Taran Municipal Council sanitation workers held a sit-down protest (Dharna) inside the council complex on June 10 over the non-payment of salaries for the last three months. They demanded that arrears for their increased salaries be released and all temporary, contract and daily wage workers be made permanent. The protesters said they would intensify their action if they were not soon paid their outstanding salaries.

Centaur Hotel employees in Jammu and Kashmir demand job security

Centaur Hotel workers in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir protested in the hotel premises on June 10 to demand job security. The action was organised by the Centaur Hotel Employees Union and the Employees Joint Action Committee.

The state government is in dispute with the Hotel Corporation of India, which operates the facility, over a violation of its lease agreement.

On May 25, the Jammu and Kashmir government served notice on the employees, directing them to vacate the premises within 45 days. On Tuesday, the government took possession of the hotel and sealed the gates of the building, making 160 employees jobless. The workers are demanding they be re-employed when the hotel is reopened under new management.

Sanitation workers in Noida, a Delhi satellite city, on strike

Over 2,800 contract sanitation workers in Noida, a satellite industrial city of Delhi, have been on strike since June 12 to demand a 17,600-rupee (\$US225) monthly wage, equal pay for equal work, including for sweepers and cleaners of public toilets.

They also want holidays on all Sundays and at major festivals, a Diwali (holiday) bonus, an emergency leave allowance, reinstatement of workers that had been dismissed because of leave, and a million-rupee compensation if workers die on duty.

The strike was called by the Akhil Bhartiya Safai Mazdoor Congress (ABSMC). An ABSMC spokesperson said the workers had been fighting for these demands for several years. Many had been employed on contract at poverty-level wages with no entitlements for close to 20 years.

South Korean pharmaceutical company workers threaten to strike

The union representing workers from Sanofi Aventis Korea, a medical equipment and drugs supplier, has threatened to call a strike next month after failing to reach an agreement with company management on a pay rise. Management is refusing to pay more than a 1.5 percent increase. The union originally demanded 7.6 percent but after eight rounds of failed negotiations and mediation reduced its demand to just 4 percent.

The union reported that Sanofi sales had increased by 7 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is currently suing the company for failing to pay four workers overtime allowances totalling 11 million won (\$US8,600).

Shell offshore LNG production workers in Western Australia extend strike

About 160 maintenance workers at Shell's Prelude floating LNG production platform in Western Australia have been holding rolling stoppages and work bans since June 10 in a dispute over pay. The workers, who are currently employed on individual contracts, have decided to extend their 12-day limited rolling strikes to 19 days.

The workers are represented by the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Offshore Alliance (OA), which consists of the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union.

The OA and ETU have been negotiating an enterprise agreement with Shell since December 2020. Shell initially rejected the unions' request to negotiate an agreement in June 2020.

The unions have said they want nothing less than Tier 1 rates and conditions to bring workers in line with industry standards. They want a ban on Shell outsourcing jobs to contractors on lower rates of pay than received by directly employed workers doing the same job. The new enterprise agreement will cover about 230 workers.

BlueCare workers in Queensland strike again

United Workers Union (UWU) members from one of Queensland's largest aged care providers BlueCare walked off the job on Monday over a company pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. It followed a strike on May 30 over the same issue.

The UWU said BlueCare management, after nine months of negotiations, had offered an "increase" that was in reality a real pay cut and was rejected by members. The "offer" included 2 percent annual pay increases in a two-year agreement, with the first increase effective in December but with no back pay. The official national consumer price index is currently 5.1 percent.

The "not-for-profit" BlueCare is owned by the Uniting Church. The UWU claims that BlueCare, according to its last annual report, gave its executives a 30 percent pay increase.

Aged care workers in Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia have been taking limited strike action since May 10 over low pay and chronic understaffing. The providers affected employ about 11,000 aged care workers to look after more than 11,500 residents in 149 aged care facilities.

The aged care workers are demanding above minimum award wages, adequate staffing levels, a registered nurse at each facility 24/7, and

implementation of recommendations of the federal government's royal commission into aged care. Although aged care workers across Australia face the same impossible working conditions the UWU has restricted its limited industrial action to just three states.

New Zealand firefighters strike

New Zealand firefighters took limited strike action on Monday 13 June to demand what their union, the NZ Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU), called "fair and reasonable wages and safe systems of work." The union made clear that the walkout would not impact on emergency responses.

NZPFU members attending 29 meetings nationwide voted by 99 percent to reject a Fire & Emergency NZ management offer, which meant about 65 percent would only receive a guaranteed 1.5–2 percent pay increase—their first since July 2020. The union has claimed an 18 percent increase over three years, still below the rate of inflation which is currently at nearly 7 percent.

Workload and understaffing are also a major issue. Firefighters undertake medical responses to life-threatening cases, which includes 96 percent of all out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. Firefighters have complained about arduous hours to keep safe crewing levels and fire trucks operating. Many have reported routinely working 60 to 80 hours a week and others up to 100 hours.

While the NZPFU has said its industrial action plan will include further stoppages if FENZ does not negotiate, it is keeping the dispute closely contained. The union has appealed to FENZ to negotiate on pay, staffing ratios, and proper agreed processes over "safe and reliable resourcing." Formal negotiations resumed on Thursday.

Transformer manufacturing plant workers in Auckland strike

About 100 striking workers at ETEL Transformers manufacturing plant in Auckland picketed the Avondale factory on June 10 over pay. The E tu union wants the base pay rate for fully trained workers to be raised to the "living wage" of \$23.65 immediately. The company has offered to pay this amount beginning in December.

The Living Wage campaign promoted by New Zealand unions, however, is a fraud. It is not enough to live on, barely above the legal minimum of \$21.20 and rapidly being overwhelmed by increasing rents, mortgages, food and petrol which is now at \$NZ3 per litre.

An E tu spokesperson admitted that workers who had been underpaid for decades were now pushing for more and that some sectors were seeking pay increases of up to 15 percent. The company says it "remains committed to working with the union" to reach a resolution.



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