

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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

China: Striking teachers in Yantai protest salary cuts

On June 15, videos of teachers in Yantai City, Shandong province, chanting slogans against wage cuts and related information about their industrial action were uploaded to Chinese social media.

The striking teachers, from dozens of public schools in the Kaifa District of Yantai City, were protesting cuts to their pay in the district. The industrial action, which occurred during the local high school entrance exams, won wide attention and social media discussion.

Strikers posted an open letter on social media, saying they had not been paid a promised Bonus Income for nearly two years and that their salaries were at “the salary level of ten years ago.” It said that many teachers had been directed to return previously issued Bonus Income payments.

The letter also stated that school bureaucrats had completely ignored the teachers’ demands and questions and that the district and city government administrators had refused to communicate with the teachers.

On June 16, the Kaifa District government issued a statement saying the teachers’ protest had been “properly resolved” but no public details were provided.

The district previously promised higher salaries to teachers to try to attract new recruits but, confronted with economic problems, the central government has directed local governments to reduce spending. As a result, many public sector workers have had their salaries slashed.

Cambodian police attack protesting NagaWorld casino workers

Police in Phnom Penh violently broke up a demonstration of about 70 former and current NagaWorld casino workers on June 27, injuring at least ten. Police claimed the protest in the middle of the Samdech Sothearos Boulevard was illegal and disrupting traffic.

Hundreds of striking workers have been protesting outside the NagaWorld casino and hotel complex in Phnom Penh since mid-December, demanding reinstatement of 365 terminated union members and an end to alleged discrimination against the union. Workers have been threatened with fines and imprisonment if they continue protesting. Union leaders have been arrested on bogus charges of “incitement to commit a felony.”

In April last year, the Hong Kong-owned complex used the COVID-19 pandemic as the excuse to restructure its operations, sacking 1,329 of its 8,000-strong work force and targeting the union organisation. Only 85

workers accepted a severance payout, which the union claimed was less than what is required by law. Workers said management had refused to negotiate with the union, insisting that they represent themselves in severance discussions.

A protesting worker told media, “I will continue to strike until there’s been a resolution because we Cambodians have the right to express ourselves.” As well as the reinstatement of union members, workers want a review of termination packages to bring them in line with Cambodia’s Labor Law.

India: Tamil Nadu municipal contract workers in Coimbatore demand permanency

Over 100 contract workers from the Coimbatore Municipal Corporation protested on Monday to demand permanent jobs and a wage increase.

The Coimbatore Contractual Labourers Welfare Union, covering conservancy workers, drivers and other contract workers, said some of the workers had been on contract for 15 years and only paid 333 rupees (\$US4.2) per day. Workers want this increased to 700 rupees a day and to be employed directly by the corporation.

Delhi rural childcare workers protest illegal sackings

Anganwadi (childcare) workers protested outside the Women and Child Development (WCD) department in Delhi on June 27 to demand reinstatement of workers and helpers sacked for participating in a 39-day strike. The Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (DSAWHU) wants the 991 illegally terminated workers reinstated with their full honorarium paid up until July.

The terminated workers have refused to return the register and phone they were given by the department while the dispute on the terminations is pending in court.

Thousands of Delhi anganwadi workers walked out on January 31 to demand an increase in honorarium and fixed working hours. They ended the strike on March 14, after the government imposed its anti-strike Essential Services Maintenance Act and began issuing termination notices to striking workers.

There are over 10,000 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. The strikers demanded a 25,000-rupee (\$US330) monthly wage for anganwadi workers and 20,000 rupees for helpers.

Jammu and Kashmir water utility daily wage workers strike

Daily wage workers from the Jammu division of the Jal Shakti Department (water conservation) have been on strike since January 22, calling for permanency. Water supply has been disrupted in Jammu city, Kathua, Samba, Udhampur, Rajouri, Reasi, Doda and other major towns and rural areas.

On Monday they demonstrated at the chief engineer's office in the Public Health Engineering (PHE) office complex in Jammu calling for resolution of their long pending demands and shouting slogans against the Union Territory administration for its "anti-worker and rigid attitude."

Organised by the PHE Employees United Front, the workers held a three-day strike in February over their demands. They said that some daily-wage workers have served at the department for three decades but only paid a meagre 255 rupees (\$US3.36) per day.

Himachal Pradesh government workers demand old age pension scheme

Thousands of Himachal Pradesh government employees protested in Dharamsala on June 26 for restoration of an old age pension scheme (OPS). They said that the Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh governments had already announced they will implement the scheme. Workers said that despite being in service for more than two or three decades, they were only entitled to a pension of a few thousands rupees which was not enough for them in retirement.

Telangana: Hyderabad sanitation workers demand permanent jobs

About 300 sanitation workers from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) demonstrated outside the commissioner's office in Hyderabad on June 23 for permanent jobs and removal of the bio-metric attendance system. They complained that the biometric machines were not working properly and caused incorrect recording of attendance which resulted in unfair cuts to salaries.

The GHMC Employees Union demanded the municipal corporation issue three pending Dearness Allowance (DA) payments, which were supposed to be provided every six months but not paid for over a year.

Sri Lankan health workers strike over lack of fuel and public transport

Eight health sector trade unions called a two-day strike on Wednesday in response to a virtual two-week national shutdown, until July 10, by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe over severe fuel shortages.

The Public Health Inspectors Union (PHUI) and the State Midwives Service Association demanded the government ensure uninterrupted fuel supplies so health workers could report to work and maintain services.

PHUI leaders said the strike was supported by the family health services officers' unions, ECG and EEG recordists' unions, associations of technicians of medical laboratories and public health laboratories, health entomology science officers' associations and the Dental Association.

The State Midwives Service Association, supported by other health unions, has called for a "continuous" nationwide strike starting on Monday, if "satisfactory solutions" are not provided to their demands.

Wickremesinghe's national shut down has seen public offices closed, apart from essential staff, while private sector companies have been asked to develop "work from home" methods for its employees. The lack of fuel has left millions of casual day workers and self-employed in the lurch. Schools in major cities have been ordered to close and public transport has been crippled.

Shell threatens to lock out offshore LNG platform maintenance workers in Western Australia

Shell has threatened to shut its giant Prelude floating LNG processing platform in Western Australia in response to industrial action over a pay dispute. It has already stopped offloading cargo until mid-July.

About 160 maintenance workers from Prelude have been holding rolling stoppages and work bans since June 10 in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The workers, who are currently employed on individual contracts, have extend their 12-day limited rolling strikes to 19 days. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Offshore Alliance (OA), which consists of the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union, is balloting workers to vote on intensifying industrial action.

The OA and ETU have been negotiating an enterprise agreement with Shell since December 2020. According to the unions, Shell wants 25 percent of all employees' base salaries to be discretionary, meaning that salaries in the enterprise agreement are only guaranteed at 75 percent, with the rest at the company's discretion. The unions claim that Shell is refusing to agree to any wage increments over the term of the agreement and wants to retain the ability to outsource jobs of direct employees to contractors on lower rates of pay.

The unions said they want Tier 1 rates and conditions to bring their members into line with industry standards and a ban on the outsourcing jobs. Workers also want to be paid for delays in Broome or Perth during de-mobilisation from the offshore facility, a shorter waiting period for income protection, and a full pass-through of two 0.5 percent superannuation increases in the employer contribution, taking it to 13 percent.

Freshfood Services workers in New South Wales locked out

Coffee-supplier Freshfood Services locked out over 100 workers at its Concord distribution centre in Sydney from June 24 to 27 in response to industrial action during a pay dispute.

Members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and United Workers Union (UWU) had imposed overtime and other bans after the company refused to offer a "decent" pay rise and restore leave rights in its proposed enterprise agreement.

Freshfood Services supplies coffee blends, equipment and maintenance services to restaurants, hotels and cafés.

South Australian power utility workers strike

Hundreds of workers employed by South Australia's Power Networks (SAPN) and Enerven stopped work on Wednesday and demonstrated outside the companies' Adelaide offices.

The strike follows two years of unsuccessful negotiations for a new enterprise agreement between the unions' Single Bargaining Unit (SBU) (comprising the Communications Employees and Plumbing Union, Australian Services Union and Professionals Australia) and Utilities Management P/L (UMPL), representing SAPN and its subsidiary Enerven.

Although UMPL failed in a court application to have the current agreement terminated and replaced with separate agreements for SAPN and Enerven workers, it is refusing to negotiate for a single agreement covering both entities. The SBU claimed the proposed EA for Enerven represents a large reduction in workers' terms and current conditions.

According to the unions, UMPL is demanding workers accept a two-tier wage structure that cuts new employees' pay by 20 percent and removes current limitations on the use of third-party contractors, a change that will threaten workers' job security.

The current agreement expired almost two years ago, meaning workers' pay has been frozen at a time of skyrocketing cost of living increases. The unions rejected UMPL's pay increase offer of 3 percent along with a \$1,000 one-off payment. The unions were demanding increases of 3.5 percent or CPI, whichever is greater. CPI for 2021 was 5.1 percent and is predicted by the Reserve Bank of Australia to reach 7 percent by the end of 2022.

New Zealand health workers' pay dispute settled

Some 10,000 New Zealand allied health workers have voted to ratify a pay settlement reached by District Health Board employers and the Public Service Association. Over 98 percent of workers covered by the allied, public health, scientific and technical collective agreements voted to accept the deal recommended by the union. The settlement follows a one-day national strike on May 16 which saw thousands join protests and pickets in main centres.

The workers are employed in 70 occupations, including anaesthetic technicians, audiologists, occupational therapists, dental technicians, social workers and physiotherapists. Many have earned little more than the legal minimum wage of \$21.20 an hour, with their pay effectively frozen since the contract expired 18 months ago.

The PSA claims the deal represents an initial increase of between 5 and 17 percent, including back-paid increases of \$5,700 and a lump sum of \$2,500, with further payments due through a pay equity process. Many workers, who are receiving more than the so-called "living wage"—\$23.65 an hour—for the first time, remain low paid. Inflation is currently running at 6.9 percent.

NZ government legislates effective pay cut for care and support workers

Legislation to amend the Support Workers (Pay Equity) Settlements Act 2017, which sets pay rates for 65,000 care and support workers, passed through the New Zealand parliament this week. The Labour government imposed a paltry 3 percent increase, far below the cost-of-living pressures the workers are facing.

Hundreds of care workers took to the streets in May, holding protests

and rallies. They are employed in health care support, rest homes and residential disability care. Their employers are private companies, including the highly profitable retirement home sector, whose wages bills are subsidised by the state.

The NZ Nurses' Organisation, PSA and E Tu, expressed their "severe disappointment" at the outcome, which they say leaves the sector in crisis, but will not fight the effective pay cut. Instead, they will submit a "pay equity" claim, a bureaucratic process ostensibly equating the pay of female-intensive professions with male-dominated ones, which is expected to take 18 months.



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