

# Workers Struggles: 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.*

## **South Korea: Thousands of ready-mix concrete truckers in Seoul strike**

The Remicon Transport Workers' Union (RTWU), representing 7,500 ready-mix concrete truckers, walked out on strike on July 1 and demonstrated in Seoul to demand an increase in transportation fees to compensate for skyrocketing inflation and fuel costs. The action followed a strike two weeks earlier which closed Remicon plants in the Seoul metropolitan area.

The union announced that it will hold a general strike next week if it is unable to reach an agreement with Remicon over the weekend. The RTWU is affiliated with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

On June 14, the union covering 25,000 striking truck drivers, Cargo Truckers Solidarity, also affiliated with the KCTU, called off a seven-day strike after the government gave a vague commitment to consider their demands. The drivers were demanding government support to cope with the sharp rises in diesel fuel prices, permanent extension of the Safe Trucking Freight Rates System and the expansion of goods covered under it, which at present only include shipping containers and cement.

## **Hyundai auto workers in South Korea vote to strike for wage increase**

Some 71.8 percent of 40,950 union members at Hyundai Motor on July 2 voted to strike during negotiations for a wage increase. The union is demanding a 165,200-won (\$US127) increase in monthly basic wages, a payout of 30 percent of the company's net income as incentives, extension of the retirement age to 64, reinstatement of fired workers and other demands.

Due to industrial law the union can only call a strike when the National Labor Relations Commission concludes there are irreconcilable differences between Hyundai and the union and decides to stop a mandatory mediation, which usually lasts 10 days.

For the past three years the union has capitulated to Hyundai's demands for wage restraint. In 2020, the union accepted Hyundai's demand for a wage freeze for the first time in 11 years, supposedly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **South Korean rail workers protest privatisation**

About 4,000 members of the Korean Railway Workers' Union held a rally and march against the privatisation of railways outside Seoul Station and the Yongsan presidential office on June 28. They shouted slogans calling for the nation's high-speed railways to be integrated.

Seoul Metro workers protested in August last year after the government announced a major restructure to reduce costs. It planned to reduce the Metro workforce by 10 percent and review the fares to "resolve continuing financial losses." Workers suspected the restructure was in preparation for privatisation.

## **Pharmaceutical workers in Seoul protest pay cut**

About 100 workers from Novo Nordisk Korea gathered outside the company's headquarters in Seoul on Thursday to protest failed wage negotiations and cuts to incentives. The union said a total of 118 members have been involved in picketing since June 14.

One union member said that last year the company agreed to a 4.5 percent pay increase but a specific timeline for implementation had not been set. He said management recently abrogated the agreement and proposed only a 1.5 percent increase. The union also said management changed its sales representatives' incentive scheme and refused to reimburse fuel costs for managers.

## **Taiwanese postal delivery workers strike for better pay**

Workers from the postal delivery company Chunghwa Express began a nationwide strike on Monday after failing to secure a wage increase following two years of negotiations with the company's management. The Chunghwa Express Workers' Union said workers in Taipei, Taoyuan, Hsinchu City and Yilan County had walked out.

At a sit-down protest outside the Ministry of Transportation and Communications in Taipei, the union demanded an immediate wage rise of \$5,000 (\$US168). The company's chairman met union representatives in an attempt to end the strike. He said he would propose giving employees a raise at an interim board meeting this month and added, "But the board would make the final decision."

The delivery firm, which is a subsidiary of state-run Chunghwa Post, receives most of its revenue from delivering cheques and other paperwork for local financial institutions. Workers complained that company

advertisements offer contractors a monthly salary which is higher than what they pay the directly employed workers.

### **India: Childcare workers in Delhi hold more protests against sackings**

Anganwadi (Childcare) workers demonstrated at Jantar Mantar in Delhi on July 2 to protest the termination of nearly 1,000 workers and helpers who participated in a 39-day strike that ended on March 14. The workers have been issued termination notices and nearly 12,000 were issued show-cause notices by the Delhi government. Anganwadi workers and helpers protested outside the Women and Child Development Department in Delhi on June 27 over the same issue.

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

The Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (DSAWHU) is demanding that all pending wages and allowances of anganwadi workers and helpers up to the month of April must be paid and that arrears of the terminated workers must be cleared without any conditions.

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.

### **Telangana senior resident doctors at government hospitals end strike**

Close to 700 senior resident doctors from 29 government hospitals across Telangana state ended their four-day strike on June 2 after the government accepted their wage demands. These doctors are fresh from graduating from medical college and must work for one year at a government hospital in a senior residency post.

The doctors claimed they had been providing services without remuneration for the last eight months. They said they treated COVID-19 patients relentlessly throughout the first and second waves of the pandemic even without proper accommodation and basic facilities.

The doctors complained the state government did not recognise their services and not even paid salaries. They called off the strike following a written assurance from the health minister to meet their demands.

### **Karnataka civic workers end state-wide strike without winning their demands**

On Tuesday, contract civic workers, including city sanitation workers, across Karnataka state, ended an indefinite strike and demonstrations outside the Deputy Commissioners' offices in all districts and at freedom park in Bengaluru. The decision followed a vague promise from the state government that it would fulfil their demands in three months. The workers walked out on June 1.

Strikers said that although the state government had ordered permanency for cleaning workers during 2017–18, only 10,755 of the total

54,512 workers had been made permanent. As well as demanding permanent jobs, they demanded retirement pensions along with housing, maternity health, and education benefits.

### **Himachal Pradesh local body administration workers on strike**

About 4,700 local body administration employees (zila parishad) have been on strike at block development offices across Himachal Pradesh for over a week. Development works, including the preparation of project estimates and the issuance of various certificates in rural areas, have come to a standstill.

The zila parishad cadre comprises ten categories of employees. They want to be merged with the Rural Development or the Panchayati Raj Department, alleging they are denied various financial benefits.

### **Andhra Pradesh electricity meter readers demand end to piece-rate work**

Electricity meter readers staged a dharna (sit-down protest) at the main gate of the corporate office of the Andhra Pradesh Eastern Power Distribution Company Limited in Visakhapatnam on July 1. They demanded that the piece-rate payment system be abolished and their services be utilised in other departments on completion of their spot billing work for the month. They also want to be paid a monthly wage like other electricity workers.

Workers made the point that meter readers were already working as assistants to linemen in the repair of power lines and meter changes after completing their spot billing work for the month.

### **Tamil Nadu construction workers protest for improved pensions**

Around 200 members of the Construction Workers Federation of India (CWFI), affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), protested in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu on July 5. They want increased pension and pensions for women workers at age 55.

Other demands include 100,000-rupees (\$US1265) compensation payments in case of natural deaths and 50,000 rupees as incentives for marriages. Workers also demanded permanent jobs and the filling of vacant positions.

### **Bangladeshi apparel workers demand arrears and festival allowance**

Hundreds of Bangladeshi apparel workers from the Intraco Fashion and Intraco Design factories in Dhaka stopped work on July 2 to demand wage arrears and Hadji festival allowances.

Workers alleged that a tripartite agreement between workers, factory owners and the government promising to pay wage arrears for May and Eid-ul-Fitr festival allowances by June 15 was breached. They said factory managements postponed the payment until June 30 but failed to even meet that deadline.

The Intraco Fashion Ltd Workers Union had threatened “tougher movement” of workers from July 4 if management failed to meet their demands.

### **Sri Lankan railway workers strike over lack of fuel for transport to work**

Sri Lanka Railways station workers walked off the job on July 4 to protest the lack of fuel which they said made it difficult to attend work. They were joined the next day by workers from the Dematagoda Yard who threatened to strike indefinitely over the issue.

A Sri Lanka Railways spokesman said that around 40 train journeys were cancelled because of the strike at the Dematagoda Yard where trains were parked and not being released. A locomotive drivers’ union spokesman said their members may strike if the severe fuel crisis is not resolved.

### **Alumina refinery workers in Western Australia walk off in a pay dispute**

Over 100 workers at the South 32 Worsley alumina refinery in Western Australia walked off the job on Monday in a fight for their first enterprise agreement. About 280 members of the Electrical Trades Union, including electricians, mechanical trades, and trades assistants, are currently employed on common law contracts. They have been pushing to transfer to an enterprise agreement for more than six months.

Workers want improved superannuation, income protection, retention of medical benefits and career progression pathways. Other demands include a five-panel 36-hour rotating shift roster, a three-day work week to allow day workers to perform three 12-hour days, and guaranteed pay increases on par with wages at comparable industries. According to the union, previous pay increases were consistently below CPI.

Workers are also calling for an end to two-tier employment in which new recruits are on a lower wage with reduced entitlements. Workers said that from 2019, South 32 stopped offering 16.5 percent superannuation, private health, and subsidised bank loans to new employees as a COVID cost-saving measure. The so-called “lucrative” entitlements were originally offered to attract workers to the remote mine and smelter complex.

### **Cleanaway garbage truck drivers in South Australia strike**

About 40 garbage truck drivers from the waste management Cleanaway company walked off the job in South Australia on Friday after rejecting the company’s proposed enterprise agreement.

After 12 months of negotiations with the Transport Workers Union (TWU) the company is demanding an end to current agreement restrictions on weekend work and wants to restrict annual wage increases to just 2.5 percent. The official CPI is currently 5.1 percent and predicted by the Reserve Bank of Australia to rise to 7 percent by the end of 2022. The TWU has demanded below-inflation annual pay increases of only 4.6 percent along with increased superannuation payments.

Drivers have complained of exhaustion, saying the company is

understaffed, forcing them to work overtime to cover unfilled shifts. They claimed this was causing driver fatigue and increasing the chance of more road accidents in what is already Australia’s deadliest industry.

Cleanaway is contracted to supply garbage collection across residential, commercial and education facilities in Charles Sturt, Port Adelaide, Enfield, Marion and Adelaide. In 2021 it reported a net profit of \$147.7 million, an increase of 31.2 percent from its profit in 2020 of \$112.6 million.

### **Qantas aircraft engineers participate in strike ballot**

Over 1,000 members of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA) at Qantas, Jetstar and Perth-based fly in, fly out subsidiary Network Aviation Services are currently voting in a protected action ballot (PAB) on whether to take industrial action over their pay dispute with Qantas and its subsidiaries.

Qantas is demanding all its employees accept pay deals that include a two-year pay freeze, followed by a below-inflation pay increase of 2 percent. The ALAEA wants a one-year agreement with a 12 percent wage rise.

Qantas engineers have not had a wage increase in four years because the union agreed to roll over older expired enterprise agreements to protect the company’s profits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking into consideration the long pay freeze, the 12 percent wage increase demanded by the ALAEA amounts to only 3 percent per annum.

Qantas has offered a one-off \$5,000 staff bonus if workers accept its current two-year pay freeze offer followed by a 2 percent pay increase. The PAB vote ends on August 10 and industrial action could begin on August 15.

### **Western Australian health workers hold stop-work meeting**

Hundreds of nurses, ward clerks, cleaners and other health workers from the Perth Childcare Hospital and QEII Hospital in Perth walked out and held a short stop-work meeting in front of their hospitals on Wednesday to oppose the Labor state government’s 2.75 percent cap on wage increases for public sector workers. The current CPI for Perth is 7.6 percent.

Health Services Union and United Workers Union members were supported by other public sector workers, including electricians, paramedics, firefighters, childcare workers, and other employees.

In response to the overwhelming support for continued industrial action, the unions proposed holding a strike and protest outside state parliament on August 17. Further stop-work meetings have been planned at the Royal Perth Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital over the next few weeks.

The teachers union and public hospital doctors in Western Australia recently voted to accept the government’s below inflation pay increase of 2.75 percent.

### **Electrical equipment manufacturing workers in South Australia locked out**

Thirty-five members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) were locked out for seven days at the Nilsen electrical equipment manufacturing plant

in Ferryden Park, an Adelaide suburb, after striking on June 29.

When workers voted nearly unanimously in mid-June to take industrial action for an improved enterprise agreement offer, Nilsen presented a revised offer. Workers rejected the offer, saying it was substandard. The ETU claimed the union was seeking an “industry standard outcome.”

Nilsen manufactures and installs electrical equipment for naval shipyard infrastructure, maritime switchboards, and defence communication systems.

### **Queensland nurses and midwives protest low pay and unsafe staffing**

Queensland Nurses and Midwives’ Union (QNMU) members rallied outside the St Vincent’s Toowoomba Hospital, west of Brisbane, on Wednesday to protest low wages and critical staff shortages.

The QNMU said that negotiations for a new enterprise agreement have been ongoing for 18 months with management offering below-inflation pay increases between 2.5 and 3.0 percent. Nurses and midwives rejected the offer and are also demanding a fixed nurse to patient ratio.

In a separate dispute, nurses and midwives from the Greenslopes Private Hospital in Brisbane plan to protest in front of their hospital on July 12 over the same issues. QNMU members are demanding that management make a pay offer that keeps up with inflation and are calling for minimum nursing and midwifery ratios to ensure they are able to deliver safe care to patients.

### **South Australian public hospital doctors protest overcrowding**

At least 20 doctors from the Royal Adelaide Hospital emergency department in Adelaide, South Australia, demonstrated outside the hospital on Monday to protest overcrowding, which they said is impacting their work and affecting patients.

Protesters wore T-shirts saying, “We need space to keep you safe” and “Hospital overcrowding harms you and me.” The Central Adelaide Local Health Network failed in its application to the industrial court to ban health workers from wearing the shirts while on duty.

A spokesperson from the South Australian Salaried Medical Officers Association (SASMO) told media the major issue was the need to discharge patients who required disability support but were waiting on suitable accommodation. Health care staff said some patients are left waiting hours for care because hospitals do not currently have the capacity required.

Protesters said these issues were not isolated, with delays felt across the entire hospital sector. In one case, a woman was left waiting five hours on the floor of the Flinders Private Hospital, while at the Lyell McEwin Hospital, a 92-year-old woman was forced to wait outside in freezing conditions.

Fearing a major revolt, the South Australian Health Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson agreed to meet with the doctors to discuss their complaints.

### **New Zealand firefighters’ union re-enters bargaining amid strikes**

The New Zealand Professional Firefighters’ Union (NZPFU) and Fire

and Emergency NZ (FENZ) announced this week they are “working to re-engage collective bargaining” amid ongoing industrial action.

Firefighters nationwide have refused to carry out administrative tasks since June 12. The partial strike action came after 96 percent of union members rejected the latest FENZ pay offer. The offer meant just over half the workers would only receive a guaranteed 1.5 to 2 percent pay increase, their first since July 2020.

The union, representing nearly 2,000 members, has been bargaining with FENZ for over a year and has been at a stalemate. According to the NZPFU-FENZ joint statement, processes to “re-engage constructively” are now underway, with a “mutually agreed third party” to assist.

Low pay, frequent overtime, poor quality equipment, and a lack of appropriate training are also contributing to the strike action. Some firefighters say they are working 100 hours a week because of staff shortages. Since 2013 they have been attending medical emergencies, including traumatic events, but are not offered proper mental health support after critical emergency calls.

The union earlier threatened to commence one-hour stoppages which would see firefighters and call centre staff walk off the job. However, the joint statement declared that while the work bans are ongoing, “this will not impact our career firefighters’ ability to respond to emergency incidents.”



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