

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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

Myanmar garment workers strike

About 2,000 garment workers from the JW factory in Yangon's Zaykabar Industrial Park walked out on July 7 claiming the company keeps cutting their pay while demanding they work longer hours. It was the first major industrial action in Myanmar since last year's military coup.

The JW factory is owned by Great Glowing Investment and operated by another factory in the industrial park ADK. They are both managed by the same Canadian nationals. The factories manufacture clothing for international sportswear brands and employ nearly 7,000 people.

A worker told media that she had worked at the factory since 2020 and was paid 4,800 kyat (\$US2.50) per day, and 1,200 kyat (\$0.65) per hour for overtime shifts. She is required to work 12-hour shifts, six days a week. Another striking worker said she had only been paid a monthly salary of 270,000 kyat (\$145) and had been required to work more than 100 overtime hours.

Workers complained that they are being pressured to increase the number of garments completed per hour from 45 to 60. They claimed the target was impossible and they cut short meal breaks to try and reach the target. They also said they are denied rights.

South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers' union accepts inferior wage offer

The union representing 40,950 Hyundai Motor auto-factory workers at Ulsan, South Korea, reached a tentative wage deal with management on Tuesday which falls short of workers' demands. If workers accept the deal, it will avert a strike for the fourth consecutive year.

Just over 71 percent of union members on July 2 voted to strike during negotiations for the new wage deal. The union had demanded 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 among other demands.

The union has accepted a much lower pay increase offer of only 98,000 won (\$74.80) in basic monthly pay, a bonus of 200 percent of a worker's monthly salary plus 4 million won and 20 Hyundai Motor shares per worker. A media release did not mention if other demands, such as the extension of the retirement age to 64, or reinstatement of fired workers, were met.

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.

Workers' main concern is job security. To push through the low-pay, Hyundai announced it intended to construct a new electric vehicle (EV) factory in Ulsan and upgrade existing production lines in stages to mass produce EVs. Acknowledging its cosy relationship with the union, management issued a media statement saying, "Labor and management have decided to coexist with a focus on the future competitiveness of the domestic factory and job stability."

India: Thousands of outsourced workers strike at various Andhra Pradesh municipal corporations

Outsourced workers from the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) in Andhra Pradesh began an indefinite strike on Monday July 11 to demand the government improve pay and conditions. The workers are employed in public health, engineering and water supply departments.

Their demands include a health allowance of 6,000-rupees (\$US75.2), a salary of 21,000-rupees, education support for their children, filling of vacant jobs, and retirement benefits. While nearly 7,000 workers are employed in the public health and engineering departments of GVMC, only 1,000 are permanent employees.

Over 3,600 outsourced workers from the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation have also been on strike since Monday for health allowances and payment of wage arrears. The strike was coordinated by the All India Trade Union Congress. Around 650 scab workers were employed by the corporation in an attempt to break the strike.

About 1,200 contract workers from the Tirupati Municipal Corporation also went on strike on Monday. The Municipal Workers Union, also affiliated to the AITUC, demanded an 18,000-rupee (\$US226.07) monthly wage, retirement benefits, including gratuity, permanent jobs for contract and outsourced workers and timescale promotions.

Telangana contract hospital workers demand unpaid salaries

Contract health workers from the District Government Hospital in Suryapet, Telangana state, staged a dharna (sit-down protest) at the main entrance of the hospital on Tuesday to demand immediate payment of outstanding salaries. The distressed workers said they had not been paid for the last three months. They said that irregularity in paying salaries is driving them to borrow from money lenders with huge interest repayments in order to meet family daily needs.

Karnataka childcare workers protest in Mysuru

Anganwadi (Childcare) workers held two rallies in Mysuru on Tuesday calling for resolution of long pending demands. The Karnataka State Anganwadi Workers Association, affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, demanded implementation of the Gratuity Act, 1972, payment of necessary funds for the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme and bringing anganwadi workers under the cover of social security schemes and statutory benefits.

Himachal Pradesh government workers protest again for old pension scheme

Thousands of government workers demonstrated in Mandi and held a protest march on July 9 demanding restoration of the old pension scheme (OPS). The protest was organised by the Himachal Pradesh New Pension Scheme Government Employees Federation-Mandi unit.

Government workers have been holding demonstrations for over a year demanding reinstatement of the OPS. Thousands of workers demonstrated in Dharamsala on June 6 over the issue.

Workers said members of parliament were “enjoying” the benefits of the OPS while over 200,000 government employees have been forced onto the new scheme with vastly reduced benefits. Workers have complained that despite being in service for two or three decades, they were only entitled to a pension of a few thousand rupees which was not enough for them in retirement.

Pakistan garment workers protest in Karachi over jobs and safety

Workers from the Denim Clothing Company, one of the largest garment factories in the country and producer for global brands such as H&M, Zara and Levi's, demonstrated outside the Karachi Press Club on July 3. The manufacturer has dismissed its entire workforce of over 4,000 at its plants in the Korangi Industrial Area.

Workers accused the company of terminating their services in order to avoid paying the recently marginally increased minimum wage of 25,000 rupees a month (US\$118.56), which itself is an appalling poverty level wage amidst skyrocketing prices. They alleged that management is planning to utilise third-party contract labour to circumvent its minimum wage obligation. The company is also notorious for flouting regulations of documenting workers and thereby avoiding providing any benefits. Most of the workers have served between 5 and 10 years.

Workers also accused management of subjecting around 2,000 female workers to sexual harassment and violence, while also denying the right of workers to unionise and collective bargaining.

National Trade Union Federation bureaucrats addressing the demonstration denounced company management but did not propose any plan of action to fight back by mobilising other workers. Instead, they made useless appeals to the international brands, whose massive profit margins depend on the extreme exploitation of Pakistani garment workers, to compel their local suppliers to respect workers and implement labour standards in agreements.

Shell shuts down offshore LNG platform during industrial dispute

In response to ongoing industrial action by 160 maintenance workers on Shell's floating LNG platform Prelude, 470 kilometres off Western Australia's Kimberley coast, Shell has suspended production and is transferring most of its workforce to shore. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Offshore Alliance (OA), which consists of the Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union, claimed Shell's action was unnecessary and the oil giant is using the shut-down as a bargaining tactic in an attempt to force workers to accept an inferior work agreement.

The Prelude workers have been holding rolling stoppages and work bans since June 10 for a new enterprise agreement. They are currently employed on individual contracts. Shell ended negotiations with the unions three weeks ago and presented a proposed enterprise agreement. It was rejected by 95 percent of the workers balloted.

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 of 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.

Shell has declared that production will remain suspended until bans restricting the off-loading of cargo are lifted.

Health workers at Adelaide's Lyell McEwin Hospital protested loss of free parking

On July 8, frontline health workers, including orderlies, security guards, catering attendants and sterilising technicians, walked off the job at South Australia's Lyell McEwin Hospital in Adelaide to demand the return of free parking for essential health workers.

The scheme provided free parking and free public transport. It was put in place by the state Liberal government at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic but was cancelled in May by the newly elected Labor government along with the COVID 19 Emergency Management Declaration, even though the pandemic had not eased.

COVID 19 cases are predicted to soon reach 5,000 a day in South Australia, further overwhelming the hospital system and its exhausted nurses and doctors, some of whom have been working 18 hours a day. A United Workers Union representative said essential health workers are forced to work double shifts and overtime due to understaffing.

The union claimed that terminating the free-parking scheme will mean an added \$1,200 in costs to the already ruthlessly exploited front line hospital workers, some earning just \$27 an hour.





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