

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.

Public sector insurance workers hold India-wide strike demanding improved wages

About 50,000 workers from the Public Sector (PSU) General Insurance Companies held a national one-day strike on July 15 to demand higher wages. The Joint Forum of Unions and associations in PSU Insurance Companies said the issue of wage revision for over 58,000 employees was being ignored by the Modi government and the General Insurance Public Sector Association.

Wage increases in these public sector companies has been outstanding since August 2017. Workers want a 15 percent wage increase, along with arrears payments, similar to that awarded to workers of the Life Insurance Corporation last year.

Contract health workers in Mizoram state end strike

The National Health Mission Employees Union of Mizoram (NEUM), representing over 2,000 contract workers, called an indefinite strike on July 14 to demand permanent jobs and inclusion in the state government service. The NHM workers held mass casual leave between July 11 and 13 before they began the indefinite strike.

The union called off the strike on July 18 following a flimsy promise from the government to meet some of its demands. The union claimed they were assured by the government that it would publish the recommendation and findings of a study group constituted last year to assess the problems facing NHM employees.

The NEUM claimed that it was assured that NHM employees would be paid regularly and that a strike ban order issued under the Mizoram Essential Service Maintenance Act would be lifted.

Andhra Pradesh rural health workers demand minimum wage

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers protested outside the collectors office in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh on July 14. Protesters demanded a minimum monthly wage of 15,000-rupees (\$US188) as well as COVID-19 death ex-gratia payments of one million rupees, medical leave and maternity benefits. They complained that they are deprived of leave and other benefits available to regular workers.

In a similar protest, ASHA workers demonstrated at the collector's

office in Dindigul on July 18 demanding a minimum monthly wage of 18,000 rupees (\$US225) and permanent jobs.

The workers, who were all women, also want incentive payments increased from 2,150 rupees to 10,000 rupees in line with other south Indian states. They also called for 500-rupee payment for COVID 19 vaccination duty and incentives payments and also submitted a charter of demands to the collector.

ASHA workers are community health workers employed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as a part of India's National Rural Health Mission.

Tamil Nadu auto plant workers demand union recognition

Workers at the HSI Automotives plant in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu began a sit-down protest at the plant on July 19 to demand recognition of their elected union representatives. Union leaders said that their action would not hinder production but the occupation would be continued until management accepts their demand.

Sri Lankan school teachers and health workers protest lack of fuel

Hundreds of teachers in several cities around the country, including Gampola, Kurunegala, and Galle, protested outside their schools on Tuesday over fuel unavailability, making it difficult for them to get to work. The teachers are needed to mark General Certificate of Education examination papers, which students need to go to higher levels in schools or enter universities.

On Monday, health workers, including doctors from the Polonnaruwa hospital in north central province, walked out and demonstrated outside the hospital to protest police and the Kaduruwela cooperative fuel station manager stopping them getting their entitled fuel allocations.

On the same day, health workers, including workers from crematoriums in the cities of Matara, Anuradhapura and Dehiattakandiya, protested over fuel allocations. Health workers and doctors from the Katugastota hospital and doctors from eastern province hospitals also walked out over the lack of fuel.

Philippines: Food Panda delivery workers in General Santos strike

Striking Food Panda delivery workers in General Santos, on the island of Mindanao, were joined by members from the Union of Delivery Riders in Digital Platforms (UDRDP) and SENTRO and IUF City on July 11.

Riders want better working conditions, fair and just delivery earnings, an end to rampant suspension and termination (off-boarding) of riders' accounts without due process, and accident insurance.

Riders complained that there was no employee-employer relationships with the delivery platforms, effectively denying them the benefits of regular workers. They want the right to join a union and enter collective bargaining agreements. Food Panda delivery riders said they have heavy workloads and are continually exposed to road hazards and assaults from customers but do not receive compensation.

The UDRDP says that the riders are treated as "delivery-partners, freelancers and independent contractors" to justify their lower wages. They work up to 15hrs a day within strict time limits and can be unilaterally suspended or terminated without appeal.

Major demands are the regularisation of employment, wages and benefits as per permanent work status and strict observance of occupational safety and health standards (OSHS). The riders have threatened more strikes if their demands are still ignored.

Sydney commuter rail workers to strike again

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) has informed Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) that its members will be holding a 4-hour strike on Thursday July 28 at 12:01 a.m. Commuter rail services of Sydney Trains and NSW Trains will be affected.

The union's limited action is a continuation of a long running industrial campaign over a new enterprise agreement and safety modifications to the Korean-built New Intercity Fleet (NIF). The new trains are designed for driver-only operation, which will eliminate the jobs of around 450 guards, while drastically increasing drivers' workloads as they bear the additional burden of monitoring a large bank of closed-circuit television (CCTV) screens when approaching and departing stations.

While the government says it will spend over \$260 million to carry out modifications demanded by workers, the RTBU wants the government to sign an agreement that this will not come at the expense of wages and conditions. The government has refused to sign such a commitment.

The union's wage claim is an annual increase of 3.5 percent in a three-year enterprise agreement, far below the latest official inflation rate of 5.1. The government's proposed agreement consists of annual pay "rises" of just 3 percent, 3.5 percent (dependent on "productivity") and 2.5 percent, inclusive of 0.5 percent superannuation increases, in line with the pay cap covering all NSW public sector workers.

Darwin Port workers hold strike ballot over planned pay cut

Members of three unions at the Darwin Port in Australia's Northern Territory are currently voting in a ballot to approve taking protected industrial action in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members rejected Darwin Port's pay offer, saying it represented a real pay cut.

The unions' proposed industrial action includes various bans and possible one-hour strikes that will have little impact on port operations. The unions have also agreed to give port authorities five-days' notice before taking any action, allowing management to prepare to circumvent industrial action.

Darwin Port is operated by Darwin Port Operations, which is part of the Chinese owned company Landbridge Group. It is Australia's nearest port to Asia and is a key support hub for the offshore oil and gas fields in the Arafura Sea, Timor Sea and waters off the coast of Western Australia.

GrainCorp prepares to hire a strike-breakers at its Newcastle Port terminal

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has accused management of GrainCorp's Carrington grain terminal at Newcastle Port of organising a strike-breaking workforce during enterprise bargaining negotiations for the terminal's 50-strong workforce.

The MUA claimed GrainCorp had been "caught out" with a strike-breaking team at the Carrington terminal on Tuesday and was trying to "intimidate" its employees. A union spokesperson said people associated with a major freight company had been through the terminal "assessing its suitability for a takeover by a scab workforce."

The union is demanding annual pay increases of 5 percent for the next three years, a real pay cut considering the official CPI for 2021 was 5.1 percent and is expected to increase to 7 percent by the end of 2022. Nor does the pay demand make up for the lost ground financially over the past decade when the union forced lower pay increases on workers to assist the company with drought conditions.

According to the union, GrainCorp posted a record profit during the first half of this year, with a net profit after tax of \$246 million.

Kingborough Council workers in Tasmania stop work

Fifty workers from the Kingborough Council, in Tasmania's Greater Hobart Area, held a stop-work meeting on Tuesday and imposed work bans in their fight for an improved pay offer. Australian Services Union (ASU) members have rejected three separate enterprise agreement offers from management and voted on July 8 for industrial action.

The ASU and Kingborough Council have been in negotiations since the current agreement expired two years ago in June 2020. Workers have not had a pay increase since then. Kingborough Council's latest pay increase offer stands at 2.8 percent, a wage cut compared to Hobart's CPI, which is currently 5.8 percent and expected to rise. A council official told workers they could improve the pay offer by reducing superannuation contributions.

According to the union, Kingborough Council's labourers and customer service workers are already the lowest paid workers of all the surrounding councils, earning between one and two dollars less per hour while doing the same work.

Nilsen electrical factory workers in South Australia locked out again

Thirty-five workers at the Nilsen electrical equipment manufacturing plant in Ferryden Park, an Adelaide suburb in South Australia, have been locked out since July 15 in an enterprise agreement dispute. Management imposed a seven-day lockout on June 29 after members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) walked out for 24 hours.

The current lockout, which ends on July 25, followed management's

response to a half day strike by workers. Nilsen initially imposed the lockout on workers from its Visy Glass operations. The rest of its workforce, however, said they would not return to work while the Visy Glass workers remained locked out.

Workers have rejected Nilsen's agreement offer saying it was substandard. The ETU claimed the union was seeking an "industry standard outcome," but has not said what claims it has made on the company.

Western Australia health workers continue stop-work protests over poor pay and conditions

Health workers from the Royal Perth Hospital, Health Support Services and WA Children's Health Services Perth Metro walked off the job on Wednesday to oppose the state Labor government's 2.75 percent cap on wage increases for public sector workers. Geraldton Regional Hospital and Bunbury Health Campus workers walked out over the issue the following day.

It is the second time this month that members of the Health Services Union and United Workers Union, including ward clerks, cleaners and other health workers, have taken strike action over the issue. Hundreds of hospital health workers, supported by other public sector workers, including electricians, paramedics, firefighters and childcare workers, demonstrated outside the Perth Childcare Hospital and QEII Hospital in Perth on July 6 to demanding the state government end its wages cap imposed in 2017.

Public sector wages are capped at 2.75 percent, or 2.5 per cent with a \$1,000 sign-on bonus. The current CPI for Perth, the state capital, is 7.6 percent. More limited stop-work protests have been planned by the unions culminating in a strike and protest outside state parliament on August 17.

Shell threatens to lock out workers from its offshore floating LNG platform

Shell has threatened to lock out workers at its Prelude floating LNG platform, 470 kilometres off Western Australia's Kimberley coast, on Monday July 25, unless they end strike action over a new agreement. The lockout threat was in response to an announcement from the unions, representing over 160 maintenance workers, that rolling strike action and selected work bans begun on June 10 would be extended until August 4.

The industrial action by Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Workers Union (AWU), has restricted offloading of cargo from the vessel causing Shell to transfer non-essential workers to shore.

The workers are currently employed on individual contracts. Shell ended negotiations with the unions four weeks ago and presented a proposed enterprise agreement. It was rejected by 95 percent of the workforce.

The MUA and AWU said 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, and that Shell is refusing to agree to any wage increments over the term of the agreement.

Union demands include Tier 1 pay rates and conditions to bring their members into line with industry standards. 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.

Melbourne tram maintenance workers on strike

Over 50 workers from three unions at the Downer EDI Rail tram maintenance depot in Preston, a Melbourne suburb, walked off the job on Tuesday and picketed the depot. RTBU, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and ETU members near unanimously voted in late June to take industrial action for a better enterprise agreement offer from Downer.

The workers said they intended to stay out until the end of the week. The unions have not made public details of demands or issues in the company's proposed agreement.



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