

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

29 July 2022

South Korea: Coupang fulfilment centre workers demand air conditioning

Workers from the Dongtan, Gyeonggi-fulfilment centre of online retailer Coupang protested in the company's head office lobby in Jamsil, south Seoul, from June 23 to July 20, over high temperature conditions in their workplace. Workers said they are only given one bottle of water a day during the summer months.

On July 20, union members, affiliated with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), carried an air-conditioning unit from the company's head office to the Dongtan fulfilment centre to demand the installation of cooling systems.

Coupang is the largest online retailer in South Korea and often referred to as the "Amazon of South Korea." It has a workforce of around 68,000 and annual revenue exceeding \$US5.9 billion.

A company spokesperson declared that Coupang would not provide air conditioning, citing Ministry of Employment and Labor guidelines, which claimed that heat-related illnesses could be prevented by fans and air circulators.

India: Chhattisgarh state government workers strike for higher allowances

Chhattisgarh state government workers walked out on a five-day strike on Monday to demand an increase in the dearness allowance (DA) and a freight allowance equivalent to the central government rises recommended in the 7th pay commission. The strike was launched after the state government granted salary and allowance increases for members of parliament.

The protesting workers complained that the state government dearness allowance is 17 percent less than that paid to central government employees. They also demanded the House Rent Allowance be increased in line with the 7th pay commission pay scale.

Jharkhand steel plant workers protest pay anomalies

Workers from the Bokaro Steel Plant (BSL) protested at Gandhi Chowk in Bokaro on July 24 to demand the revision of pay anomalies. The Bokaro Steel Officers' Association (BSOA) said that rectification of the pay anomaly of junior officers of the 2008–10 intake was still pending. They alleged that BSL had given several oral and written assurances on rectifying the anomalies but failed to do so.

Childcare workers in Delhi continue protests over sackings

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers in Delhi are continuing to protest the sacking of nearly 1,000 fellow workers who participated in a 39-day strike that ended on March 14. The Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union (DSAWHU) organised the protest and picket outside the Delhi Women and Child Development Department headquarters on July 21.

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 against striking workers. Nearly 12,000 workers were issued show-cause notices by the Delhi government.

The DSAWHU is demanding all outstanding wages and allowances of anganwadi workers and helpers be paid up to the month of April and the arrears of the terminated workers 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 just 9,678 rupees (\$US128) and 4,839 rupees respectively. Anganwadi workers want a 25,000-rupee (\$US330) monthly wage and 20,000 rupees for helpers.

Haryana auto factory workers occupy plant demanding wage settlement

Around 270 permanent workers from the Napino Auto & Electronics Limited factory in Manesar have been protesting inside the factory premises since July 14 to demand a three-year wage settlement agreement due since 2019. Workers want the monthly wage increased from 23,500 rupees (\$294.5) to 28,000 rupees.

Workers said multiple rounds of talks between the union and management ended without any positive resolution. Napino supplies automotive electronic components to leading auto companies, including Hero, Maruti Suzuki and others.

Andhra Pradesh government hospital contract workers demand outstanding wages

Contract health workers from the state-run Chest and Communicable diseases hospital in Vizag demonstrated outside the Collector's office on Monday demanding unpaid wages and other entitlements.

Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) representatives said the workers had not been paid wages for March, April and May 2021 and that the contractor, VIMS, had not paid the provident fund for 2020 to January 2021, a sum of 36,000 rupees (\$US450.28).

Tasmanian hospital nurses walkout over short staffing and low pay

At least 300 nurses, midwives and assistant nurses held a 15-minute walkout at the Royal Hobart Hospital at 1 p.m. on Wednesday. They were joined by 200 supporters in a picket outside the hospital. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members are protesting unsafe staffing levels, low pay and unsustainable workloads.

As one striking nurse told the media: “On a regular basis throughout this hospital, you’ll have nurses who will start work at 2 o’clock in the afternoon, they’ll get asked to stay on for the night shift, and they’ll go without a break, working fatigued, right through to 8 o’clock the next morning.”

ANMF members at the Hobart Repatriation Hospital walked out on Thursday afternoon over the same issues and a strike is planned for the Launceston General Hospital on Wednesday, August 3.

Exhausted and traumatised hospital health workers have been writing to the Liberal state government saying that the hospital system is in crisis, causing unbearable working conditions and threatening patient safety.

One hospital nurse commented, “My heart breaks as these patients are not receiving the care that they require and are entitled to. I frequently go home from my shift in tears because I know I could do better for my patients, but the dire staffing levels make it almost impossible to provide even basic care,” she said.

The government cynically offered to meet with the ANMF 24 hours before the strike to discuss pay and conditions, but only if they called off industrial action.

New South Wales government road infrastructure maintenance workers strike

Hundreds of Australian Workers Union (AWU) members employed by Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) walked off the job across the state for 24 hours at 6 a.m. on Thursday to protest the Liberal state government’s wage cap for public sector employees. The striking workers from 69 depots maintain highways, roads and bridges, including the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Under the wage cap, annual increases are restricted to just 3 percent, 3.5 percent (dependent on “productivity”) and 2.5 percent, inclusive of 0.5 percent superannuation increases. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, inflation has increased to 6.1 percent through the past 12 months.

A 24-hour strike planned for July 7 was called off by the union, after the NSW Industrial Relations Commission ordered the strike be abandoned for two weeks because their work was deemed essential. The AWU covers about 800 workers at TfNSW.

The road workers strike coincided with a 4-hour strike by Road Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members at Sydney Trains and NSW Trains from 12 a.m. on Thursday over the cap on wage increases and safety issues concerning a new fleet of Korean-built trains. Fearing that a united struggle would get out of control of the unions, the AWU and RTBU have insisted that their industrial actions were not connected.

Melbourne water utility maintenance workers strike

About 50 workers who maintain Melbourne’s water supply for Yarra Valley Water held a 24-hour strike on Monday over stalled negotiations with their contract employer Ventia for a new enterprise agreement.

After 12 months of negotiations with the AWU, the company’s pay rise offer consists of at zero increase for the past 12 months (a period in which the union agreed to delay negotiations), then an average increase of 3.5 percent over the next 3 years. The workers rejected the well below inflation pay offer and have threatened further industrial action.

Dnata ground crew at Australian airports apply for strike ballot

The Transport Workers Union (TWU), covering Dnata (Dubai National Air Travel Agency) ground handling services workers at nine Australian airports, has applied to the Fair Work Commission to hold a ballot of members to approve industrial action, including strikes over pay rates and conditions.

Dnata provides ground handling services for around 20 airlines, including Cebu Pacific, Air Canada, Etihad and Qantas.

With Australia’s major airports already chronically understaffed and struggling to meet every day operational requirements, any industrial action by Dnata workers would have a major effect on air travel.

The TWU has alleged that Dnata is trying to push through an enterprise agreement that gives pay cuts to experienced workers and below award minimum conditions.

South Australia commuter bus drivers strike

About 40 members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) from the Adelaide commuter bus company SouthLink walked off the job for 24 hours on Tuesday in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Following six months of failed negotiations with SouthLink’s owner, Keolis Downer, 96 percent of bus drivers voted for strike action. A TWU spokesman said last-minute talks failed to resolve issues on a pay increase and rostering.

SouthLink provides commuter bus services in the Adelaide Metro Hills area, serving over 500 passenger trips per day. No bus services were available during the strike.

New Zealand timber workers strike over pay

Workers at a large timber processing plant in Nelson, on New Zealand’s South Island, held a snap strike last Monday and picketed the factory. Around 60 workers, who are members of E t? and FIRST Unions, are seeking to secure what they call a “decent” pay rise for the next 12 months.

The employer, South Pine, has offered a 6.25 percent rise over 12 months. Inflation, however, is already running at 7.3 percent and is

expected to escalate. A FIRST Union spokesman said the offer is unacceptable in the face of extraordinarily high living costs and higher wage rates in other companies in the industry.

One worker told media: “The market is booming. The company needs to pay workers a wage that reflects their skills and dedication. There are some people who have been at the company for up to 20 years and barely earn above minimum wage. The current offer shows no respect, particularly for long-serving members.”

The unions claim that starting rates should be at least at the level of the “Living Wage,” and want “pay parity” for trades staff such as fitters, engineers and saw doctors. In fact, the so-called “Living Wage,” promoted by the unions and is currently \$23.65 an hour, is just above the legal minimum of \$21.20 is not enough to live on.



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