

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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

India: Punjab contract sanitation workers demand permanent jobs

On Tuesday, members of the Safai Sewaks' (sanitation workers) Union and the Water Supply and Sewerage Union demonstrated outside Fatehgarh Sahib Municipal Council offices in Punjab over several demands including to be made permanent.

The Punjab government had decided to make permanent workers who have completed 10 years' service but that 180 contract employees at the Sirhind Council would not be included. The protesters insisted that most of the contract workers, including safai sewaks, water pump operators and sewermen, have been serving for over 10 years and should be made permanent with full allowances and other benefits.

Electricity distribution workers in Punjab fight pay anomalies

Punjab State Electricity Board (PSEB) Employees' Joint Forum members protested outside the state power distribution company Powercom on Tuesday to demand recognition of their qualifications with full pay. They chanted slogans against Powercom management and burnt an effigy.

The union claimed that even after the completion of the probationary period of assistant linemen, no orders of recognition were issued nor were the workers paid the full salary. The union called a work-to-rule and restricted duty to eight hours a day.

Workers demanded that previous errors in the 2016 pay scales be removed, allowances increased, dearness allowance arrears paid, and basic wages increased, along with other demands.

In a separate protest that day, the Powercom and Transco Contractual Workers' Union demonstrated at the Fountain Chowk in Patiala to demand regular jobs for outsourced workers. A union spokesperson alleged that although recruitments were being carried out, outsourced workers were being ignored. Union leaders called off the protest following a meeting with police and district administrative officials even though workers' demands remained unresolved.

Tamil Nadu: Lotte Choco Pie factory workers' strike entering third month

Close to 60 workers from the Lotte Choco Pie factory in Tiruvallur district near Chennai have been on strike since April 20, following the dismissal of four workers who led the fight to form a trade union at the plant. The union was formed in January this year and affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) to initiate negotiations on salary-hikes and other benefits.

The factory has 60 permanent employees with 8 to 14 years' service with 57 of these workers on indefinite strike. Over 100 casual labourers and around 60 National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme workers are also employed at the factory. The plant is owned by Lotte India Corporation Ltd based in South Korea.

When workers called for salary increases in 2018, management formed a bogus "grievance redressal committee." Although negotiations were held, management controlled the committee, and nothing was resolved. When workers formed a union, management responded by laying false charges against the four office bearers and then dismissed them. Management also sent intimidating letters to 11 other workers.

Ten rounds of talks have been held with the labour department and included district officials and the police. The South Korean administration, however, rejected all labour department proposals and, in contempt of Indian law, declared that it would not accept a union.

Workers protested outside the factory on June 3, calling on the Tamil Nadu state government to intervene and last Tuesday demonstrated outside the Tiruvallur district collector's office.

Bangladeshi postgraduate trainee physicians demand an allowance increase and unpaid wages

Around 500 postgraduate trainee physicians from the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) in Dhaka demonstrated on campus on Tuesday to demand payment several months of overdue wages and an increase in monthly allowances. Trainees want their hospital service allowance lifted from 20,000 taka (\$US183) to 50,000 taka a month. Protesters threatened to strike from Thursday if their demands were not met.

While postgraduate trainee physicians are supposed to obtain further specialised training in a specific medical field for two to

five years to achieve higher degrees, they are not allowed to engage in private practice. There are over 7,000 postgraduate students attached to over 30 institutions under the BSMMU.

Darebin City Council workers in Victoria strike for better pay

Over 400 outdoor and office workers from Darebin City Council (DCC), in Melbourne's northern suburbs, stopped work for two hours on Tuesday and protested outside the Preston Town Hall offices. They held placards stating, "Too little too late, don't let wages stagnate," "We all deserve pandemic leave" and "Fighting for better quality services."

The strike is an escalation of earlier bans by Australian Services Union (ASU) members for a better enterprise agreement.

In April, ASU members in city planning, waste management, construction, cleansing, parks, by-laws and other departments overwhelmingly rejected and voted for industrial action against the council's sub-inflation wage offer and its refusal to end outsourcing. The strike follows unsuccessful negotiations for a new agreement that began in June 2022.

DCC's latest pay increase offer on June 8 was 2 percent or \$30 per week (whichever is the greater) from July 2022, followed by annual increases of 3 percent or \$45 per week and 2 percent or \$35 per week. The union wants annual pay increases of 3, 3.5 and 3.2 percent or \$45 per week (whichever is the greater). This is well below the consumer price index of 6.8 percent and does not challenge the state Labor government's 3.5 percent rate cap on municipal council workers.

Union covering BHP outsourced mine workers in Queensland calls off industrial action over wages

Production workers from BHP's in-house job hire company Operation Services (OS) were to begin taking protected industrial action on Thursday at BHP's coal mines in the Bowen Basin in central Queensland. It was called off at the last minute by the Mining and Energy Union (MEU), a division of the Construction Maritime Mining and Energy Union, claiming it was because of an administrative oversight. No additional explanation was given.

The industrial action was to start at the Saraji mine and included set crib times and a bus-driving ban. Failing a response from management, the action was to extend to five other mines where OS workers are deployed. BHP has around 4,500 OS production and maintenance workers at its mines.

The MEU is in dispute with OS over its proposed enterprise agreement covering production workers. MEU members voted near unanimously last week to approve industrial action following 20 failed negotiation meetings.

The MEU claims that the offer from OS was sub-standard and contains no set pay rates or guaranteed pay rises and is well below

industry standards. It further stated that the union and OS are still apart on dozens of issues including rosters.

New South Wales paramedics and patient transfer officers impose more bans in pay dispute

New South Wales Ambulance (NSWA) paramedics and control centre officers, along with patient transfer officers (PTOs) from the state-owned hospital services provider HealthShare imposed 24 hours of work bans on Wednesday in their ongoing dispute with the Minns Labor government for a pay rise above the government's pay cap. The action follows the imposition of work bans on June 7 for 24 hours.

Paramedics and PTOs refused to accept jobs after the end of their normal shift and banned transferring patients discharged from hospital to their home or a residential aged care facility, or from a private hospital, or from a base hospital to a smaller hospital.

PTOs are covered by the Health Services Union (HSU), while paramedics and control centre officers are members of the Ambulance Division of the HSU. The HSU has been calling limited industrial action while appealing to the Minns government to honour an election pledge that it would negotiate the lifting of a 3 percent wage cap on public sector workers.

The government announced on June 5 that it would increase wages for health workers by just 4 percent, plus a 0.5 percent contribution to superannuation. The offer was rejected by workers who responded on social media by calling for immediate strike action.



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