

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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

Bangladesh garment workers protest murder of union leader

Hundreds of garment workers demonstrated in readymade garment factory zones in Gazipur, Ashulia, Savar and Narayanganj on the outskirts of Dhaka on June 25. They were protesting the death of a union leader allegedly killed by company thugs. The demonstrations continued on Monday and Tuesday outside the National Press Club in Dhaka.

Workers from the Prince Jacquard Sweater factory at Tongi in Gazipur had been demanding payment of outstanding salaries and the Eid bonus for the last two months. Management promised to pay the outstanding wages to workers waiting outside the plant on June 25 but failed to keep its promise.

Later that day, Shahidul Islam Shahid, a 50 year-old union representative, accompanied by two workers—Mustafa Kamal, 26, and Ahmed Sharif, 35—entered the factory to try and hold talks with management.

Workers have alleged that the three men were set upon and severely beaten by company thugs as they left the factory. The men were taken to hospital but Shahidul was pronounced dead on arrival. Workers have identified the attackers and said they will maintain their protests until the accused are arrested.

India: Punjab commuter transport workers strike for better pay and job permanency

Commuter transport workers from the state-run Punjab Roadways Transport Corporation (PRTC) and Punjab Roadways Buses (PUNBUS) held a two-day strike on Tuesday over the government's failure to fulfil long-pending demands. Nearly 3,000 buses were parked across several depots and bus stands.

The strike followed protests in Tarn Taran and Patti on June 22 called by the Punjab Roadways/Punbus/PRTC Contract Workers' Union when it was realised that the government had no intention of keeping a commitment made to grant their demands last month. The transport workers were demanding a 5 percent increase in monthly salaries, reinstatement of blacklisted employees, increased pay for

data entry operators, permanency for ad-hoc employees and equal pay for equal work.

Uttarakhand public school midday meal workers demand wage rise

Midday meal workers from state-run schools demonstrated on Tuesday across Uttarakhand state to demand higher wages and benefits. They told the media that their services are being exploited.

"Our job is to prepare meals for students. We cook and maintain the kitchen and as per regulations and should leave one hour after school ends. However, we are forced to do housekeeping work like cleaning washrooms and preparing tea and snacks for teachers, among other duties. All this is not part of our job," the worker said.

Workers said they are paid only 3,000 rupees (\$US36.55) per month even though the chief minister had previously announced that wages would be increased to 5,000 rupees. Four months ago they were only paid 1,500-2,000 rupees per month.

South Korea: Hyundai Motor union sets strike date for higher pay

The union representing workers at Hyundai Motor's Ulsan plant, South Korea, has announced that its members will take industrial action on July 12 for higher wages. The partial walkout will involve workers from the morning and afternoon shifts who will strike for two hours. It will be the first since 2018.

The union and Hyundai's Ulsan plant management initiated annual wage talks on June 13. The union wants a base monthly pay increase of 184,900 won (\$US143), up 71 percent from last year's increase of 108,000 won, and 30 percent of last year's operating profit as an incentive bonus.

The autoworkers also want an existing 25 percent discount on the cost of a new vehicle to retired workers with 25 years of service to be extended all workers, irrespective of their years of service.

Grange iron-ore mine workers in Tasmania strike for improved pay

Over 300 workers from the Grange Resources iron ore mine and processing plant in northern Tasmania walked off the job for 48 hours on June 24 in opposition to the company's low pay increase offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) and Australian Workers Union (AWU) members will hold 24-hour rolling stoppages over the next fortnight. It is the first ever strike by these workers and their first union negotiated agreement.

Workers want a pay increase above inflation to make up for years of real pay cuts, proper penalties on public holidays, and industry-based allowances. They said they will maintain industrial action until demands are met.

Grange Resources operates a mine at Savage Creek and a pellet plant at Port Latta, in north-west Tasmania. It made a net profit last year of \$500 million.

Brotherhood of St Laurence workers in Victoria continue industrial action

About 80 community services workers from the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) charity group in Victoria are maintaining state-wide low level industrial action which began on May 16 with a two-hour walkout. They were in dispute with the charity's proposed enterprise agreement. The current agreement expired on April 1, 2021. The workers have not had a pay increase since December 1, 2020 and it was only 1.3 percent.

Australian Services Union members rejected BSL's sub-inflation pay offer which includes annual pay increases of only 5 percent from July 2023, 4 percent in July 2024 and 3 percent in 2025. The current official inflation rate for Victoria is 6.8 percent.

BSL also wants to change leave entitlements, which would mean that new employees were worse off than under the previous enterprise agreement. The new agreement will apply to more than 1,100 workers employed by BSL in its National Disability Insurance Sector, aged care, early childhood health, migrant services, financial education and research and development.

Darebin City Council nurses in Victoria strike for better pay

About 30 members of the Australian Nurses and Midwives Federation (ANMF) from the Darebin City Council, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, have been maintaining low-level industrial action since May 18. Maternal and child health and immunisation nurses are wearing red campaign t-shirts and stopping work to discuss their action while in dispute with the council over its proposed enterprise agreement. On Tuesday, the nurses stopped work for an hour and protested outside the Darebin Town Hall.

The nurses' current agreement expired last July and the ANMF and Darebin council began negotiations in September. Council offered the nurses a pay increase when the current agreement expired, but it was rejected by the nurses, saying it was too low.

The council wants to extend the agreement from three to four years with annual pay increases of only 2 percent or \$30 a week in the first

year, 3 percent in the second year or \$45 and in the remaining two years 80 percent of the Victorian government's still unknown 2024 sub-inflation rate cap. The consumer price index in Melbourne is 6.8 percent while gas and electricity prices are up by 25 and 15 percent respectively.

The ANMF has indicated it will accept a below-inflation pay deal. Its claims include a three-year agreement with improved entitlements and a pay increase in the first year of only 3 percent or \$45 per week (whichever is greater) from 1 July 2022, 3.5 percent or \$45 per week in year two and 3.2 percent increase or \$45 per week in the third year. In real terms this represents a pay cut of over 3 percent. Nurses want improved entitlements such as a parking permits for community MCHN visits and improved education access.

New Zealand school principals vote on third pay deal

New Zealand primary school principals have this week been voting on their third pay offer recommended by the union, the NZ Educational Institute (NZEI). The deal follows months of low-level industrial action by principals, including refusal to work with the Ministry of Education (MoE).

The offer includes a pay increase of more than 10 percent over two years and a new allowance that recognises "cultural leadership" and recognition of leading learning of literacy and numeracy.

An NZEI spokesperson said there had been "a little bit of movement" from the MoE's previous offer which was rejected by principals, including better pay for smaller schools as well as recognition for specialist leaders.

If the offer is accepted, principals will receive a pay increase of 6 percent from July this year as well as two pay increases in 2024 of 3 percent and 1.8 percent. This represents an effective pay cut, with inflation currently 6.8 percent and food 12.4 percent.

The deal follows a similar below-inflation settlement pushed through by NZEI for 30,000 primary school teachers last month after a long campaign that included a combined one-day teachers' strike in March. Kindergarten teachers have also settled with the MoE while the secondary teachers union, the Post Primary Teachers Association, has taken their pay dispute to arbitration.



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