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.*

India: Proterial electronics workers in Haryana strike indefinitely

The entire 250 temporary workforce at the Japan-based electronics manufacturer Proterial (formerly Hitachi Metals) in Manesar, Haryana state, have been on strike since June 30. Workers are demanding a salary review, approved leave and reinstatement of sacked workers. Strikers alleged that the company had employed scab labour to maintain production.

In May, about 40 contract workers, including three union leaders who had been advocating for workers' demands over the past year and a half, were accused of hindering production and disciplinary violations and terminated. The current strike was triggered after a contentious shift change enforced upon three workers that day.

One striker told the media that after workers began demanding the implementation of their charter of demands, which was submitted a year ago, management began turning off fans in the heat and intermittently halted meal services.

Proterial is a transnational corporation involved in multiple businesses, including information technology, electronics, power systems, social infrastructure and industrial equipment. The Manesar plant manufactures parts for electronic products.

Karnataka factory workers protest longer working day laws

About 50 workers protested at the Peenya Industrial Area in Bengaluru on July 2 to oppose the Factories (Karnataka Amendment) Act, 2023 presented to parliament by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Act will increase the working day for factory workers to 12 hours. The protest was organised by workers affiliated with the Maoist-AICCTU (All India Central Council of Trade Unions).

One protester told the media that workers in Peenya industrial area face multiple issues. "The payments are irregular and overtime wages are not properly paid. I used to work at a shoe factory called Kuvempu Enterprises. They used to exploit and sometimes assault the migrant workers from North India. They did not give us our salary slips or even the PF [Provident Fund]. We wanted to leave the factory but had two months' pending wages," he said.

The protest followed demonstrations in major cities across Tamil Nadu on April 12, after the state government passed its Factories (Amendment) Act 2023. The Act extends the working day for factory workers from 8 to 12 hours. A general strike for May was called off after the Tamil Nadu government said it would temporarily withhold the Act.

Bangladesh: Retrenched Jute mill workers demand compensation

Retrenched jute mill workers held a protest march through the Khalishpur industrial area in Khulna on July 2 to mark "Black Day" and oppose the closure of 26 jute mills three years ago. The protest was called by the Combined Citizen Council consisting of sacked jute mill workers.

On July 2, 2020, the Awami League government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina shut down all 26 remaining mills of the state-owned Bangladeshi Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC), laying off more than 50,000 workers, including about 25,000 permanent employees.

Although the government gave assurances that compensation would be settled within two months of the closures, many workers are yet to receive their outstanding amounts. Workers have held numerous protests demanding the mills be reopened and for outstanding payments and compensation.

UGL Rail Services workers in New South Wales strike for higher pay

About 200 workers from the UGL Rail Services manufacturing and maintenance plant in Newcastle, 140 km north of Sydney, walked off the job for 24 hours at 1 p.m. on Wednesday and rallied outside the plant. The workers are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) which have been in negotiations with UGL for a new enterprise agreement since December.

An AMWU spokesman said most outstanding issues had been resolved but that members rejected UGL's pay offer which does not cover increases in the cost of living. The ETU said its members are paid roughly $7 per hour less than colleagues in competing companies. The strike was an attempt to get UGL to resume negotiations.

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Chas Kelly Transport workers in Tasmania strike over low wages and poor conditions

Seventeen members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) from the Chas Kelly Transport depot at East Devonport, in northern Tasmania, struck for 24 hours on Thursday in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. After nine months of negotiations the union and the company have not been able to reach agreement.

In a near unanimous vote on June 14, workers approved taking protected industrial action after rejecting the company's sub-inflation wage increase offer and an attempt to unwind their current conditions in its proposed agreement. Future industrial action could include unlimited numbers of 72-hour strikes and various work bans.

Chas Kelly Transport is one of Tasmania's largest transport companies with 600 employees. It also operates shipping between Tasmania and the Australian mainland.

Union at Airbus Pacific in New South Wales extends industrial action into fifth month

The Australian Workers Union (AWU), which covers 80 aircraft maintenance workers at the RAAF air base at Richmond, west of Sydney, has dragged out industrial action begun in early March, after rejecting Airbus Pacific's proposed work agreement. Workers are maintaining rolling one-hour stoppages and a ban on overtime and work-to-rule with little effect on the company.

Negotiations between the union and Airbus for a new agreement stalled in February when the company's sub-inflation 7.5 percent wage increase offer over three years was rejected by workers. The current annual inflation rate is 6.8 percent. The AWU claimed that Airbus is refusing to negotiate improvements to its rejected pay offer. The workers have not had a pay increase since August 2021.

South Australian public hospital allied health workers walk out over low pay and intolerable workload

Hundreds of allied health workers from public hospitals in South Australia walked off the job calling for better pay and conditions on July 3. Health Services Union (HSU) members rallied outside the Royal Adelaide Hospital with placards saying, "Save Our Staff" and "Over Worked, Under Paid."

Workers complained that positions were being left vacant, leading to stress and increased workloads. The HSU claimed that allied health workers' wages in South Australia are the lowest compared to their counterparts in other states.

HSU members in New South Wales (NSW) have threatened to intensify industrial action if the Minns Labor government failed to lift the states wage increase cap by Friday. Allied health workers rejected the Labor government's pay offer of 4 percent plus 0.5 percent superannuation increase. The current inflation rate is 6.8 percent.

Darebin City Council workers in Victoria strike again for better pay offer

Australian Services Union (ASU) members from Darebin City Council (DCC), in Melbourne's northern suburbs, stopped work for one hour on Thursday and protested outside the Preston Town Hall offices to demand a better pay offer in the council's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). Strikers held placards saying, "Librarians on strike—You can shelve your 2%" and "Fair pay for Darebin workers."

The action followed a two-hour walkout on June 13 and continuation of work bans. The ASU has dragged out negotiations for a new agreement since June 2022.

In April, about 400 ASU members from city planning, waste management, construction, cleansing, parks, by-laws and other departments overwhelmingly voted for industrial action after rejecting the council's sub-inflation wage offer and its refusal to end outsourcing.

Labour court forces rail workers in New South Wales to suspend planned strike

A planned three-day strike on Thursday by Australian Railway Track Corporation (ARTC) workers in New South Wales was suspended by the Fair Work Commission (FWC) on Tuesday evening following a successful application from ARTC. The FWC ruled that the strike would impact on rural commuter services and transport of bulk freight. The four unions representing the 250 workers did not oppose ARTC's application to the commission.

Industrial action would have included consecutive 72-hour work stoppages by track workers and drivers, a 24-hour stoppage by signal electricians and an indefinite on-call ban.

Members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), Australian Services Union, Electrical Trades Union and Professionals Australia, including controllers, maintenance leaders and signal electricians, voted overwhelmingly last month to approve strike action in response to the ARTC's below-inflation pay offer of 11.5 percent over three years. The unions and ARTC began negotiations for a new enterprise agreement in February.

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