

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: Dengue breeding control workers strike in Delhi

Thousands of Dengue Breeding Checking (DBC) workers from the Delhi Municipal Corporation have been on strike since July 31 over long pending demands. The strike was called by the Anti-Malaria Ekta Karmachari Union with about 2,800 members, 2,000 of whom are field workers.

Their demands include permanent jobs, better working conditions, increased health benefits such as health cards, and support for the family of deceased workers. A union spokesman claimed that despite their heavy workload the workers only get one day a month casual leave and no health cover.

Dengue control workers were hired in 1996 when the city faced a massive dengue outbreak with over 10,200 cases and more than 420 deaths, the worst outbreak on record. Delhi has subsequently experienced severe dengue outbreaks, including in 2015, the worst outbreak since 1996. Dengue is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, which breeds in containers with clear and stagnant water.

Tamil Nadu: NLC India Limited contract workers demand permanent jobs

Over 6,400 contract workers from the government-owned coal mining and electricity generating company NLC India Limited have been on strike since July 26 to demand permanent jobs. They also want restoration of the 26-day working month instead of the current 19 days, and immediate payment of 50,000 rupees (\$US604) per month until they are made permanent.

Workers are demonstrating day and night outside the NLC office in Neyveli, Tamil Nadu. According to workers, NLC management appealed to police demanding that the protest be broken up on the grounds that operations of the company are “severely” affected.

Many of the workers have been employed on contract for three decades. NLC management, in response to the long-running program of strikes and protests, has agreed to make only 517 workers permanent based on seniority.

The strike was called by the Jeeva Contract Workers Union, which is affiliated to the All India Trade Union Congress, led by the Stalinist Communist Party of India.

Bangladeshi secondary-level school teachers’ strike enters fourth week

Teachers from government-supported secondary-level Monthly Pay Order (MPO)-enlisted education institutions have been on strike since July 11 demanding their jobs be absorbed into the national education system on equal terms with government teachers. Hundreds of teachers organised by the Bangladesh Teachers’ Association have withstood police attacks and maintained protests in Dhaka since July 11. About 100 began a hunger strike protest on Monday.

Teachers want their entry-level monthly salary of 16,000 taka (\$US147) to be a basic wage, up from the current 2,500 taka, and for treatment allowances to be lifted from 500 to 1,500 taka. They also want the religious festival allowance to be lifted to 25 percent of the basic wage and house rent allowance increased from the current 1,000 taka to 45 percent of the basic wage.

According to Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022, around 200,000 teachers from 16,766 junior secondary and secondary schools currently get MPO facilities. These teachers have staged protests since 2018 in support of their demands.

Sri Lankan government health workers continue protests over inferior medicines

Hundreds of hospital workers from the Sabaragamuwa province base hospital in Balangoda demonstrated outside the premises on Wednesday in protest over inferior medicines being supplied to the hospital. The protest was called by the Campaign to Protect Free Health Care in Balangoda. Workers held placards displaying inferior medicines.

The protest followed island-wide demonstrations on July 18 over the issue. Protesters have accused the government of planning the privatisation of health services and importing anaesthetic drugs without approval of the National Medicines Regulatory Authority.

The All Ceylon Nursing Association claimed that there were more than twenty patients who had allergic conditions after eye operations in the National Hospital and the Nuwara-Elia base hospital, some of whom now are blind.

Sri Lankan government surveyors protest lack of funding

Sri Lankan government surveyors demonstrated in Kollupitiya, a suburb of Colombo, on Wednesday to protest the government’s inaction over

their long-pending demands and inadequate funding. Workers held placards demanding increased recruitment, saying their department is in disrepair and the government needs to “resolve surveyor problems immediately.”

South Korean construction workers protest heat-related deaths

A group of Korean Construction Workers Union members protested outside the Yongsan Presidential Office in Seoul on Wednesday demanding safety measures for construction workers during the ongoing heatwave. The protest was in response to the high number of heat-related deaths in the construction industry.

Government data collected between 2016 and 2021 shows that 20 out of 29 heat-related deaths occurred in the construction industry. There were five deaths in July last year alone.

A recent union survey of 3,200 construction workers resulted in 81 percent saying they were working without breaks during the recent heat wave and more than half replied they had seen a co-worker faint or have had symptoms of heat-related illness.

On Tuesday, the government raised the heat wave warning level to “severe,” the highest in its four-tier system. According to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, at least 17 people across the nation died in connection with the heat wave over the weekend.

The union has allowed this crisis to continue for years. The Occupational Safety and Health Act, which requires employers to implement safety measures for people who work at high-temperature sites, does not include construction workers.

Filipino food delivery riders in Cagayan de Oro strike for better conditions

Foodpanda delivery riders in Cagayan de Oro, a city in northern Mindanao, Philippines, stopped work during peak periods on Sunday, July 30 over the company’s failure to respond to demands for improved conditions. A protesting female delivery rider injured while working held a sign demanding accident insurance.

Riders want the company to resolve various issues regarding their daily earnings, illegal terminations and provide plans on their health insurance and government-mandated benefits, among others. They urged the city government not to renew Foodpanda’s business permit until they re-open their office in the city.

Members of the Hero Riders of Cagayan de Oro-Associated Labor Unions threatened that they will stop work for two hours every Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. until the company responds.

Bulk liquid port terminal workers in Darwin begin industrial action

Ten United Workers Union members at Vopak’s bulk liquid terminal at the Darwin East Arm Port in Australia’s Northern Territory, began industrial action on Thursday in a pay dispute. A spokesman from the Bulk Liquid Alliance (BLA) said workers decided to take action in response to Vopak’s pay increase offer which was 9 percent less than their Sydney colleagues.

On July 26, workers voted unanimously to take industrial action that could include bans on administrative work, transfer of liquids in the terminal and unlimited stoppages from 1 hour to 24 hours.

The BLA has accused Vopak of denying their Darwin workforce a collective agreement since they began operations in the Northern Territory 20 years ago. Negotiations for an enterprise agreement began in April.

Call centre workers at Services Australia impose work bans

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members at Services Australia (SA) call centres across Australia began two weeks of industrial action from August 1 to August 15 in their pay dispute with the Australian Public Service Commission. The CPSU called limited action that will only involve a small number of members at SA call centres.

Operators will not use “Auxiliary” codes and only use “Ready,” “Not Ready” or “Work Health and Safety.” Child support operators will use only “Case Mode.” The CPSU said it didn’t expect the action will affect service to the public. Not all CPSU members use Auxiliary codes.

CPSU members approved taking industrial action on July 3, after rejecting the government’s pay sub-inflation annual pay increase offer of 4, 3.5, and 3 percent, equal to 10.5 percent over a three-year enterprise agreement. Workers want 20 percent over three years. Over half of the almost 10, 000 CPSU members at Services Australia voted for industrial action with 88 percent voting for strike action.

B&D Doors workshop workers in Victoria strike for higher pay

About 30 workers at the Kilsyth workshop of B&D Doors in Melbourne walked out on indefinitely on Wednesday to demand a better pay offer in the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. The strike began after management threatened to dock the workers’ pay if they went ahead with planned minor work bans.

After five months of negotiations with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the company refused to improve its original pay offer of 3 percent annual increases, well below the current inflation rate of 6.8 percent. The workers last pay increase was on July 1, 2022. It was only 2.5 percent while the consumer price index (CPI) at the time was up over 7 percent.

EnerSys electricians in Victoria strike over low pay offer

Fourteen Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members at the EnerSys Thomastown battery manufacturing facility in Melbourne’s northern suburbs, walked off the job on July 26 over the company’s proposed enterprise agreement. The strike began after management threatened to dock workers’ wages if they imposed limited work bans, even though they would have remained on the job.

EnerSys refused to grant workers’ demands for inflation-level wage rises, restructuring of the wage classification system and improved working conditions. The current agreement expired in March. Workers have not had a pay increase since April last year, which was only 2 percent, well below the inflation rate at the time of over 7 percent.

Energys is a stored energy systems and technology provider for

industrial applications. It has 32 manufacturing facilities around the world with total revenue of \$3.4 billion.

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New Zealand teachers hit with below-inflation pay deal

An arbitration panel ruled this week that New Zealand secondary teachers should get a 14.5 percent pay rise spread over three instalments. The recommendation is expected to end a protracted pay dispute between the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA).

The panel recommended a 6 percent pay rise backdated to the start of July, plus 4 percent in April next year and 3.9 percent in December next year. The base pay rise of 14.5 percent by the end of the proposed collective period is a pay cut in real terms. Household costs surged by 7.2 percent in the 12 months to June — ahead of the current 6 percent inflation rate. Costs are driven by interest rates, which have risen by 28.8 percent, and food prices, up 13.2 percent.

If accepted by both parties the settlement will have a knock-on effect for early childhood and primary school teachers. Under pay parity rules, the MoE must offer any changes to teachers' unified base salary scale to primary teachers and then in turn to kindergarten teachers.

The PPTA shut down industrial action by secondary teachers last month to go into arbitration. PPTA and the primary teachers' union, the NZ Education Institute (NZEI), kept the two workforces separated and scuttled a growing movement that saw a 50,000-strong unified one-day strike by teachers in March, the country's largest ever.

New Zealand nurses accept “pay equity” settlement

Nurses and healthcare assistants employed by Te Whatu Ora (Health NZ) have voted to accept a ‘pay equity’ settlement that will net some up to \$28,000 in lump sums.

The deal came out of mediation between Te Whatu Ora, the Nurses Organisation (NZNO) and Public Service Association, which had been in litigation in the Employment Relations Authority and Employment Court since early 2022.

The claim, lodged by unions in 2017 under the Equal Pay Act, is meant to fix long-standing gender-based discrimination and bring wages into line with so-called male-dominated professions. It has been used as a legal mechanism for years to stifle independent industrial action by nurses over pay and conditions.

Te Whatu Ora paid out lump sums of \$10,000 last March, and together with additional lump sums and backpay on the revised pay rates meant staff were owed between \$17,000 and \$29,000, depending on role and seniority.

Strike action by nurses remains possible next week. Voting is open until August 7 for NZNO members on whether to accept a separate collective agreement offer from hospitals. That amounts to a flat-rate salary increase of \$4,000 (\$5,000 for senior nurses) and a further 3 percent next year, an effective pay cut.



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