

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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## India: Andhra Pradesh power union calls off strike after partial resolution of workers' demands

The Andhra Pradesh State Power Employees Joint Action Committee (APSPE JAC) called off a planned indefinite strike by over 70,000 power utility workers within several hours of it commencing on midnight Wednesday. The JAC claimed it had reached agreement with the government on major issues, such as pay revision and other demands. A committee is to be formed to finalise the pay revision, which was to come into effect on April 1, 2022.

The decision to strike followed the government's cancellation of a meeting on July 20, work-to-rule action from August 4, and a sit-down protest on Tuesday in front of the Transmission Corporation at Vidyut Soudha, Vijayawada.

The JAC represents 37,000 permanent workers, 23,500 contract workers and 4,500 piece readers. Workers want salary increases, an end to privatisation and the installation of pre-paid smart meters, equal pay for equal work, and permanency for contract workers. JAC claim these issues will be dealt with by the newly formed committee.

## Punjab power utility workers demand job permanency

Contract workers from Powercom and Transco demonstrated outside the office of cabinet minister Anmol Gagan Maan in Mundi Kharar, Punjab state, on Monday over several long-outstanding demands. These include permanent jobs and compensation for relatives of deceased linesmen. The protest was organised by the Powercom and Transco Contract Workers' Union.

A large contingent of police attacked the demonstrators, detaining about 60 workers, forcing them onto buses and transporting them away from the area. Workers and family members responded by demonstrating near the Bhago Majra toll

plaza and blocked the Kharar-Morinda road.

## Textile machinery manufacturing workers in Maharashtra strike

For the second time this year workers at the Switzerland-based Rieter India textile machinery manufacturing plant in Wing, Maharashtra state, walked out on Tuesday to protest unfair labour practices, including unlawful employment of contract workers. The Rieter India Employees Federation accused the company of calling in police and local politicians to break the strike. Over 350 federation members walked out in January over the same issues.

According to the federation, seven union leaders, including the general secretary and president, have been transferred to try and weaken the union. It claimed that 20 workers have been suspended, following false allegations by management in false cases and another 20 transferred to distant locations under the pretence of training. It also claimed that nine union members, including two union representatives, were abruptly dismissed from service when the union issued the strike notice.

## Bangladeshi tea garden workers continue strike action in Sylhet

Tea garden workers in Habiganj town, located in Sylhet, Bangladesh, have been on strike since July 23 over outstanding wages and allowances. Tea garden managers suspended payment of their regular weekly wages on July 20.

Workers from the Imam and Bawan tea gardens of the Nabiganj sub-district staged a three-hour demonstration, including a sit-down protest outside the Imam factory, over the same issues. Their protest followed a three-day demonstration on July 23.

Workers want all outstanding wages, festival allowances and reimbursement of the provident fund paid immediately along with a guarantee that their house rents and medical allowances are maintained. Workers alleged that the leaseholders of the gardens have not paid 8 million taka (\$US74,000) in outstanding wages and 1.4 million taka in festival allowances since the 2019 financial

year.

### **South32 labour hire coal miners in New South Wales strike for improved pay offer**

Over 100 workers from labour hire company CH4 walked off the job on August 4 at two South32 coal mines at Appin and Dendrobium, south of Sydney, in protest against a below-inflation pay rise offer from the company. The Mining and Energy Union (MEU), a division of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, has been in negotiations with CH4 for a new enterprise agreement since the old agreement expired in December 2022.

Workers rejected CH4's pay offer of annual 3 percent increases over four years. The MEU has restricted its pay demand to just 5 percent per annum, equal to the recent pay increase South32 gave its direct employees. This is a sell-out demand and well below the current June quarter inflation rate for New South Wales of 6.6 percent. CH4 workers have not had a pay increase for two years.

### **Brotherhood of St Laurence workers in Victoria strike again**

About 80 members of the Australian Services Union (ASU) from the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) walked off the job for the day across Victoria on August 4 as part of a longrunning dispute over the charity group's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers struck for two hours on May 16 and are maintaining low-level work bans.

While their current agreement expired on April 1, 2021, they have not had a pay increase since December 1, 2020, and that was only 1.3 percent. Workers rejected BSL's sub-inflation pay increase offer of 5 percent from July this year, 4 percent in July 2024, and 3 percent in July 2025. BSL also wants to change leave entitlements, which would mean that new employees were worse off than under the previous agreement.

Workers want a pay increase in line with the rate of inflation, which is currently around six percent, plus two percent. Other demands are for gender transition leave, additional leave entitlements for Indigenous staff, reproductive leave, superannuation on unpaid parental leave, increased parental leave and enforceable employment targets for disabled workers.

While only 80 ASU members are involved in industrial action, the final agreement will apply to the pay and conditions of more than 1,100 workers employed by BSL in its National Disability Insurance Sector, aged care, early childhood health, migrant services, and financial education, research and development departments.

### **Strike at B&D Doors in Victoria continues**

A strike by about 30 workers at the Kilsyth workshop of B&D Doors in Melbourne's northeastern suburbs has entered its second week. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members walked off the job on August 2 to demand higher pay in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

After five months of negotiations, the company refused to improve its original offer of just 3 percent annual increases. The last pay rise, of only 2.5 percent, was on July 1, 2022, when the consumer price index (CPI) was up over 7 percent.

After workers decided to take industrial action, B&D management retaliated by withdrawing its initial sign-on bonus and offering instead an extra 1 percent if workers reached company-dictated productivity increases. This was rejected by B&D workers. The AMWU has not presented a specific pay claim, saying that workers want a pay increase greater than the 3 percent offered by B&D.

### **New Zealand Westpac bank workers hold nationwide strike**

Nearly 900 workers at New Zealand Westpac banks held a one-day nationwide strike on Wednesday and held a protest rally in downtown Auckland. Westpac is one of the largest banks in the Australasian market and last year made over a billion dollars profit.

First Union has been bargaining for five months with the bank over pay. More than 95 percent of Westpac's First Union members recently voted to reject an offer of a 7 percent pay increase over 18 months and an additional one-off lump sum payment of \$1,000.

Westpac workers have only received pay increases well below the official rate of inflation since 2021. "Westpac workers have had a gut full of being given the run-around by billionaire bank bosses and are sick of waiting for progress in pay negotiations," a First Union official said.

Westpac workers are planning to vote on another partial strike against management-imposed social media restrictions. Workers have declared that they should be free to publicly share their opinions about low pay and working conditions without fear of disciplinary action. Future strike dates and specific times have not yet been announced.



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