

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: Tamil Nadu sanitary workers in Salem protest arbitrary transfers

Hundreds of sanitary workers from the Salem City Municipal Corporation, Tamil Nadu demonstrated on Monday to demand the immediate cancellation of arbitrary transfers. Workers from all 60 areas stopped work to participate in the protest. Some held a sit-down demonstration outside the corporation's central office.

Workers said that transfer orders were issued on August 13 in opposition to an assurance given by the corporation commissioner. Workers demanded a meeting with management and that all future transfers be limited to within wards and zones and for workers' welfare to be taken into account. The Tamil Nadu Tuimai Sangam (cleaners union) called off the protest following a meeting with corporation officials.

Neyveli Lignite Corporation union calls off 20-day strike with no gain

On Tuesday, the Jeevan Contract Workers Union, which represents over 6,000 striking contract coal mine workers from the government-owned Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, shut down a 20-day strike without winning any gains. Their six demands included job permanency for all contract workers, a 50,000 rupee (\$US600) interim salary and permanent jobs for those who gave up their land for the benefit of the corporation.

The union ended the strike after a meeting with NLC officials and the labour welfare department. According to the union, the NLC agreed to withdraw disciplinary action against 20 workers who participated in the strike and that both parties would abide by the outcome of the Madras high court's decision regarding the workers' demands.

Trichy city sanitary workers protest low wages

Sanitary workers employed by a private agency in Trichi city demonstrated on Monday to protest a cut in their pay. Workers said that their basic daily wage was reduced from 575 rupees (\$UA6.92) to only 421 (\$US5.06) after the Trichy City Corporation outsourced garbage collection.

Workers said that waste collection officials had assured them that wages would not be reduced following privatisation. They also complained that wages payments were inconsistent.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand pay increase

The Bangladesh Garments Sramik Sanghati (workers' union) called a protest in Savar, Dhaka, on August 11 to demand that the minimum wage and annual increment be increased.

The union demanded the minimum monthly wage for all garment workers be lifted from 8,000 and 12,000 taka to 25,000 taka (\$US228) to compensate for the higher costs of living. It also demanded that the 5 percent per annum pay increase be lifted to 10 percent and that the wages board meet more frequently to review the minimum wage.

Sri Lankan wholesale co-operative workers protest restructure

About 200 workers from the retail facility Lanka Sathosa, a subsidiary of the government-run Co-operative Wholesale Corporation, protested outside Sathosa's head office in Colombo on Tuesday. Workers are opposed to government plans to merge Sathosa's 420 retail outlets with the Cooperative Wholesale Establishment. They suspect that the government intends to use the merger to slash the wages of Sathosa's 4,500 employees in preparation for privatisation. It is part of the Wickremesinghe government's privatisation of 430 state enterprises in line with austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund.

The Co-operative Wholesale Establishment was previously established by the central government to provide wholesale and retail facilities for the distribution of essential food items for impoverished workers.

Sri Lankan hospital workers in Colombo protest salary anomalies

About 300 employees from the Doctor Nevil Fernando Teaching Hospital (NFTH) in Malabe, a Colombo suburb, demonstrated outside the health ministry on Wednesday to demand elimination of salary anomalies. Protesters chanted slogans and displayed hand-written placards stating, "Pay our salaries properly," "Pay our salary arrears," and "Stop suppressing workers."

The NFTH, previously a private concern, was acquired by the government in 2018. The Intercompany Workers Union alleged that the

government failed to pay the correct salaries and overtime since the takeover.

Indonesian domestic workers demand parliament pass protection law

Hundreds of domestic workers and supporters are holding sunrise-to-sunset fasting protests in Jakarta and other major cities. They are protesting the government's delay in passing a bill endorsed by legislature in 2020 that protects domestic workers. Workers vowed to maintain their protest until the bill is passed.

Domestic Workers Alliance members are demonstrating under tents outside the parliamentary compound in Jakarta. They held clocks, baby pacifiers, napkins and other cleaning equipment, as well as chains they said symbolised the challenges that domestic servants face in Indonesia.

Indonesia has some 4.2 million domestic workers, according to a 2015 survey by the International Labor Organization and the University of Indonesia. The survey reported that domestic employees often work long hours without adequate rest or time off. They have no social security and suffer violence, as well as economic, physical, and psychological intimidation and isolation, the survey said.

Women comprise 84 percent and children comprise 14 percent of Indonesia's domestic workers who have no protection under the country's labour laws and regulations.

Services Australia workers strike nationally for improved pay

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members at Services Australia (SA), which delivers Centrelink social security payments, held a one-hour strike at 4 p.m. on Tuesday in opposition to the federal Labor government's proposed changes to workplace conditions and 10.5 percent pay offer in a three-year enterprise agreement.

The strike followed two weeks of industrial bans with CPSU members refusing to use prescribed codes that enable management to track the tasks they are completing.

Workers want a 20 percent pay increase over the life of the agreement, as opposed to the government's sub-inflation annual pay increase offer of 4, 3.5, and 3 percent. The government's well-worn claim is that union's demands are "impossible to deliver, granted current budget constraints." The agency has a workforce of almost 10,000.

The CPSU has nearly 1,000 members at the agency and claims that the proposed agreement attacks existing employee rights in rostering, call monitoring and performance management. It is also seeking disability leave, gender affirmation leave, and a four-day working week.

Coal mine supervisors in New South Wales strike for higher wages

About 30 members of the Collieries' Staff and Officials Association (CSOA) at the South32 Appin coal mine in the Illawarra district, south of Sydney, walked off the job for seven days on August 11 in their dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Trying to divide the mine's workforce, management threatened to close part of the pit and stand down production workers, falsely claiming that without supervisors on the job safety could not be guaranteed.

After eight months of negotiations CSOA members voted on July 3 to take protected industrial action after rejecting South32's below inflation pay offer of 6.3 percent. Workers are demanding an improved offer and a production bonus in a year when the mine's profitability skyrocketed to \$US1.38 billion. The union compared the miserly pay offer to management's remuneration, claiming that the CEO is paid \$4.3 million a year and the Chief Operations Officer makes around \$2 million, the equivalent of almost half the total salaries for the mine's 85-person workforce.

CSOA claimed the proposed agreement failed to meet a number of conditions, including rostering for public holidays and left key conditions outside the workplace agreement, which would mean they could be changed at any time by management.

Catholic school teachers in Queensland strike over salaries and conditions

The Independent Education Union (IEU), representing over 4,000 teachers from 100 Catholic Schools across Queensland, gave notice this week that its members will hold a one-hour strike at 10 a.m. on August 23 as part of their campaign for a pay rise. Queensland Catholic Education management has threatened to dock teachers a full day's pay if they persist with industrial action.

The strike follows industrial action on Tuesday that included a five-minute strike and bans on interruptions to lunch breaks, not answering emails outside of working hours and using their full planning and correction time to prepare lessons.

As well as seeking a pay increase that compensated for the current high inflation, teachers want workload reduced and a review of their wage structure, which has not changed in over 30 years.

High-voltage power workers in New South Wales take industrial action

About 20 electricians from the high-voltage power and infrastructure company Consolidated Power Projects (CPP) in New South Wales began industrial action on Tuesday in their fight for wage parity with their CPP colleagues in Victoria and Queensland. There is a \$5 an hour pay difference.

Electrical Trades Union members have twice rejected the company's non-union negotiated enterprise agreement. CPP, following recent compulsory conciliation in the Fair Work Commission, plans to release a third non-union agreement for voting.

ETU members voted on August 3 to approve protected industrial action that could include 24-hour strikes and a ban on working overtime, along with eight other low level work restrictions. The ETU has not specified what industrial action is being taken.

Isaac Regional Council workers in Queensland strike for higher pay

Members of The Services Union (TSU) from the Isaac Regional Council, on Queensland's Central Coast, began a series of one-hour stoppages on Wednesday in opposition to the council's latest pay increase

offer of 0.4 percent. Workers also rejected the council's "unfair approach" to bargaining, which the union claimed favoured one group of workers over another.



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