

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.

70,000 South Korean school teachers to strike over dangerous working conditions

About 70,000 education staff, including teachers, headmasters and vice principals from public schools, plan to strike on September 4 over increasing student abuse in the classroom and harassment by parents. At least 450 schools indicated they will close on the day.

The strike will follow a series of demonstrations by thousands of teachers in response to the death of a young teacher who allegedly committed suicide on July 18 following harassment by a student's parents. Since the death, tens of thousands of teachers from around the country have participated in rallies every Saturday in Seoul. At a protest in front of the National Assembly on August 26 teachers demanded that parliament pass a bill to grant teachers immunity from child abuse claims.

Teachers complained that on average they each have 25 students and that outside school and off duty, they deal with constant abusive phone calls from parents.

Under current law, if a teacher is accused of abuse by a student or parent, that teacher is usually suspended and left to fend for themselves through the legal system. Media reported that two teachers at the same school committed suicide in 2021, allegedly due to harassment from parents and lack of support from the school.

India: Rural social health workers still on strike in Haryana

More than 20,000 Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Haryana state have been on strike since August 8 demanding a wage increase and to be made permanent. They have been protesting in several parts of the state. On Monday, police brutally intervened in their protest march toward the state assembly in Panchkula and arrested union leaders.

ASHA workers have not had a pay increase since 2018. They complained that their work has increased three-fold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On Monday, the Asha Workers Union Haryana State Committee responded to vague assurances from the health minister that their grievances "will be discussed soon" and "resolved appropriately" by declaring that the strike and demonstrations will continue till September 11.

ASHA workers in Kashmir demand higher pay and permanent jobs

ASHA workers from several areas in Kupwara district, Kashmir, protested on Monday to demand regular jobs and a pay rise. ASHA workers are among the poorest group of Kashmir workers. They demanded their minimum monthly wage be increased to 21,000 rupees (\$US254).

The impoverished workers told the media that they had not been paid incentives and wages for several months and are facing serious financial difficulty. They complained that even though they have been providing ASHA services for nearly two decades they still do not receive a regular and adequate wage.

Indian sanitation workers protest in Delhi over work deaths

Thousands of female sanitation workers from across India gathered at Jantar Mantar, Delhi on Monday to protest rising deaths in sewer-septic tanks. They shouted one slogan, "Stop Killing Us!"

Protesters accused the Modi government of underreporting the number of work deaths of sanitation workers, saying the actual number is much higher than the government's figures. They demanded that concrete steps be taken to prevent those deaths, like mechanising the cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.

The workers said they faced widespread social discrimination and demanded that the government ensure their right to life with dignity.

Sri Lankan government health workers protest deteriorating health services

About 100 health workers from the Gampola Base Teaching Hospital in Central Province protested outside the hospital this week over several demands. Protesters held handwritten placards demanding resolution of staff shortages, sufficient supply of medicines and proper payment of overtime rates.

Workers from Kalutara and Matara hospitals in Southern Province joined the protest and demonstrated in front of their base hospitals demanding an end to "paying wards" in hospitals and for the filling of vacant staff positions. The protests called by the Joint Health Employees Union followed an island-wide protest last week by 7,000 government health workers over worsening conditions.

Sri Lankan development officers protest over salary issues

Hundreds of Development Officers protested in front of provincial council secretariats in several parts of the island, including Dambulla in Central Province and Labuduwa in Southern Province. Protesters demanded restoration of a full wage which was abolished in 2016, and a 20,000-rupee (\$US62.10) living allowance.

The Development Services Officers Union and Graduate Employees Union representing about 160,000 development officers called the protest. These workers are paid on average a meagre monthly salary of 41,490 rupees with a base salary of 31,490.

Chevron LNG processing workers in Western Australia strike for better wages and conditions

Unions representing 500 workers employed at Chevron's LNG processing facilities in Western Australia have given notice that their members will begin rolling strike action on September 7 in opposition to Chevron's proposed enterprise agreement.

Australian Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union members at three facilities will impose work bans and hold three-hour rolling stoppages for two days, followed by an 11-hour stoppage, then 10-hour stoppages till September 11. The bans include not working in off-duty periods, acting in higher positions, night shifts or call outs, maintenance work and work on fly-out days.

Workers at the Wheatstone offshore platform will start with half-hour stoppages in the morning before escalating to hour-long stoppages that afternoon and evening. Action will continue up until September 14 with sporadic four hour-long stoppages each day.

Over 98 percent of workers have rejected Chevron's proposed EA which the unions claimed will give Chevron the right to replace permanent employees with low-wage labour hire workers, allow unilateral changes to rosters, the right for Chevron to coerce workers to work on other facilities and other panels with no reimbursement for expenses incurred by the worker.

The unions want to lock in benchmark industry pay and conditions, control over rosters, and restrictions on the use of contractors.

Ampol oil refinery workers in Queensland hold second strike over wages

Over 40 workers employed by the Wood Group, a global engineering and maintenance contractor at the Ampol oil refinery in Lytton, Queensland, walked off the job for the second time in a week on August 23. They are in dispute over the Wood Group's proposed enterprise agreement. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members voted unanimously on August 3 to take strike action and on August 17 walked off the job for the day.

The union has not made public its log of claims other than declaring it wants a "fair" pay increase that compensates for working in confined and dangerous conditions. The current agreement expired on June 30 and negotiations began in April. The workers' last pay increase was 2 percent in June 2022, a real pay cut compared to the official inflation rate at the time of 7.8 percent.

Swinburne University academics in Victoria strike over attack on wages and conditions

Around 500 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at Victoria's Swinburne University held a half-day strike on Thursday in opposition to cuts to wages and conditions in the university's proposed enterprise agreement. NTEU members voted overwhelmingly in May to authorise unlimited strike action and various bans.

Negotiations for a new agreement began in June 2021 and stalled when academic staff rejected Swinburne's offer. The NTEU claimed that the proposed agreement would slash 140 current clauses from the old agreement, including caps on unsafe workloads, reduce protections against bullying, eliminate the transition pathway from casual to permanent employment and impose limits on academic freedom.

The strike coincides with industrial disputes at other tertiary institutes across the state, including at the Melbourne, Monash, La Trobe and Victoria universities over a range of issues, including sub-inflation wage rises, state and federal Labor government's cuts to university jobs, pro-corporate restructuring, and the prioritisation of defence research.

B&D Doors strike in Victoria in fourth week

Strike action by 30 workers at the Kilsyth workshop of B&D Doors in Melbourne's northeastern suburbs has entered its fourth week. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members walked off the job on August 2 to demand higher pay in the next agreement.

The union claimed that after five months of negotiations the company's Japanese owners refused to budge from their offer of just 3 percent annual pay increases. The workers' last increase was in July last year and only 2.5 percent, well below the annual consumer price index at the time of over 7 percent.

Management responded to the workers' decision to strike by withdrawing an initial sign-on bonus offer and offering an extra 1 percent rise if workers reached company-dictated productivity increases. This was also rejected by workers.

The AMWU has not presented a specific pay claim, saying that workers want a pay increase greater than the 3 percent offered. The company has refused to negotiate or meet with the union.

EnerSys electricians' strike in Victoria enters sixth week

Fourteen Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members at the EnerSys Thomastown battery manufacturing facility in Melbourne's northern suburbs are maintaining a strike they began on July 26. The walkout started after management threatened to dock workers' wages if they imposed limited work bans. The workers are fighting for higher pay and improved conditions in the next enterprise agreement. The current agreement expired in March.

EnerSys rejected workers' demands for inflation-level wage rises, restructuring of the wage classification system, and improved working conditions. Workers have not had a pay increase since April last year, which was only 2 percent, well below the then 7 percent inflation rate.

EnerSys provocatively ordered other employees in the factory to dump the strikers' tools outside the factory gates. It is also not allowing strikers back on site to retrieve their personal items. While the ETU claims that

EnerSys plans to break the workforce, the union kept the dispute isolated and is not campaigning for support from other EnerSys workers, allowing the company to keep the factory operating.

SRG Global workers strike at Western Australia alumina smelters

Over 150 workers from SRG Global, an industrial services contract company, began industrial action last week at the Alcoa and South32-Worsley alumina smelters in Western Australia. The workers, who are members of the AMWU and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), are in dispute over SRG Global's proposed enterprise agreement.

South32-Worsley site workers walked out for three hours on August 23, while those at Alcoa struck on August 25. Alcoa SRG workers want a specific site agreement and the same conditions as the South32-Worsley workers.

The strikers are demanding pay increases that compensate for the increasing cost of living, back-pay to the previous agreement expiry date, income protection, travel allowance and compensation for workers who hold additional competencies and several other claims.

SRG Global, an Australian company with a 3,300-strong workforce, provides construction and maintenance services mainly in the mining industry and for large infrastructure projects.



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