

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: Punjab social health workers protest over long outstanding demands

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Tarn Taran district protested on June 18 over long-pending demands that include raising the retirement age from 58 to 65, a monthly pension of 10,000 rupees (\$120) and 500,000 rupees financial support. Another demand was guaranteed jobs for their children when they retire.

The ASHA Workers Facilitators Sanjha Morcha trade union called the demonstration and delivered a memorandum of demands to the district civil surgeon.

Supermax Personal Care factory workers in Maharashtra protest unpaid wages

About 500 former factory workers from Supermax Personal Care at Thane, Maharashtra state, demonstrated outside the chief minister's house on June 13 to demand outstanding wages. The multi-national company, without prior notice, shut its factory in Thane two-and-a-half years ago without paying overdue wages. Some protesters were employed at the factory for 30 years.

The factory had a 70-year history of producing shaving blades for the world market.

Punjab: Amritsar municipal sanitation workers protest night work

Sanitation workers from the Amritsar Municipal Corporation in Indian Punjab demonstrated on Tuesday against an order forcing them to do night work. The Safai Mazdoor Union called the protest, stating that workers were not getting wages on time and vacant posts were not being filled. Workers threatened that if the night work order was not reversed within 72 hours they would strike.

Tamil Nadu fishermen protest demolition of their coastal houses in Chennai

On June 16, ocean fishermen demonstrated in Chennai opposing the demolition of their coastal homes by the Greater Chennai Corporation. The corporation had started the demolition as part of a construction project and gentrification of the city beach residential area. Fishermen said they would extend their protests state-wide if demolition was not stopped immediately. They said they had been forbidden from constructing houses near the coast where they work.

Pakistan: Hospital nurses and doctors in Toba Tek Singh protest colleague's arrest

Nurses from the Khanewal District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital stopped work and blocked the National Highway on June 14 to protest the arrest of a colleague, Apsa Afaq, who has been accused of negligence for the alleged reaction of antibiotics which caused the death of three children at the facility.

Nishtar Hospital nurses and paramedics in Multan, along with Multan Children's Hospital nurses, struck in solidarity. The Khanewal Young Doctors' Association (YDA) blamed medicines for the children's' death and demanded immediate release of the arrested nurse.

Bangladeshi chemical workers in Gazipur strike over unpaid wages

About 100 workers from the National Chemical Manufacturing factory in the Barabari area, in Gazipur, Dhaka, stopped work for two days on June 14 demanding unpaid salaries for April and May. They rallied outside the factory gate and attempted to block the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. One protesting worker was seriously injured and hospitalised when police attacked the demonstration.

Among their demands were payment of last year's annual leave payment, Eid festival bonuses, and the withdrawal of layoffs, which factory authorities started in April. Workers said they would not go home for Eid festival on June 17 without their earnings, vowing to continue their protest until they were paid.

Endeavour Energy power distribution workers in New South Wales strike

Hundreds of Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from Endeavour Energy stopped work for 24 hours and rallied outside the company's

headquarters in Parramatta on Tuesday. The action followed a 24-hour strike in February and imposition of low-level work bans in opposition to Endeavour's "insulting" pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement.

Endeavour's latest offer, rejected by workers in March, included a \$1,000 sign-on bonus, a 5.25 percent pay rise from July this year and annual 3.25 percent increases, or the consumer price index (CPI) rate, whichever is the greater, in 2025 and 2026.

The ETU, which covers over 800 Endeavour workers, says it wants a yearly 8 percent pay rise over three years to compensate for previous sub-inflation pay increases. It claimed that wages at Endeavour have only increased by 10.5 percent since 2019. It said there are also over 60 outstanding claims that are subject to ongoing negotiations.

Endeavour Energy operates the electrical distribution network for Greater Western Sydney and the Illawarra area, south of Sydney.

Saputo milk-processing workers in Tasmania strike again for pay parity

Maintenance workers at Saputo's milk-processing factory in Burnie are holding their eighth strike since the beginning of May in their 10-month attempt to reach agreement with Saputo for a pay increase. The 22 workers walked out on June 14 and have not set a date to return to work.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) and the Communication Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU) allege Saputo pays its Burnie workers 21 percent less than their co-workers across multiple sites in rural Victoria. Workers want pay parity and a pay rise. Saputo's last offer was for a 4.5 percent rise in the first year, well below the rise of 21 percent that workers are demanding.

According to the unions, Saputo has flown in scab labour from the Australian mainland and Germany as strikebreakers and has sent propaganda about the negotiations to the home addresses of striking workers.

Ecolab chemical manufacturing workers in Australia strike

Sixty-six United Workers Union members at five Ecolab chemical factories in Melbourne and Brisbane walked out on Wednesday in an enterprise agreement dispute. Workers in Brisbane stopped work for 24 hours while the Melbourne workers struck for four hours. The action followed a one-hour walkout on June 13 to demand an improved cost-of-living wage rise and to close the wage gap between Brisbane and Melbourne, which Ecolab has rejected.

The US-based Ecolab produces chemicals for hospitals, the mining industry, fast food chains, food and beverage manufacturers, water treatment plants and fertilisers. According to the union, Ecolab registered \$US5 billion in revenue last financial year, which allowed Ecolab's chief executive to pocket around \$22 million.

Port of Brisbane fuel barge workers strike against poor pay and conditions

Six workers employed by ASP Ship Management to operate the Champion 63 barge, which refuels cruise ships and other vessels at the

Port of Brisbane, struck for eight hours on June 15 and again on Wednesday to demand improved pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. Workers complained of unfair wages, unsuitable roster arrangements and an inability to take leave because of undermanning.

They are represented by the Australian Maritime Officers Union, Maritime Union of Australia and the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers, which accuse ASP of delaying bargaining, saying it took six months to agree to begin bargaining after vessel operations began in February 2023.

Medical imaging staff at Royal Hobart Hospital strike

Exhausted and under-paid medical imaging staff at the Royal Hobart Hospital in Tasmania's capital Hobart walked off the job for half an hour on Wednesday and rallied outside the hospital. Radiographers, sonographers and nuclear medicine technologists demanded the state Liberal government raise wages and staffing levels in their department.

Workers said they are paid \$10 an hour less than imaging staff in the private sector, which is causing low retention rates at the hospital. Some positions remain unfilled despite being advertised for over six months.

A spokesman for the Health and Community Services Union said the unit is suffering a critical shortage of qualified imaging workers and currently unable to fill 30 percent of vacancies, causing an ongoing shortage that is impacting medical treatments.

Demand for imaging services has increased by 100 percent over the last six years with no increase in staff. The union alleges that the lack of imaging is interfering with decisions about patient treatment and is restricting timely care throughout the hospital.

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology educators hold fifth strike in pay dispute

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) educators held a 36-hour strike on June 13, their fifth walkout this year. Low-level bans were imposed last August, after 1,100 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members overwhelmingly rejected RMIT's proposed enterprise agreement and voted for industrial action.

While the current agreement expired in June 2021, the NTEU has dragged out the long-running pay dispute. RMIT has offered sub-inflation 3.5 percent annual wage rises and 13 percent superannuation. Management has demanded a new sessional staff category, increased teaching and work hours and changes to classification level testing.

Educators want annual wage increases of 5 percent, reduced workloads, guaranteed secure jobs for current casual teachers and academic staff, 17 percent superannuation for all fixed term and continuing staff, and equality of conditions for redundancy and disciplinary procedures for all Higher Education and Vocational Education staff.

NTEU members currently come under two enterprise agreements—the RMIT University Enterprise Agreement 2018 and RMIT Vocational Education Workplace Agreement 2019. RMIT management is refusing the union's demand that all workers be covered by a single agreement. The NTEU has threatened to call another strike in August during the university's Open Day.



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