

# 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.*

## South Korea: Strike at Samsung Electronics enters second week

About 6,000 National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU) members, mainly from Samsung's semiconductor manufacturing unit, walked out on a three-day strike on July 8 to demand higher pay. Failing to receive any response from management, the union has extended the strike indefinitely. The NSEU represents over 30,000 of the company's 125,000-strong workforce.

Negotiations for a pay increase began in January but ground to a halt after nine rounds of negotiations. The NSEU wants a 6.5 percent pay rise, a bonus pegged to the company's earnings, a one-day vacation for all employees, additional paid leave and compensation for economic losses incurred during unpaid strikes.

The union also wants transparent guidelines on the company's bonus system, which is connected to Samsung's operating profits. Currently, the company can claim a division produced no profits and deny paying bonuses regardless of how much labour employees worked. Like other major companies in South Korea, bonuses make up a significant portion of workers' wages, meaning that withholding bonuses is akin to a wage cut.

Samsung has flatly rejected the union's demands, offering a 5.1 percent wage increase and threatened to replace the striking workers. The media has reported that the strike is affecting production at the semiconductor unit. On Thursday, management agreed to meet the union yesterday to discuss a framework and schedule for fresh negotiations.

## Indian railway workers protest new national pension scheme

Members of the All-India Railwaymen's Federation, South Central Railway Mazdoor Union and Northeast Frontier Railway Mazdoor Union held gate meetings and protests at railway offices in various parts of the country on July 12 to demand the government resurrect the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and scrap the New Pension Scheme (NPS).

State and federal government employees across India have been holding ad hoc protests over the cost-cutting NPS after it replaced the old scheme in 2004. Under the NPS, workers are paid a pension as per their contribution to the provident fund, which is well below what they would get under the old defined benefits scheme. The previous scheme paid a pension based on the last wages paid to workers.

## Karnataka social health workers demand higher wages and social security

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers demonstrated outside the Zilla Panchayat Conference Hall in Kalaburagi on Sunday to demand the state government ensure minimum wages and social security to ASHA workers and for their inclusion as government employees. Until that happens, all statutory facilities including free health coverage must be extended to them, the workers said.

## Tamil Nadu garment workers demand higher minimum wage

Garment and Fashion Workers' Union members held a protest meeting in Chennai on July 9 over the latest minimum wages notification by the Tamil Nadu government. The government had reduced an earlier notification of the minimum wage and slashed the dearness allowance from \$US97 to \$49.

According to federal law, minimum wages should be revised once in every four years but minimum wages in Tamil Nadu have not been revised since 2014. Last November, the Supreme Court ordered the Tamil Nadu government to revise the minimum wage, but it was never implemented.

## Oxygen production workers at the SAIL-Bokaro Steel Plant protest sackings

On July 9, Jharkhand Krantikari Mazdoor Union (JKMU) members from the SAIL-Bokaro Steel Plant demonstrated at Bokaro to demand justice for contract workers at INOX, which produces industrial oxygen within the steel plant.

Around 80 workers, employed by INOX through third-party contractors since 2021, were dismissed a month ago after raising concerns about non-payment of minimum wages, bonuses and overtime. The union has demanded the Bokaro district commissioner reinstate the dismissed workers and have called on the steel plant management to adhere to labour laws.

## Sri Lanka: Low-income support workers in Colombo protest

Hundreds of Samurdhi officers employed in the government's program to support lower-income people protested outside the Sethsiripaya (Sri Lankan government ministerial premises) in Battaramulla, a Colombo suburb, on Wednesday. Workers held placards saying, "Immediately stop the reduction of wages of new employees" and "Pay all allowances immediately".

The workers want the immediate ending of the 4 percent ETF (electronic funds transfer) surcharge, the immediate establishment of a promotion system acceptable to all ranks, reintroduction of safety and social welfare programs for low-income people, and an end to cutting the rights of retired workers.

### **Western Australian public servants continue rolling stoppages for pay rise**

Western Australian public servants in Perth and regional areas stopped work on Wednesday and held lunchtime rallies as part of a series of 30-minute rolling stoppages for an improved pay offer from the state Labor government.

Workers in Perth rallied on Wednesday at the Urban Orchard followed by walkouts at Bunbury and Kununurra on Thursday. The action followed 30-minute rallies in Perth on July 3 and 10. The next walkout and rally is planned for July 24, at the Mason Bird Building Forecourt in Cannington.

The Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association (CPSU/CSA) want a 12 percent pay increase over the next two years for about 40,000 public sector workers, a trial of a four-day working week, and higher allowances for staff in regional Western Australia. The government's current pay offer stands at 11.5 percent over three years and it has not responded to the union's other demands, which also include improved superannuation entitlements and parental leave and a pay equity review.

### **Ramsay Health Care nurses in New South Wales take industrial action over low pay and high workload**

About 2,600 members of the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) at private hospitals of Ramsay Health Care began low level industrial action on July 12 in their struggle for higher pay and safe staffing levels. The action involves members wearing union badges and distributing leaflets to patients and visitors.

The nurses are in dispute over Ramsay Health Care's sub-inflation pay offer of 11 percent over a three-year agreement, or annual increases of 3.7 percent. The union has allowed negotiations for the new agreement to drag on since March last year.

Ramsay Health Care owns more than 70 hospitals and health facilities across Australia. The union claimed that NSW members are paid up to 14 percent less than their Queensland counterparts.

Nurses want an 18 percent pay increase over three years and improvements to conditions, including increases to paid parental and personal leave entitlements, protection of existing conditions and improved staff rostering to reduce workload. One nurse told the union, "We are doing increasing hours of overtime and regularly miss out on lunch breaks as a result of staffing shortages."

### **Bolton Clark aged care workers in Victoria begin industrial action for pay rise**

Over 1,000 members of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) at Bolton Clark aged care facilities in Victoria began industrial action on Monday for a higher pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Over 98 percent of ANMF members approved taking action in response to Bolton Clark's meagre pay rise offer of just 2 percent over a four-year agreement—i.e., annual increases of only 0.5 percent.

The ANMF has restricted industrial action to include the wearing of union t-shirts, bans on collecting and recording of data, writing messages on cars and refusing redeployment.

The union wants wages and allowances increased from 30 June 2024, in line with the Victorian public health sector, and for this to be the base rate of pay. It also wants a further 4 percent increase on June 30 for each year of the agreement.

ANMF has also accused Bolton Clark of not paying the full 15 percent Stage 2 aged care work-value wage uplift mandated and funded by the federal government. Nearly all other aged care providers are paying the full rate.

### **Royal Hobart Hospital medical imaging staff take industrial action over low pay and chronic understaffing**

Radiographers, sonographers and nuclear medicine technologists at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) in Tasmania have banned using the hospital's new imaging machine until they get additional staff. Workers said demand for imaging services has increased by 100 percent over the last six years with no increase in staff.

The action follows a 30-minute walkout on June 19 over the staffing issue. Workers said they are paid \$10 an hour less than imaging staff in the private sector, which is causing low retention rates at the RHH and Launceston General Hospital. Some positions remain unfilled despite being advertised for over six months. The Health and Community Services Union claimed that currently RHH is unable to fill 30 percent of vacancies in medical imaging.

The union has no intention of mounting a campaign to unite health workers across the state in support of the imaging staff. Instead, it is appealing to the state Liberal government to fill positions by "stepping up and paying competitive wages with the mainland and paying the market allowance."

### **Brisbane's Cross River Rail construction workers strike for pay rise and better safety**

About 150 Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at Cross River Rail construction sites in Brisbane walked off the job on Tuesday as part of an ongoing campaign for higher pay and improved safety in a new work agreement. Negotiations between the CFMEU and building contractor CPB began early this year.

They are demanding the introduction of a heat policy and a subcontractors' clause to improve job security, the inclusion of traffic controllers and cleaners in the agreement and industry-standard rostered days off. The CFMEU also wants equal pay and conditions for the 2,500

subcontracted workers at all the sites.

Heat stress is an ongoing concern for workers. On February 15, thousands of construction workers and supporters demonstrated outside the Queensland parliament over dozens of heat stress incidents on worksites. The protest was in response to the death of Daniel Sa'u, a 29-year-old labour hire worker, who allegedly died of heat stress at the Cross River Rail Salisbury site in late December. The CFMEU claims that 25 workers have been hospitalised due to heat stress since Christmas.

#### **Western Australian offshore gas platform workers strike for new work agreement**

Twenty-five maintenance workers on three offshore natural gas processing platforms in Western Australia began protected industrial action on July 13, in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Workers voted unanimously on July 11 to take protected industrial action that could include nine separate work bans and work stoppages of between 30 minutes and 24 hours.

UGL-AIS employs the workers to operate and maintain Woodside's Montara and Pyrenees floating natural gas platforms, and Jadestone's Stag offshore platform. They are covered by the Offshore Alliance (OA), which includes Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia members.

The OA accused UGL-AIS of attempting to shift workers off a union-negotiated agreement onto its Baseline Maintenance Agreement, with conditions below industry standards. Workers have twice voted unanimously to reject the company's proposed agreement.

#### **SAE University College educators across Australia strike for pay rise**

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at SAE University College campuses across Australia walked off the job for five hours on Tuesday in protest over the university's "insulting" low pay offer. SAE is a national creative media industries educational institute specialising in video, audio, artificial intelligence and game design.

SAE has offered a meagre \$0.01 above the minimum award rate. The strike affected classes in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Byron Bay. Workers want a decent pay rise and a reasonable workload.

#### **Victorian Alpine resort workers hold second strike for improved pay and conditions**

About 50 state government workers from Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) took industrial action for a second consecutive weekend to demand improved wages and conditions. Their duties include snow making, clearing and grooming, managing traffic, ski patrol, waste management, asset and property management and facilitating alpine leisure activities.

Australian Workers Union members at Falls Creek and Mt Hotham joined forces with Mt Buller and Mt Baw Baw members on July 13 in their fight for a single agreement with all workers on the same rates and conditions. Currently only some workers receive weekend penalty rates, higher rates for working between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. and compensation for

extreme weather conditions.

Negotiations for a new agreement have been ongoing for four months. The union wants workers who receive penalty rates to retain them, and for the same penalty rates to be extended to all ARV workers. Workers also want wage and entitlement parity with other Victorian public servants.



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