

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: Seoul bus drivers threaten to strike over pay

The Seoul City Bus Union announced on Wednesday that it will stage a “strike kick-off ceremony” at the Seoul Traffic Centre in Songpa District on May 26. The drivers are demanding higher pay. If an agreement is not forthcoming, wider strike involving all bus drivers will be called for May 28. The drivers imposed work-to-rule bans on May 7 as part of their campaign.

The main issue in dispute is whether bonuses should be included in base wages. The bus drivers’ union argues that a Supreme Court ruling last December requires bi-monthly bonuses, equivalent to 100 percent of base salary, to be counted as part of the regular wage.

Management insists that the current wage system excludes bonuses from base wages and that therefore the union’s demands are unrealistic. It wants the wage structure to be reformed saying that in light of the court ruling wages would increase by 20 percent in the current structure.

Other union demands include an 8.2 percent increase in base pay, the elimination of wage disparities for equal work, and extending the retirement age from 63 to 65.

India: Food processing workers in Bihar strike over unpaid bonus and poor conditions

Workers at a multinational food products factory in the Sikandarpur Industrial Area, Bihta walked out and blocked the factory’s main entrance on May 12. The administration called in the police to intervene.

One worker said the company had failed to honour its promise of an annual 10 percent salary increase and reported poor canteen food quality and delays in other benefits. Similar demands, including payment of festive bonuses, were raised six months ago with no resolution.

Tamil Nadu power plant workers demand better wages and conditions

Contract workers and supporters from the NLC Tamil Nadu Power Limited (NTPL) thermal power plant in Thoothukudi have been holding various demonstrations since April 17. Workers want fair wages,

improved working conditions, and an interim daily relief of 200 rupees (\$US2.34).

The NTPL’s Thoothukudi plant has two 500 MW generating units, employing around 1,400 contract employees and approximately 200 permanent workers. Management has filed a court case against the workers’ struggle.

Ludhiana Municipal Corporation sanitation workers demand permanent jobs

Non-permanent sanitation workers, along with their work colleagues, protested at the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation Zone A office in Punjab on May 7. They accused management in a meeting with the commissioner of making “fake assurances” about permanent jobs.

Workers also complained about the job outsourcing claiming it erodes workers’ rights, causing job insecurity and reduced benefits. They demanded the complete abolition of outsourcing and a return to direct hiring practices to ensure fair treatment and long-term employment for all sanitation staff.

They also demanded the implementation of a medical insurance scheme with one million rupees coverage. This demand, they said, underscores the significant physical risks inherent in their duties and the need for adequate health protection.

West Bengal teachers protest at Salt Lake

Teachers in Kolkata’s Salt Lake have steadfastly refused to leave their protest site outside Bikash Bhavan, despite being issued notices from the Bidhannagar Police Commissionerate. The atmosphere around Bikash Bhavan remains tense as teachers are determined to maintain their sit-down protest, regardless of external pressures.

Organised by the Jogya Shikshak Shikshika Adhikar Mancha (JSSAM), the teachers have been maintaining a sit-down protest since May 7. Their action was sparked by a Supreme Court decision in April, which annulled the appointments of over 25,000 teaching and non-teaching staff who had been recruited through the 2016 West Bengal School Service Commission (SSC) examinations. The annulments led to significant job losses, forcing teachers to protest.

The teachers have several demands, chief among them being the reinstatement of their positions. They insist on a permanent solution to their demands and clarification on the state government’s response to the review petition.

Bangladeshi apparel workers protest to demand arrears

Over 200 Bangladeshi apparel workers from Stylecraft Limited and Young Ones Bangladesh plants protested outside the Gazipur Metropolitan Police Office on Sunday to demand 14-months wage arrears. The two factories employ about 1,800 workers.

Some workers were paid 20,000 taka (\$US164) during the Eid holidays. At that time, the factory authorities promised workers that the remaining arrears would be paid on May 7.

The workers waited for three days and went to the factory on Sunday morning but were attacked by alleged company thugs. According to the Bangladesh Garment and Sweater Workers Trade Union Centre, five female workers were injured. The union accused the factory owners of using their influence in various ways to avoid the payment of arrears and of filing false cases against workers.

Bangladeshi tannery workers strike for revised minimum wage

Workers from over 50 tanneries in the Savar Tannery Estate, in Dhaka District, began taking two-hour daily stoppages on Monday demanding implementation of the revised minimum wage. Workers warned they would strike indefinitely if their demand was not met within three days.

The Ministry for Labour and Employment had approved the new minimum wage of 18,001 taka (\$US148.06) a month in November 2024, but most factory owners are yet to implement it.

A union spokesperson said about 65 percent of tannery workers are employed on a temporary basis, a practice, he claimed, is used to deny workers their rightful benefits under the new wage structure.

Sri Lankan port workers strike over unpaid allowances

Jaya Container Terminal and East Container Terminal workers at the Colombo Port struck for four hours at 8 p.m. on Sunday to protest Ports Authority cuts in incentive allowances paid to essential employees who worked on May 12 and 13, during the Vesak Poya holidays.

The Port Authority limited the overtime allowances for work done on May 12 to 10,000 rupees (\$US38) and on May 13 to 5,000 rupees. The dockers said this violated long-standing practices regarding holiday compensation for essential workers.

Sri Lankan LP gas terminal workers strike for pay rise

Around 250 manpower workers at the Muthurajawela Litro LP Gas storage terminal walked out on Wednesday, accusing management of going years without increasing wages and not paying the government-mandated minimum wage. Workers said they would continue the strike until a written commitment is given to meet wage requirements.

Allied Pinnacle bakery workers in Victoria strike for pay rise

About 150 workers from the Allied Pinnacle bakery at Altona North, Melbourne walked off the job for 48 hours on Wednesday to protest the company's low pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement. The bakery produces cakes, cookies, croissants, donuts and bread for major supermarkets, such as Coles and Woolworths, and independent and industrial bakeries such as Bakers Delight, as well as cafes and smaller businesses.

The United Workers Union have been negotiating with the company since September for an improved offer. Workers want a 15 percent wage increase over three years. The company has offered annual increases of only 4 percent, 3.75 percent and 3.5 percent. Workers are also seeking nightshift allowance parity with colleagues at other Allied Pinnacle worksites.

West Wimmera Shire Council workers begin industrial action

About 40 Australian Services Union members from the West Wimmera Shire Council in western Victoria began industrial action on May 9, after rejecting the council's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers voted unanimously in April to impose over 20 work bans. These include not attending management meetings or responding to management emails, bans on using personal mobile phones for council work, and refusing to collect fees and charges. They have also banned overtime, mowing, doing street repairs, picking up and relocating dead animals and other duties.

Epworth Medical Imaging workers in Victoria maintain industrial action

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation members from Epworth Medical Imaging at Richmond and Geelong have entered their third week of low-level industrial action for higher pay. The 33 workers want 4.5 percent annual increases in a three-year enterprise agreement and a \$9 lead apron allowance.

Qube crane operators in Queensland walk off for industry standard pay rates

Over 30 Qube crane operators walked off the job and rallied outside their work site in southeast Queensland on May 8 to demand higher pay. Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union members are demanding Qube pay market rates and conditions on par with other crane hire companies.

Kempe Engineering workers in Victoria strike over stalled wage talks

Over 20 Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members from Kempe Engineering at Portland, Victoria stopped work for 24 hours and rallied outside their factory on Wednesday. The workers, who have also imposed overtime bans, are protesting the company's delay in negotiating a new enterprise agreement. The workers have not had a pay increase

since January 1, 2024.



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