

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: Telangana domestic workers demand rights and welfare benefits

Hundreds of domestic workers in Hyderabad protested on June 16 to demand basic work rights, including welfare benefits, social security, monthly pensions and hospital access. Telangana state has about 1.1 million domestic workers including about 600,000 in Hyderabad, who all face low wages, overwork and employer harassment. Most are migrants from rural areas and did not have facilities to pursue their education.

Tamil Nadu gas bottling workers in Salem strike against victimisation

Contract workers from the Indian Oil gas bottling unit in Salem began an indefinite strike on June 12. The walkout began after management fired 12 workers falsely, accusing them of "work dereliction." The Tamil Nadu Petroleum and Gas Workers Union, which is affiliated to the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, called the strike. Management agreed to reinstate only 10 workers but workers are insisting on unconditional reinstatement of all 12 employees.

West Bengal teachers protest over job losses

Teachers and education staff have been protesting at Central Park in Kolkata since May 8 to demand reinstatement after losing jobs due to a School Service Commission corruption scandal. One of ten of protesters who began a 60-hour hunger strike was hospitalised with several others now suffering health issues.

Kerala: Sabarimala Forest region plantation workers strike

Around 280 plantation workers from the Kerala Forest Development Corporation in Gavi have been on strike since June 16 to demand basic facilities, including the provision of raincoats and shoes which are needed to protect against forest leeches. Workers denounced company officials

for not paying any attention to their basic needs. Sixty of the 280 workers are temporary employees. Plantation work in Gavi has come to a standstill.

Bangladeshi healthcare workers demand outstanding salaries and job security

About 50 healthcare workers hired under a government COVID-19 response project held a sit-down protest outside the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) in Mohakhali on Saturday to demand payment of outstanding salaries and official confirmation that their jobs would continue.

Protesters told DGHS authorities they had 24 hours to respond to their demands or face intensified action. Over 300 health workers protested on April 27 over the same issues.

The nearly 400 health workers were hired in early 2020 under the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Pandemic Preparedness project. The workforce, which included medical officers, nurses and technologists, was later expanded to 1,154. According to the government, workers' salaries were funded through a World Bank grant which ended in December.

"We've worked for five months without pay," said one of the protesters and added, "Now we're being asked to stop reporting to work, without any job confirmation or explanation."

Bangladesh government sector workers oppose "black law"

Government workers resumed protests on Monday and continued until Wednesday at the Secretariat's Badamtoli area to demand withdrawal of the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, terming repressive measures a "black law."

The amendment allows dismissal of public servants for "administrative disruptions" within 14 days and without departmental proceedings based on four types of offences. These are disrupting discipline, obstructing duties, unauthorised absence, or inciting others not to perform their duties.

The protesters planned to submit a memorandum to the advisers of the Home Affairs, Social Welfare, and Housing and Public Works ministries calling for the repeal of the Ordinance and warning that they will continue their action if their demands were not met.

The initial protests that began on May 24 were called off after several days by the Bangladesh Secretariat Officers and Employees Unity Forum which accepted a government promise that there would be a positive response by June 15.

Bangladesh: Protesting garment workers in Gazipur arrested

Joint security and military forces violently arrested 45 garment workers in Gazipur on June 14 who were protesting job cuts at the Designtex Knitwear factory. The protest began after workers discovered that factory management had fired 10 workers when it reopened after Eid holiday.

Sri Lanka government sector educators begin work-to-rule campaign

Principals of all grades throughout Sri Lanka began industrial action over several issues on Monday. A spokesman from the union said that principals will carry out duties from 7.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. but that they would not do any official work for the rest of the day. The principals want their existing allowance increased and paid to all grades and an immediate revision to the basic salary policy and other promotional issues.

Sri Lanka state sector agricultural casual employees rally for permanency

Hundreds of agricultural casual workers marched to the Ministry of Agriculture in Colombo on Monday demanding confirmation of their service. Some were dressed in black and held placards. There are about 1,500 workers recruited under the Ministry of Agriculture as casual employees on a contract basis.

While the minister told protesters that the government was moving to regularise government casual employees, educators want solutions within a month.

Victorian firefighters' dispute enters ninth month

Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) firefighters and administrative staff have been in dispute with management and the state Labor government over wages and conditions since October when they walked out and marched through central Melbourne.

This week, 90 percent of 2,896 of the 3,700 members of the United Firefighters Union (UFU) passed a vote of no confidence in the FRV commissioner and executives. Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria leaders have resigned following similar votes in the past 12 months.

Administrative staff said they had not had a pay increase for four years and that wages had effectively declined by 20 percent since 2019.

Frontline firefighters are protesting over the dangerous state of their old fleet of fire trucks and equipment, which they say is unreliable and not fit for purpose. A UFU spokesperson said this week that 42 percent of fire trucks should be off the road but requests for FRV to conduct a fleet audit were denied. UFU claimed the relationship with FRV leadership was "untenable" and membership had been hit by serious technical, operational and industrial failures.

The UFU has dragged out the dispute and limited industrial action pushing it into the Fair Work Commission with the UFU and government unable to come to an agreement.

Bluescope Steel electricians in New South Wales impose bans

About 140 members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) at Bluescope Steel in Port Kembla, south of Sydney, have banned overtime and the use of critical equipment to demand a better enterprise agreement. Apart from the Australian Workers Union, which has accepted the company's offer, the other ETU, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) remain in dispute.

As well as improved wages and conditions, the ETU, AMWU and CFMEU want a separate agreement that brings apprentices back in-house. The ETU said apprentices are currently hired through an external company on minimum award rates as low as \$13 an hour.

Striking Qube crane operators in Queensland reject pay offer

Over 30 striking Qube crane operators at the Port of Brisbane rejected the company's latest pay offer on June 13. Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union members began industrial action on May 28 demanding market rates and equal pay and with other crane hire companies. The crane operators have a 24/7 picket outside their depot.

Qube provocatively responded to the industrial action with a threatened snap restructure of its mobile crane business and declaring it would impose sweeping redundancies. It is advertising through labour hire companies for qualified crane operators to act as scabs. Qube has hired security guards who are preventing CFMEU safety inspection permit holders entering the premises and report on what some labour hire company workers are doing to maintain operations.

Snowy Mountains hydro-power construction workers strike again

About 900 workers from five unions on the multi-billion-dollar Snowy 2.0 hydro-power construction project in southern New South Wales walked off the job for the day for the second time in three weeks on June 11 to demand higher wages and improved conditions. Members of the CFMEU, AWU, AMWU, ETU and NSW Plumbers Union first walked off the job for 24 hours on May 11.

The FIFO (fly-in-fly-out) workers do 12-hour underground shifts in 14-day stints in the Snowy Mountains wilderness before travelling home for seven days.

The unions are in negotiations with the construction contractor, Italian-owned Webuild and associate partner Future Generation Joint Venture (FGJV), for a new enterprise agreement. Workers want a 12 percent pay increase to bring them in line with rates paid by Webuild at the North East Link Tunnels project in Melbourne.

They are also demanding a \$140 daily camp allowance, a doubling of night shift rates, and increased leave for mental health, as well improved and more varied meals.

Five consecutive 24-hour strikes planned for Monday were called off by the unions when they accepted a recommendation from the Fair Work Commission to pause industrial action for two weeks to facilitate three days of "intensive" bargaining.

Glencore coal miners in New South Wales strike for pay rise

About 140 miners at the Glencore coal mine complex at Ulan in New South Wales began industrial action on Monday with a five-hour strike at the start of each shift.

The Mining and Energy Union (MEU) is representing surface and underground miners for their respective work agreements with Swiss-based transnational mining giant Glencore. The long-running negotiations stalled with the union accusing Glencore of attempting to cut existing entitlements and conditions in current enterprise agreement offers.

MEU members voted on June 6 to approve industrial action that could include up to five work bans, including overtime, and unlimited strikes ranging from one minute to 24 hours. Surface operation workers have been negotiating for annual pay rises with Glencore for three years. Underground miners want wage equity with underground miners at Ulan West, the site's nearby sister mine.

New Zealand doctors and dentists strike over pay

Some 240 senior doctors and dentists in New Zealand's Northland region struck for 24 hours this week over an ongoing pay dispute with Health New Zealand (HNZ). They staged a mass walkout from Whang?rei Hospital on Wednesday morning and picketed nearby. They also demonstrated outside Kaitaia Hospital.

The walkout followed an unprecedented nationwide 24-hour strike on May 1 by more than 5,000 senior hospital doctors and specialists in the same dispute. The Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) said HNZ's offer is well below the CPI and the parties were still "far apart" in bargaining.

While the union has asked for a 12 percent pay rise in the coming year, HNZ's offer averaged about 0.78 percent increase per year over three years. Prior to bargaining, HNZ offered no pay rise for the year from August 2024, when the collective agreement expired, one percent in the second year, and two percent in the third year.

Northland is one of the country's most impoverished regions with high rates of unemployment and endemic illness. Health services are falling over. According to cardiologists, heart patients in Northland must be much sicker to get a specialist appointment than if they lived in Auckland. There are huge staff shortages across the region, with 52 current vacant specialist positions.



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