

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: Tamil Nadu vocational training teachers hold state-wide strike

Thousands of temporary vocational training teachers across Tamil Nadu stopped work on Tuesday and protested in Chennai demanding permanent jobs and an increase in wages from the current 12,500 rupees (\$US146) a month. At least 5,000 attended the demonstration but this number quickly diminished to about 500 following violent attacks by police who intimidated protesters with detentions and charges.

The teachers have been demanding to be made permanent since their appointments in 2012. They condemned the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government for not fulfilling its pre-election promise to give them permanent jobs.

Punjab: Mohali Municipal Corporation workers end strike

On July 3,300 sanitation workers from the Punjab Municipal Corporation ended strike action that began on June 30 over the arbitrary targeting of sanitation inspectors over attendance issues. Workers accused the inspectors of seeking early promotions while sanitation workers are not promoted even after working 10 to 15 years. The Punjab Safai Mazdoor Federation called off the strike claiming that the Mayor Amarjeet Singh Sidhu and MLA Kulwant Singh agreed to workers' demands.

Odisha road transport drivers strike for improved conditions

The Odisha Driver Mahasangha, which covers most road transport drivers in Odisha state, called an indefinite strike on Tuesday saying it had a seven-point charter of demands. These primarily focused on improving driver welfare and opposing

recent government policy changes.

The union said a major concern of drivers involves the Odisha government's decision to grant vehicle-checking authority to the police, a responsibility that traditionally rested with the Transport Department. The union argues that this change could open the door to harassment and misuse of power.

Other demands include the construction of rest shelters and toilet facilities at designated vehicle parking zones and the extension of welfare benefits to auto-rickshaw drivers, who are generally not included in the current welfare framework. Essential services such as ambulances, fire brigades, and disaster response vehicles are exempted from the strike.

Glencore coal miners in New South Wales strike for pay rise

About 100 Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members at Glencore's underground coal mine at Ulan in New South Wales stopped work for 24 hours on Wednesday in their fight for pay parity with sister mine, the nearby Ulan West. The MEU claimed that workers at Ulan underground are paid almost 12 percent less than at Ulan West, just 2 km away, despite both being employed by Glencore, and performing the same roles.

The MEU is representing 140 surface and underground miners for their respective work agreements with the Swiss-based mining giant. The long-running negotiations stalled with the union accusing Glencore of attempting to cut existing entitlements and conditions in current enterprise agreement offers. Surface operation workers have been negotiating for annual pay rises with Glencore for three years.

KONE elevator technicians in New South Wales strike for industry standard pay

Elevator installation and maintenance technicians from KONE walked off the job for 24 hours at Newcastle, Central Coast and Mid-North Coast of New South Wales on July 4 to demand industry standard pay in a new enterprise agreement. The action was in addition to a ban on overtime and other work bans put in

place a week earlier.

The Electrical Trades Union claimed that the workers are paid \$8 an hour less than other KONE technicians in the state. Workers want industry standard rates and conditions that Kone and other lift companies already pay elsewhere.

These workers are currently finalising their second underpayment claim in as many years with KONE. The last one ended up being a \$12.6 million underpayment impacting over 800 lift technicians across Australia.

Stramit/Taurean Doors workers in Victoria strike for pay rise

Manufacturing workers employed by Stramit/Taurean Doors in the outer Melbourne suburb of Knoxfield planned to strike for 48 hours on Friday and Monday. About 60 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) will be taking industrial action after negotiations for a new enterprise agreement failed to reach agreement after numerous meetings.

The workers voted by a large margin in June to approve protected industrial action including strikes, indefinite stopworks and bans on overtime and other work.

Stramit is one of Australia's leading manufacturers and suppliers of roll formed steel building products.

Getinge lockout of electricians in Queensland enters eighth week

Eight electricians employed by contractor Getinge, which maintains and repairs sterilising equipment at Queensland Health's public hospitals, have been locked out for eight weeks. They protested outside the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital on July 3 to demand wage parity with their Victorian colleagues who they say are paid \$7 per hour more.

Electrical Trades Union members voted unanimously on May 19 to take industrial action that could include work stoppages up to 24 hours and bans on overtime, call outs and other work. The lockout was Getinge's response to low-level industrial action following five months of failed negotiations for a new agreement.

Star Casino workers in Queensland strike again for pay rise

About 800 United Workers Union (UWU) members at the Star Casino in Brisbane walked out for four hours on Wednesday evening against Star's proposed enterprise agreement. The action, by gaming, food and beverage, and housekeeping workers, followed a two-hour strike on July 4, their first ever. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union is also in the process of

negotiating for a new enterprise agreement with Star and their members joined Wednesday's strike.

After seven months of negotiations Star has offered a below-inflation pay rise of 4 percent over three years coupled with cuts to Sunday penalty rates. Workers want equal pay and conditions with Star Casino workers in Sydney. One worker told the media, "I get paid about 60 cents above minimum wage. If I was doing literally the exact same job at the Star Sydney, I'd be getting almost \$2 an hour or more than I currently get."

Workers threatened to strike again on Friday for 24 hours to coincide with a scheduled poker tournament.

New Zealand Uber drivers rally for employment rights

More than 50 Uber drivers and supporters rallied outside the New Zealand Supreme Court in Wellington last Monday amid an ongoing legal battle with the multi-billion-dollar international ride-share company.

The court was hearing Uber's second appeal against a 2022 Employment Court decision to grant four Uber drivers workplace protection. The Supreme Court must decide whether to uphold the 2022 decision, subsequently confirmed by the Court of Appeal, that the drivers should be deemed employees.

If the court rules in favour of the drivers they will be eligible for benefits such as leave entitlements, minimum wage and holiday pay. The case has implications for thousands of workers across the gig economy with similar employment conditions.

Uber is arguing drivers are independent providers of transportation services for clients with whom they enter into contracts using the app provided by Uber. Counsel for the company told the court drivers were fully aware they were not signing up to a traditional employment relationship. A driver's "freedom to decide" where and when they worked was beyond "typical employment" relationships, he said.

The Appeals Court ruled in favour of the drivers in August 2023, declaring that 'We do not consider that drivers can, in reality, be said to be carrying on transport service businesses on their own account at times when they are logged into the driver app.' The drivers had "no opportunity to bargain with Uber" over the quantity of work they receive, the quality of the work, or their revenue, the court found.

The Supreme Court hearing continued during the week.



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