

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 middle school teachers demand equal pay

More than 2,000 middle school teachers from across Tamil Nadu held a hunger protest on July 26 at the Egmore Stadium in Chennai demanding equal pay for equal work. It followed strike action in January 2023 over the issue.

Teachers ended that strike based on assurances from the chief minister, who according to teachers formed a phony committee to resolve the wage issue, which never happened. Resolution of the middle school teachers' wage issue was also an election promise of the current DMK government. Teachers said they would intensify their agitation if the government continued to ignore their demand.

Meanwhile, in a separate dispute, other teachers in Chennai held a 72-hour hunger protest to demand reinstatement of the old pension scheme which was scrapped in 2003. They complained that the new pension scheme, which they are forced to contribute to, does not provide proper pension, gratuity and other benefits.

Retired Tamil Nadu transport workers demand increased pension and allowances

Retired workers from the State Express Transport Corporation held a sit-down protest outside the bus depot in Tirunelveli on July 23. Demands included minimum pension of 7,850 rupees (\$US90), proper work for eligible children of retired workers and a rise in health insurance and allowances.

The Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) organised the protest. CITU also called a protest of retired workers and their families at the Chennai City transport depot with a similar set of demands.

Jharkhand 108 Emergency ambulance workers strike for better wages and conditions

108 Emergency ambulance drivers and emergency medical technicians went on strike on Monday in Ranchi to demand increased wages and improved working conditions. The 100 workers are employed by a private operator Samman Foundation who threatened the workers that they would

face consequences if they stopped "emergency and essential work affecting the people."

Karnataka commuter transport workers protest before indefinite strike

A group of Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers held a hunger protest at Freedom Park in Bangalore on July 30 to demand settlement of long pending demands. The action was a prelude to the indefinite strike planned for August 5 called last week by the KRSTC Joint Action Committee (JAC) over the issue.

The JAC is led by the All-India Trade Union Congress-affiliated KSRTC Staff and Workers' Federation and includes five other unions. Demands include a pay rise with effect from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2027 and settlement of salary arrears for 38 months (January 1, 2020, to February 28, 2023).

Bangladesh: Gazipur police attack ceramic factory workers

Gazipur industrial police fired tear gas shells at hundreds of protesting workers from RAK Ceramic Industries Limited, in Sreepur, Gazipur on July 27. Protesters blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for around two hours after they gathered at 6 a.m. in Nayanpur area of Dhanua village and marched to the factory.

Their demands included payment of January-July arrears by August 1, appointment of employees to suitable posts based on educational qualifications and a salary increase every February based on cost of living. Other demands were formulation of a reasonable salary structure for new and old employees, fixing the minimum attendance allowance, increasing the attendance bonus, reinstating all previous facilities and old-age allowances and removal of high-ranking Indian officials from the company.

RAK Ceramics authorities said they would review the demands and try to resolve them through discussion, but termed many of the demands "unrealistic" and "unacceptable." Workers warned that if anyone is dismissed after the protest they would organise a fresh movement.

Industrial action by Queensland nurses and midwives enters third month

Tens of thousands of nurses and midwives at Queensland's public hospitals and health facilities have been taking limited industrial action seeking improved wages and conditions since June 5. The Queensland Nurses and Midwives Union (QNMU) has allowed the dispute to drag on by calling only limited action.

Responding to demands for more concrete action, QNMU this week escalated its Stage 2 bans to include mental health nurses and banning a range of non-clinical duties. Union members will also fully use their entitled breaks and refuse overtime unless given at least four hours' notice.

QNMU members rejected the Liberal-National Party (LNP) government's pay increase offer of only 11.5 percent over three years, which included reductions in parental leave, reproductive leave, and flexible working arrangements. They said the offer fell short of what the LNP promised in the lead-up to the state election.

After six months of failed negotiations, the government has referred the dispute to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for conciliation.

Queensland teachers to strike for better pay and conditions

The Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) with 48,000 members at Queensland's public schools has notified the state National-Liberal Party government that its members will walk out for 24 hours on August 6 as negotiations for higher wages and improved staffing reached deadlock. This will be their first strike in 16 years, and impacts about half a million students.

After 17 meetings over 5 months, including a conciliation meeting in the Industrial Relations Court on Monday, the union rejected a low pay offer from the government which would have delivered teachers a 3 percent pay rise next financial year and a 2.5 percent increase in 2026 and 2027. The union wants an extra student-free day as well as "nation-leading salaries and conditions."

Townsville City Council workers strike over low pay

About 200 outdoor workers from the Townsville City Council (TCC) in north Queensland walked off the job for 24 hours on July 25 seeking higher pay. The workers are represented by three unions, the Transport Workers Union (TWU), Australian Workers Union (AWU) and Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU). The unions claim their members are paid 20 percent less than workers doing the same work at neighbouring councils.

Workers said their average annual pay is \$56,000 while other councils are paying \$10,000 more. They are demanding a 20 percent pay rise. The council has offered only 11 percent over three years.

According to the AWU, TCC has four levels of management who recently received an 8.3 percent pay rise. The CFMEU claimed that the council's CEO earns a salary within the range of \$550,000 to \$600,000, while there are three other senior executive positions with salaries ranging from \$380,000 to \$450,000.

Meanwhile, The Services Union (TSU) is in dispute with TCC over the low pay offer for administrative workers. The union claimed the council's pay offer fails to align TCC wages with other councils. It is canvassing its members for approval to begin industrial action.

Scenic Rim council workers strike for better pay offer

The Services Union members at the Scenic Rim Regional Council, southeast Queensland walked off the job for two hours on Thursday to demand an improved pay offer in the council's proposed certified agreement.

The union said the strike was in response to management's refusal to propose a reasonable wage increase with backpay. Workers rejected the council's pay rise offer of 4 percent, with any other claims taken from that.

Boom crane crew in Queensland strike for pay increase

About 30 crane crew workers employed by Boom Logistics at the Clark Creek Wind Farm construction site, near Rockhampton, north Queensland, struck for 24 hours on July 23 as part of a national campaign to improve wages and safety in the renewable energy construction sector. Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union members voted unanimously on July 4 to approve taking protected industrial action. This could include consecutive work stoppages from 1- to 24-hours duration and 11 work bans, including overtime.

CFMEU members employed by BMS Heavy Cranes and Qube at wind farm construction sites in Victoria and Queensland respectively have been taking industrial action for improved wages and safety since early June. All sites have reported life threatening accidents.

A 36-year-old BMS worker was killed on the Golden Plains Wind Farm project, Victoria in November last year, crushed by a massive wind turbine blade that came loose from scaffolding during assembly.

Schindler Lifts electricians in Western Australia strike for better pay

Over 60 members of the Electrical Trades Union from Schindler Lifts in Perth, Western Australia have been on strike since July 10 seeking higher pay. The workers voted unanimously on June 30 to take industrial action. The union has not made public the issues in dispute.

Infrabuild Mesh workers in Queensland strike for pay rise

About 30 members of the Australian Workers Union and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union from Infrabuild Mesh walked out for 24 hours on Monday to demand an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. This was their first industrial action in two decades.

Infrabuild Mesh manufactures steel products for the building industry. The workers voted in mid-July to approve taking protected industrial action that included strikes and work bans.

GE Aerospace workers at Brisbane Airport strike for increased wages

GE Aerospace aviation maintenance workers at Brisbane Airport walked off the job for 24 hours on Tuesday and rallied outside their worksite. The 20 Transport Workers Union members decided to walk out after the company responded to minor work bans by refusing all work and withheld pay. Following failed negotiations for a pay rise in a new work agreement, the workers voted overwhelmingly on July 18 to take industrial action. This could include unlimited strikes, bans on overtime and minor work bans.

GE Aerospace workers develop and maintain engine components for Qantas, Virgin and the Australian Defence Force. They are demanding a pay rise that reflects the “critical and specialised” nature of their work.

Queensland Department of Transport engineers begin industrial action for pay rise

Professionals Australia members, including engineers and technical professionals employed by the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads put in place a raft of work bans on Tuesday morning as part of their campaign for a pay increase that brings them up to industry standard. The state Liberal-National Party government responded by withholding pay during the action, even while the workers remained on the job.

Protected industrial action included four low-level bans on working more than 36.25 hours a week, completing accelerated training, end of month activity reports and submitting/approving timesheets. Email signatures and/or autoreplies were updated to note their participation in industrial action.

Professionals Australia claimed that Department of Transport engineers are paid up to 20 percent less than their Queensland colleagues who are partnering with them to deliver the exact same projects. Despite months of bargaining the government has failed to address this issue of parity and offered a pay rise of only 3 percent.

Despite losing a day’s pay, Professionals Australia has not called for strike action and instead called a public rally on Thursday afternoon in front of state parliament.

Northern Territory public hospital pharmacists threaten to take industrial action over staffing

Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) members, including pharmacists and pharmacist technicians, are threatening industrial action at Northern Territory public hospitals over underfunding of pharmacy services, staffing shortfalls and for a pay rise.

The PPA claimed that pharmaceutical staffing shortfalls at Katherine Hospital, Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospitals are threatening patient safety with current staff vacancy levels at 30 percent and Katherine Hospital facing a potential closure of its pharmacy department in a few months’ time.

The PPA has been in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement with the Country-Liberal Party state government for a year seeking a wage rise that will bring them into parity with pharmacy workers in other states and boost workforce attraction and retention, and stem the tide of resignations.

The government wants PPA members to change the way medications are dispensed and is stopping some services. The association said the government is refusing to hold further meetings.

Public sector healthcare workers in South Australia strike over low pay

About 200 public sector health support and disability support workers from several hospitals in Adelaide walked out and protested outside the state Human Services minister’s office on Tuesday. United Workers Union (UWU) members claim they are paid 20 percent less than health workers in other states doing the same job.

In February, 1,000 UWU members, including theatre orderlies, patient service assistants, central sterilised stores department technicians, menu monitors, chefs, cleaners and kitchen services workers put in place bans on cleaning management offices, performing duties above their classification, changing in and out of scrubs only during paid time and other work-to-rule measures.

At the same time, over 1,100 disability support workers demanding a “living wage” and “Safe Support Services” imposed bans at 240 Department of Human Services (DHS) houses. The bans will impact on management, including restricted administrative tasks and communications during unpaid time. The UWU says DHS cannot attract staff because of low pay and a reliance on agency workers to meet minimum staffing levels.

Disability support workers are demanding parity with workers employed under the Federal award and to be paid the same Sunday penalty rates. They are currently \$25.60 an hour worse off. The UWU claimed the state Labor government has received federal funding that allows for higher pay but has not passed it on.



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