

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: Haryana government doctors and healthcare workers protest electronic tracking system

Haryana government doctors and healthcare workers stopped work for an hour on Monday to protest introduction of a location-based Geofencing Attendance Management System in hospitals and primary healthcare facilities. The Haryana Health Department Employees Coordination Committee demanded the system be withdrawn saying it was a violation of their privacy and personal liberty.

Workers said that geofencing, which physically tracks the workers through location-based technology, was imposed unilaterally by the government despite assurances otherwise. Workers said they will hold more protests if the system is not withdrawn.

Conservancy workers in Chennai, Tamil Nadu strike against privatisation

About 300 conservancy workers from Royapuram, Thiru Vi Ka Nagar and Ambattur zones in Chennai, the Tamil Nadu state capital, are continuing strike action and a demonstration outside the Municipal Corporation Building, begun August 2, to protest the privatisation of solid waste collection.

The workers, who are part of the National Urban Livelihood Missions, said they had been temporary employees for 15 years expecting to be made permanent. They are concerned that privatisation of conservancy services, which started on August 1, is a threat to their livelihoods.

The Labor Rights Movement claimed that the chief minister had promised to make the workers permanent during the 2021 elections. The media reported that the deputy mayor said that there would be no change in the decision to privatise waste management in the city.

Karnataka commuter transport workers' union calls off indefinite strike

The Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers' union called off an indefinite strike on Tuesday evening, following a high court directive and government threats. The strike began that morning.

The Congress government had passed the draconian Essential Services Maintenance Act against the workers, banning the strike until December 31.

The KRSTC Joint Action Committee (JAC), led by the All-India Trade Union Congress-affiliated KSRTC Staff and Workers' Federation and which includes five other unions, called the indefinite strike over several long outstanding demands. These 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).

The JAC said if last-minute talks with the government fail they would resume the strike on Thursday in defiance of the high court and the government.

Telangana: Telugu film industry workers on strike for better wages

Telugu film industry (Tollywood) workers, from about 24 crafts, walked out on Monday demanding a 30 percent wage increase, halting production at south India's film industry facilities. Workers called the strike after negotiations for the regular three-year wage revision with Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce and the Telugu Film Producer Council failed to reach agreement. The film artists and craftsmen accused employers of rejecting their "just" demands. While employers falsely claim that the pay claim is their biggest cost burden, workers compare their low pay to the high remuneration given to the big stars in the industry.

Pakistan: University workers demand unpaid wages and pensions

University of Peshawar teaching and non-teaching staff staged a sit-in protest on Monday to demand salaries and pensions for June and July. During the daylong sit-in, they didn't allow administration officials to perform duties and forced them to close all the offices in the administration block.

One protester said that her husband died a couple of years ago while working as a senior clerk at the university, but the administration has failed to release his pension. "My late husband's pension is our sole source of income, and we are suffering a lot due to its non-payment," she added.

In a separate dispute, University of Lakki Marwat workers protested outside the administration block on Monday over non-payment of salaries and continuous delays making them permanent. The Joint Action Committee, a joint body of teachers, administrative officers and low-ranking employees, said that their protest would be extended to other departments of the university if their salaries were not released within two

days.

Pakistan: Power loom workers protest Punjab government's minimum wage

Thousands of power loom workers demonstrated in Faisalabad on August 2 to protest the Punjab government's new minimum wage. Workers rejected the proposed wage of 40,000 rupees (\$US141) per month saying it fails to meet the basic needs of working families during this period of soaring inflation.

Loom workers said they are struggling to cover food, rent and healthcare expenses. A spokesperson alleged that even though the government sets a low minimum wage, employers pay even less. Workers also demanded social security and reopening of closed power-loom factories.

KONE elevator technicians in NSW strike again for industry standard pay

Elevator installation and maintenance technicians from KONE walked off the job for 24 hours at Warners Bay, a suburb of Newcastle, on Tuesday to demand industry rates. It followed a 24-hour strike at the depot on August 1 and a state-wide strike on July 4 along with an overtime ban and other work bans.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union have been in negotiations with KONE for a new enterprise agreement covering nearly 200 members at Newcastle, the Central Coast, Tamworth, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour. An ETU spokesperson said the union met with the company on July 18 for a "marathon bargaining session" where they thought they had reached an agreement. He claimed that when the company sent back their version, it was not what the union agreed to.

Workers want an 8 percent pay rise, which they say will bring their pay in line with their colleagues in Sydney. The unions also want fatigue management consideration, travel allowances and a clause in the agreement limiting subcontractor use.

Schindler Lifts technicians in NSW strike for pay increase

About 200 ETU members from Schindler Lifts, in NSW held a 24-hour state-wide strike on August 1 in their fight for "job security, safe working conditions, fair pay, and respect" in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers want a 6 percent pay rise, the same that Schindler recently gave its Queensland workers. It is the first time in 25 years that these workers have taken industrial action.

Meanwhile in Western Australia, 60 Schindler Lifts workers are maintaining strike action begun on July 10 for higher pay.

National industrial action by Qantas engineers enters second month

Qantas line engineers, responsible for towing and marshalling aircraft

and performing turnaround checks on aircraft to ensure they are safe to take off again, are maintaining rolling work bans put in place on June 25 at all major airports across Australia. The action is part of their long-running campaign for higher pay in a new enterprise agreement. Bans are imposed on 20 duties, including restrictions on towing aircraft, de-icing and using forklifts.

The 600 workers are represented by three unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union, who have allowed negotiations with Qantas to drag on since April last year.

Qantas has offered 3 percent per annum wage rises in a three-year agreement. Workers want a 15 percent wage rise in the first year and 5 percent for every year thereafter to compensate for three-and-a-half years of wage freezes agreed to by the unions during the COVID pandemic.

Confluence Water utility workers in Sydney strike for wage rise

Over 30 members of the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union walked off the job for four hours at Confluence Water on Wednesday and protested outside the company's headquarters at Chatswood. The strike was sparked when management walked away from negotiations after workers rejected its pay rise offer. Management refused to reenter negotiations saying its latest offer was all it could do.

CBH Kwinana grain terminal workers in Western Australia strike for better pay

Over 100 plant operators and maintenance workers at the CBH bulk grain handling port at Kwinana, Western Australia walked off the job for two hours at 10 a.m. last Friday in opposition to CBH's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a day of work bans put in place on Tuesday affecting unloading/loading of trains, trucks, and ships, along with various other operational and maintenance-based tasks.

The workers are represented by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Electrical Trades Union, which claim CBH wants roster changes, reduction of the number of meal breaks and to take back the wins made by workers in the last agreement. They say CBH has only offered 2 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement and rejected all other union claims.

According to the MUA, calculations the offer put forward by CBH, after factoring in the roster changes and loss of other entitlements, would leave operators with a pay rise that comes to only a couple of hundred dollars total over the life of the agreement and leave maintenance workers 10 percent behind the rates being paid to maintenance workers at other sites within CBH itself.

The Kwinana Grain Terminal is WA's largest grain-export facility, shipping on average more than half of the state's total grain production each year.

Queensland Department of Transport engineers give notice to strike

Professionals Australia, representing more than 450 engineers and

technical professionals employed by the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads has informed the state Liberal-National Party government that its members will strike for 12 hours at 6 a.m. on Monday. The stoppage is expected to cause delays to all major transport infrastructure projects and impact on the traffic network.

The action comes after months of stalled negotiations for a new certified agreement and follows a day of low-level work bans on July 29, during which around 150 workers were sent home without pay for participating in the protected action work bans.

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.

West Australian court security workers strike again over low pay and safety

In their long-running struggle for higher pay and improved safety, workers from Ventia, which provides court security, custodial services and prisoner transport under contract to the state government, walked off the job on Tuesday and rallied outside Ventia's base in Canningvale, a southern suburb of Perth. It was their sixth strike since November last year.

The workers are members of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), which is dragging out negotiations for a new enterprise agreement with Ventia. The union accused Ventia of renegeing on key safety agreements and other previously agreed demands. It claims that the state government has provided 11.6 percent for wage increases but has not passed it on to workers.

Workers want safe staffing levels and a decent pay increase, saying they are paid up to 24 percent less than those of their competitors from G4S who do the same job.



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