

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: IDBI bank workers hold national strike against proposed privatisation

Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI) workers held a one-day national strike on Monday to oppose privatisation and demand increased staffing. Workers want 5,000 clerks and 2,000 sub staff recruited and an end to the toxic work culture at the institution. According to the unions, the Modi government and the Life Insurance Corporation of India plan to divest 30.24 percent and 30.48 percent respectively of IDBI holdings to private enterprise.

The United Forum of IDBI Officers & Employees, which included unions of both the employees and officers, coordinated the walkout.

Karnataka ASHA workers hold three-day protest in Mysuru

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers held a three-day protest in Mysuru on August 12. Their major demand was for a 10,000-rupee (\$114) honorarium per month, an election promise of the current ruling Congress government before they came to power in 2023.

The Congress state government announced the pay increase in the current budget but has not implemented it. A 1,000-rupee increase was paid to only 12,000 workers out of ASHA's 42,000-strong workforce.

The All-India United Trade Union Centre, a trade union wing of the Social Centre of India (Communist), called the protest.

Chennai corporation conservancy workers' strike enters third week

About 3,000 conservancy workers from the Greater Chennai Corporation are maintaining strike action and a demonstration outside the corporation's building that they began on August 2 to protest privatisation of their jobs. The workers are defying the Madras High Court's direction that they clear the protest site and end the strike.

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.

Meanwhile, about 2,800 Primary Health Centre sanitary workers

employed under the Reproductive and Child Health scheme held a one-day hunger protest in Chennai on August 10 to demand their monthly wage be increased to 15,000 rupees (\$US171) as promised.

Telangana: Telugu film industry workers remain on strike

Telugu film industry (Tollywood) workers remain on strike after pay talks this week failed. Workers from about 24 crafts walked out, halting production at south India's film industry facilities on August 4, to demand a 30 percent wage increase.

The 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.

Bangladesh: Thousands of MPO private education teachers demand federal recognition

Thousands of non-government teachers under the Monthly Payment Order (MPO) protested on Wednesday evening outside the Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka to demand nationalisation of MPO-listed institutions by September 14. MPO schools receive financial support from the federal government, which covers the teachers' basic salaries.

The "Teachers' Rally and March Towards Secretariat" demonstration involved thousands of teachers from MPO schools, colleges, madrasahs and technical education institutions from 64 districts. Protesters called for a 45 percent house-rent allowance and medical and entertainment allowances equivalent to those of government employees. The teachers have threatened to walk out at all MPO-listed institutions across the country if their demands are not met.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest unpaid wages and factory closure

Over 150 garment workers from Rowa Fashions in Gazipur blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway on Tuesday morning to demand the reopening of their factory and payment of July salaries. Their factory is

being relocated. Gazipur Industrial Police were deployed to the site.

On Monday evening, several hundred workers from two garment factories held management officials hostage inside the Srom Bhaban in Dhaka's Bijoynagar area. They were demanding unpaid salaries and other entitlements.

Sri Lankan public sector workers protest

Power utility workers demonstrated at the Ceylon Electricity Board premises and at several branches across the country on Monday opposing the Sri Lanka Electricity (Amendment) Bill, which they claim seeks to privatise the state-owned enterprise.

On the same day hundreds of education sector workers protested outside the Presidential Secretariat to demand that their children be admitted to the government school where they serve.

Also on Monday, health workers at the Higurakgoda Base Hospital in Polonnaruwa District, North Central Province demonstrated to call for improved security against threats from patients affected by alcohol.

WesTrac heavy machinery maintenance workers in New South Wales strike

Over 150 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members, including diesel mechanics, boilermakers and auto-electricians, at WesTrac heavy machinery repair centres in Tomago and Mt Thorley walked off the job on Thursday afternoon for the last two hours of their shift. It was to protest the company's "punishing" 50-hour working week policy. Employees working 10-hour daily shifts five days a week complained that they barely see their kids because of the work hours.

The AWU is negotiating with WesTrac for a new three-year enterprise agreement covering 800 workers. Workers rejected the company's proposed annual pay increases of 3.2 percent, 3.1 percent and 3 percent.

The union claimed that overtime protections and sufficient notice for shift changes were being threatened in the company's proposed agreement. It has not presented an actual pay demand, saying that members were only asking for industry standard pay, proper conditions and respect.

The workers voted on July 12 to approve future industrial action that could include work stoppages ranging from 30 minutes to a week, or for an indefinite duration, and a ban on overtime.

Townsville City Council workers hold rolling stoppages for pay increase

About 400 outdoor workers represented by five unions at the Townsville City Council (TCC) in North Queensland have been holding ad hoc work stoppages since July 25 for higher pay. The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members walked off on Wednesday in their fourth strike in three weeks. Other unions involved in the dispute are the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union, Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union, Transport Workers Union and the Plumbing and Pipe Trades Employees Union.

The unions claim their members receive 20 percent less—about \$10,000

a year—than employees doing the same work at neighbouring councils. Workers want a 20 percent increase in their base wage rates. TCC has offered only 11 percent over three years.

Meanwhile, The Services Union (TSU) is in dispute with TCC over the pay offer for administrative workers. The union claimed the council's pay offer fails to align their wages with other councils and has accused TCC of trying to split workers by offering different percentage pay increases for each work category. It is canvassing its members for approval to begin industrial action.

Opal Specialty Packaging workers in NSW strike for improved pay

Twenty-three Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members at the Opal Specialty Packaging factory at Orchard Hills, New South Wales have held three work stoppages over two weeks for an improved pay offer. Opal offered a wage increase of only 10.5 percent over three years, and refused to include clauses in the agreement that are in the industry award.

On July 15, the workers voted unanimously for future industrial action that could include unlimited work stoppages, ranging between one hour and one week, and eleven work bans, including a ban on overtime.

Getinge electricians remain locked out after 8 weeks, without pay

Eight electricians employed by contractor Getinge, which maintains and repairs sterilising equipment at Queensland Health's public hospitals, have lost eight weeks of pay due to lockouts.

The Electrical Trades Union members voted in mid-May to take protected industrial action following five months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. Getinge responded with a series of lockouts.

The workers want equal pay with their colleagues in Victoria who they say are paid \$7 per hour more.

Glencore Ulan underground coal miners continue industrial action

About 100 Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members at Glencore's underground coal mine at Ulan in New South Wales are maintaining rolling two-hour work stoppages on each shift. They started industrial action on July 9 with a 24-hour strike, following 15 months of failed negotiations for a pay increase in a new enterprise agreement.

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 workers walked out for 24 hours on July 24 and rallied in the nearby town of Mudgee with supporters holding signs saying, "Rotten to the core", "Glencore respect our town" and "Glencore pays more next door."

The MEU says that Glencore is using 60 strikebreakers on higher pay, with reports that 80 more scabs will be sent to the mine.

Schindler Lifts locks out its NSW electricians

Elevator and lift installer and maintainer Schindler Lifts locked out its entire electrical workforce on August 8 in response to low-level work bans imposed by members of the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) on July 10 along with several work stoppages. The ETU is in negotiations with Schindler Lifts for a new enterprise agreement.

Schindler claimed it had held 11 bargaining meetings and presented three offers. Its latest offer included 4.5 percent annual pay increases and increased allowances. Workers are demanding a 6 percent pay rise, the same amount Schindler recently gave to its Queensland workers. Negotiations are continuing.

Crown Sydney casino workers strike for pay parity

The United Workers Union (UWU), representing about 350 employees at the Crown Casino in Sydney, called a strike on Friday as part of their campaign for higher wages. The action followed a four-hour strike at 6.30 p.m. by 70 gaming workers on August 8, their first ever walkout.

The UWU claimed that some of its members, who include housekeeping workers and gaming table attendants, among others, are paid just 7 cents above the minimum wage and others earn almost \$8 less an hour than Crown Melbourne casino workers doing the same job. Workers rejected Crown's latest pay rise offer of just 9.25 percent over three years.

UWU members voted overwhelmingly on July 16 for future industrial action. This could include work stoppages of 2 to 24 hours and selected bans on housekeeping duties. Casino workers said they will continue industrial action until they win "real pay rises, fair career progression and respect for the work they do."

Qantas engineers strike over low pay

About 600 Qantas engineers walked off the job on Monday morning in their long-running dispute for higher pay. The workers are line engineers who are responsible for towing and marshalling aircraft and performing turnaround checks on aircraft to ensure they are safe to take off again.

The latest action by members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union was in addition to rolling work bans put in place on June 25 at all major airports across Australia. The unions, which have allowed negotiations with Qantas to drag on since April last year, claimed their members' pay has increased by only 12 percent in the last decade.

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. The unions claim Qantas is refusing to return to the negotiating table.

Hydro Tasmania electricians prepare for industrial action

The Electrical Trades Union, representing close to 700 workers at the state-owned power generator Hydro Tasmania (HT), has lodged an application in the Fair Work Commission to hold a ballot on future strike action. The action followed six months of failed negotiations after which ETU members voted on July 28 to reject the company's proposed

enterprise agreement.

Hydro Tasmania's offer included pay increases of only 2.4 percent for the first year matched to the March consumer price index, with second and third years capped between 2 and 3.5 percent. It also featured a \$4,000 sign-on bonus.

The ETU claimed the offer amounted to a real pay cut and to workers living standards since HT had agreed to wage rises of 3.5 percent annually in its previous enterprise agreement. The union made the point that the company had offered its 100 engineers market-based wage rises of up to 5 percent of their base salary.

Brophy Family youth workers in Victoria strike for pay rise

A small group of Australian Services Union (ASU) members from Brophy Family and Youth Services centres in Victoria have been taking protected industrial action over the past week in their campaign for higher wages and better conditions. The 18 workers are employed in youth services, community development, welfare and clerical and administration.

Industrial action includes short work stoppages and bans on overtime, working outside of rostered/contracted hours, communications and administrative tasks. The workers walked out on Tuesday afternoon to "celebrate" since their last agreement expired in 2015. There has been no improvement in conditions and Brophy has restricted pay increases to just 1.5 percent above the minimum award.

Brophy Family and Youth Services describe themselves as a provider of health, safety, stability, development, learning and wellbeing of children, young people and families in Portland, Hamilton and Warrnambool regions of southwest Victoria.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact