

# 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: Sanitation workers in Madurai, Tamil Nadu end five-day strike without resolution

Around 2,000 striking sanitation workers from the Madurai Municipal Corporation, Tamil Nadu called off their five-day protest outside the collector's office on August 23, following talks with a government minister.

The Centre for Indian Trade Unions represented the workers and accepted the minister's word that its demands for a wage rise and job permanency would be presented to the state's chief minister. One of the workers' major demands was for cancellation of government order number 152, which involves the outsourcing of sanitation work.

## Telangana: Telugu film industry workers return to work after 18 days

The union representing Telugu film industry (Tollywood) workers and technicians, who had been on strike for 18 days for higher pay, called off all industrial action on August 21, after reaching agreement with the Chamber of Commerce in the presence of the labor commissioner. The parties agreed to a structured wage rise, which included an initial 15 percent pay increase, followed by increments of 2.5 percent and 5 percent in the subsequent two years.

## Punjab anganwadi workers protest faulty tracking app and budget cuts

The Anganwadi Mulazim Union, affiliated with the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, representing Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers, held protests in several Punjab districts on August 21, against the "faulty" Poshan app and welfare cuts. They complained the app had many technical glitches and was disrupting their work. Workers wore black armbands during the day.

## Patna Municipal Corporation daily wage workers demand wage rise

### and permanency

Daily wage workers from the Patna Municipal Corporation in Bihar state demonstrated outside the corporation's office to demand a pay rise and permanent jobs on August 21. According to reports, Patna police violently intervened to try to end the protest. Corporation management had only agreed to a meagre wage rise for the sanitation supervisors and workers, which workers rejected.

## Bangladesh: Momo Fashion garment workers protest factory closure

Momo Fashion factory workers in Dhamrai, Dhaka demonstrated on Tuesday morning, blocking the Dhaka–Aricha highway for nearly an hour. They were protesting the sudden closure of their factory. Industrial police and army personnel intervened and dispersed the workers, who continued their demonstration at the factory gate.

One female worker said, "Yesterday we were on duty, but this morning we found the gate locked and a closure notice. Finding no one inside, we put forward six demands. They cannot just shut the factory like this. Where will so many people go? Where will we find jobs? How will we survive? We demand 120 days' basic pay, leave benefits, and all dues as per labor law."

Workers ended their demonstration after police assured them that their demands would be addressed in discussions with authorities. While workers, factory owners, workers and the BGMEA (which represents the country's garment industry) met over the issues no information has been released.

## Sri Lankan public transport workers reject government's joint transport initiative

Hundreds of workers from the Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) have raised strong objections to a proposed joint project between the government and private sector transport services, which proposes sharing long-distance transportation responsibilities. Workers alleged that the plan would threaten their rights and job security and have threatened to go on strike, starting Thursday.

## South Australian public sector health workers strike again over low pay

On August 22, several hundred health support and disability workers from five major hospitals in Adelaide walked off the job and rallied outside the state treasurer's office as part of their long running dispute over low pay. On July 29, United Workers Union (UWU) members from major city hospitals protested outside the South Australian human services minister's office saying they are paid 20 percent less than workers in other states.

Over 2,000 workers are involved in the dispute which has dragged on for over seven months. 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 imposed a series of bans, and various 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 UWU says DHS cannot attract staff because of low pay and is relying 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 claims the South Australian Labor government has received federal funding that allows for higher pay but not passed it on.

#### **NBN subcontractors in Victoria protest 30 percent pay cut**

About 300 independent communications contractors employed by Service Stream to expand and upgrade the federal government-owned National Broadband Network (NBN) rallied outside Service Stream's head office in Melbourne on August 22 to protest the NBN Delivery Partner's new contract rates. Rates for subcontractors are to be cut by up to 30 percent.

The protest, which included a convoy of 300 parked vans that blocked traffic, was organised by the Communications Workers Union. Workers threatened to hold daily demonstrations until the cuts are reversed. The union has not proposed any support action by other communications workers.

#### **Cleanaway waste management workers still on strike at Chevron in Western Australia**

Eighteen workers employed by waste management contractor Cleanaway on Chevron's Gorgon and Wheatstone offshore oil and gas facilities in Western Australia have been taking rolling strike action since July 4 over Cleanaway's proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers are represented by the Offshore Alliance (OA), comprising the Australian Workers Union and the Maritime Union of Australia, who claim Cleanaway stripped \$30,000 from the workers' annual pay when it took on the new Chevron contract in 2021. According to the OA, Cleanaway is paying workers engaged on major hazard facilities a base wage of only \$33.45 per hour. Workers want restoration of former pay rates.

The OA alleges that Cleanaway has failed to persuade other Cleanaway crews to scab on the strikers and has now engaged a labour hire company to recruit a scab workforce.

#### **Crown Sydney casino workers hold third strike over low pay**

About 350 workers at the Crown Casino in Sydney walked out for four hours at 7 p.m. on Thursday as part of their campaign for higher wages. It was the third strike by United Workers Union (UWU) members since voting to take industrial action on July 16.

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 proposed enterprise agreement which included a pay rise offer of just 9.25 percent over three years, scrapped career progression and no improvement to overtime or higher duties.

The UWU claimed the pay offer would leave Sydney workers' pay up to \$24,000 a year less than Crown Melbourne staff.

#### **ReGroup waste recycling workers in Queensland strike for improved pay offer**

Over 30 Transport Workers Union members employed by ReGroup at the council-owned waste recycling plant in Bli Bli, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, held their first-ever strike on August 22. The workers want a pay rise, saying they are paid up to 22 percent less than other waste recycling workers in the region. The Bli Bli facility processes recyclable waste from 400,000 residences on the Sunshine Coast.

#### **Tasmanian public health and community sector workers protest over wages**

A group of nearly 30 Health and Community Services (HACSU) members demonstrated in Hobart on Thursday afternoon to protest the Rockliff Liberal government's cancellation of all pay negotiation meetings scheduled for the week. The union said negotiations began in December and should have been finalised by July 1, when a pay rise was due. The government has still not made a wage offer. An HACSU spokesman accused the government of "wage suppression by neglect."

#### **Early childhood teachers and educators in Victoria fight for pay rise**

For the first time in a decade, early childhood teachers and educators under the Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement (VECTEA) took industrial action on Monday demanding improved pay and conditions.

VECTEA establishes the minimum salaries and working conditions for teachers and educators in kindergarten and early learning services. It outlines employment standards for not-for-profit early education services, including provisions for wages, benefits, and career progression.

The workers are members of the Australian Education Union (AEU), which has been in negotiations with the government for 15 months. Workers want a 35 percent wage rise to bring them into parity with state schoolteachers. The AEU has indicated it was willing to compromise if

exploitative workloads and administrative duties were reduced. It says the government is refusing to present a counteroffer.

Kindergarten teachers say they are currently working almost 6.6 hours in unpaid overtime every week or approximately one day a week of free labour. The AEU says that ongoing low wages and onerous conditions have resulted in a workforce shortage of 11,000.

The union has limited industrial action to stopping work if any Victorian Labor government member visits a kindergarten. The union has also imposed work bans on various management meetings and requests except for those related to child safety and welfare. The AEU threatened to escalate industrial action with a 24-hour stopwork later in term three if the government continues to refuse to negotiate.

### **Fonterra dairy processing workers in Victoria strike for pay rise and job security**

About 60 United Workers Union (UWU) members from the Fonterra dairy processing factory in Bayswater, a Melbourne suburb, held a one-hour strike across two shifts at 2.30 p.m. on August 22 and rallied outside the factory. The workers accused management of purposely delaying negotiations for a new enterprise agreement prior to the sale of the company to French dairy manufacturer Lactalis.

Workers, who are worried about future attacks on jobs and conditions, are demanding that their new work agreement be extended to four years to give stability during the company takeover. They are demanding an increase in redundancy payouts by 8 weeks to 60 weeks, as well as higher allowances and health-and-safety improvements. Workers endorsed an indefinite ban on overtime and another two hours of strikes on Thursday and Friday this week.

Lactalis is reportedly the largest dairy manufacturing company in the world. Its \$3.48 billion purchase of Fonterra will make it Australia's largest dairy company.

### **New Zealand media workers strike**

Workers at New Zealand media company *Stuff* held a 2-hour strike on Thursday afternoon in response to low pay offers and attempts to divide the workforce. Members of the E t? union walked out from 3 p.m. and demonstrated outside newsrooms in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch.

Journalist Sapeer Mayron said the strike was about “years of being undervalued.” Staff had had miserly increases, with pay going backwards in real terms and some years with no increases at all. “That means more than CPI, to catch up on all those years of falling behind,” Mayron said.

Workers are also unhappy about the company’s plans to split their collective agreement into two, which they say would reduce their bargaining power. The company separated into two entities last year, Stuff Digital and Newspaper Brands.

In June, online marketplace Trade Me bought a 50 percent stake in Stuff Digital in what was described as a “lucrative multi-million-dollar payday” for Stuff’s owner, Sinead Boucher. In 2020 Boucher bought Stuff from its Australian owners Nine Entertainment for \$1.

### **New Zealand uniformed Defence Force staff to replace striking**

### **civilian workers**

In a serious precedent, the New Zealand government has introduced legislation allowing the chief of New Zealand Defence Forces (NZDF) to direct uniformed staff to replace striking civilian workers. Soldiers cannot take industrial action, but civilians employed by the NZDF can.

In December, Defence Minister Judith Collins signed off on having soldiers cover for security guards and firefighters who were working to rule. This included refusing overtime, taking combined breaks and stopping any work at heights or off-site. Collins said the new bill would enable that to happen over 14 days without explicit government approval.

Public Service Association national secretary Fleur Fitzsimons said last year PSA members at the NZDF “were offered a zero pay increase and were only able to achieve a better offer after taking strike action.”



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