

# 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.*

## South Korea: Hyundai and GM auto manufacturing workers strike

The 42,000-strong Hyundai Motor labour union called its members out on 2-hour work stoppages during morning and afternoon shifts on Wednesday and Thursday and planned 4-hour stoppages for Friday. The action halted production across Hyundai's key facilities.

The strikes, over wages and retirement age, are the first since 2019. Negotiations broke down after 20 rounds of talks since June 18, with Hyundai offering a second proposal that included a base salary increase of 95,000 won (\$US68) a month, performance bonuses worth 400 percent of monthly pay plus 14 million won in cash, and 30 company shares for each worker.

The union is demanding a larger monthly raise of 141,300 won, a performance pay equivalent to 30 percent of last year's net profit, and an extension of the retirement age to 64 without income gaps.

The union justified its pay claim pointing to Hyundai's record 14.2 trillion won (\$US10.1 billion) operating profit last year and a 7.3 percent revenue increase in the second quarter.

Meanwhile, the union covering workers at GM Korea has called three days of 4-hour work stoppages that commenced on Monday. The union is demanding that the company reconsider the closure of its direct maintenance centres and demanded GM dispel concerns regarding rumors of withdrawal from Korea.

## Hyundai Heavy Industries shipbuilding workers strike

The HD Hyundai Heavy Industries union called a 4-hour partial strike from 1 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday and held a joint rally involving workers from HD Hyundai shipbuilding companies, HD Hyundai Heavy Industries, HD Hyundai Mipo and HD Hyundai Samho. Further strikes of longer duration were planned for Thursday and Friday.

The company and union have held 20 negotiation meetings for the 2025 wage agreement since May 20. At the same time the union conducted five partial strikes. As well as better pay, the union wants the retirement age extended and changes to the performance bonus calculation criteria.

On July 18, management and the union reached a deal for a new offer that included a base salary increase of 133,000 won and an "encouragement payment" of 5.2 million won. It was rejected by the workers.

## Bangladesh: Police and military fire at protesting factory workers, killing one

On Monday, police and military personnel opened fire on protesting workers from the Evergreen wig factory at the Uttara Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Nilphamari. One worker, Mohamed Habib, 21, was killed and at least seven others were injured. According to a Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha spokesperson the workers were staging a peaceful protest and work abstention for the past four days but "police and army personnel opened fire during the protest, resulting in the tragic death of a worker."

The workers have 20 demands, including reinstatement of retrenched workers, an end to layoffs, reduced production targets and payment for overtime. They accused the factory owners of being in collusion with EPZ authorities and arbitrarily terminating workers, harassing them and violating labour regulations with impunity.

They alleged the government was driving up exploitation in EPZ areas by enacting separate laws that curtail workers' rights and restricting access of labour-related government agencies to the zones.

Workers demanded immediate identification and prosecution of those responsible for the shooting, lifelong financial compensation for Habib's family, proper medical care and compensation for the injured workers, and reopening of all closed factories with full payment of arrears to workers. Provoked by police and military brutality, workers from other factories in the EPZ expressed solidarity with Evergreen workers.

## Bangladesh: Eurozone Fashion Garments workers protest over unpaid wages and allowances

Over 500 workers from the Eurozone Fashion Garments factory demonstrated on Wednesday, blocking the road at Kuril, in Dhaka from 12.00 noon for four hours. They were demanding unpaid wages and allowances. Workers ended the protest after a meeting with the government in the afternoon in which the factory owners assured them that all arrears would be cleared by September 10.

Workers said they decided to protest because factory authorities failed to clear a long-awaited arrears payment. They said if company pledges were not met within the promised time they would hold stronger protests.

## India: Telangana ASHA workers protest for promised pay increase

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers from across Telangana protested outside the health commissioner's office in Koti,

Hyderabad on Monday to demand a fixed wage of 18,000 rupees (\$US204)—an election promise of the current state government. Police arrested several protesters.

Other demands were withdrawal of the GPS tracking system, cuts to excessive workloads, payment of retirement benefits and paid leave on Sundays. Workers threatened to boycott work for the state and central governments if their demands were not granted soon. The workers have been protesting over these demands for several years.

#### **Strike action by Tamil Nadu State Transport workers enters third week**

State Transport workers remain on strike in Chennai after walking out on August 18. Strikers intensified their protests after police detained participants of the Kaththiruppu demonstration on Pallavan Road in Chennai. Since then, workers have staged road blockades and continued demonstrations across the state. They are demanding payment of wage arrears and retirement benefits from April 2024. The workers are organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

#### **Chennai police attack port workers demanding compensation for deceased migrant worker**

Contract port workers at Kattupally in Chennai demonstrated on Monday after a fellow worker from Uttar Pradesh died at the port while on duty. Amaresh Prasad, aged 35, who had been working at the port for two months, fell from the roof of a building under construction on September 1. Workers demanded Prasad's family be properly compensated.

The protest started with 100 workers and quickly grew to 500. Police were called and violently attacked the workers injuring at least 10. They charged 20 workers falsely claiming they were violent intruders and had "deadly weapons."

#### **Chhattisgarh contract workers strike for permanent jobs**

About 16,000 National Health Mission (NHM) workers have been on strike in Chhattisgarh since August 18 despite warnings from the BJP-led state government threatening "no work, no pay." The workers want permanent jobs—an election promise of the state government—as well as retirement benefits, a 27 percent wage hike and other demands.

#### **Sri Lankan public transport workers strike against joint transport initiative**

Thousands of Sri Lanka Transport Board (SLTB) workers began an indefinite strike on August 28 to protest the newly implemented unified long-distance timetable, which was introduced jointly by the government and private sector transport services. The initiative is aimed at sharing transportation responsibilities. Workers alleged that the plan would threaten their rights and job security.

Workers gathered at the SLTB head office demanding a meeting with the chairman and the immediate withdrawal of the project.

#### **Sri Lankan public sector doctors strike at Ratnapura teaching hospital over the director's conduct**

Ratnapura Teaching Hospital doctors at the Sabaragamuwa Province stopped work on Tuesday to protest harsh and unacceptable actions by the hospital director. The doctors refused to return to work because management refused to take any remedial action.

A spokesperson for the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) warned that if there was no satisfactory resolution, the union would escalate the protest into a nationwide strike involving all its members.

#### **DNATA baggage handlers at Perth Airport hold second strike**

Transport Workers Union members employed by Dubai National Air Travel Agency (DNTA) as baggage handlers at Perth Airport, Western Australia stopped work for 24 hours at 5.30 p.m. on August 28 to demand higher pay and job security. The 90 workers walked out for 16 hours on August 21 over the issue.

The TWU claimed that the workers are the lowest-paid DNATA workers in the country, earning far less than their eastern states counterparts, despite doing the same job. The union compared DNATA's pay offer to Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide employees who received a 6 percent increase last year and will receive 5 percent this year.

Workers overwhelmingly rejected the company's pay rise offer of 4 percent in 2025, 3.5 percent for 2026, 3 percent for 2027 and 2.5 percent or CPI for 2028 (with CPI capped at 3 percent).

Workers are demanding pay parity with their counterparts in the eastern states, better roster flexibility, retention of night soil allowance, secure jobs and increased parental leave. DNATA has offered a \$500 bonus if workers accept a revised offer in a vote on Thursday.

#### **DHL Express workers at Brisbane Airport strike for pay parity**

About 50 Transport Workers Union members from DHL Express at Brisbane Airport walked off the job for 24 hours in their first strike ever on August 29. It followed seven months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The workers voted unanimously on August 14 to approve taking protected industrial action that could include unlimited stoppages from 2 hours to 24 hours and bans on six different work activities.

The workers sort and deliver freight coming in and out of Brisbane Airport. They want a pay rise that will keep pace with the rising cost of living and bring them into line with interstate DHL workers, about \$33 per hour.

#### **Rockhampton Regional Council workers strike for improved pay offer**

Workers from five unions at the Rockhampton Regional Council, in north Queensland, walked off the job for one hour at 10 a.m. on Monday and rallied in Rockhampton's city centre. The workers—members of The Services Union (TSU), Electrical Trades Union, Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy union, Transport Workers Union and the Plumbers Union—want an improved pay offer in the council's proposed certified agreement.

Workers rejected council's pay rise offer of only 2.7 percent in the first year, and 2.5 percent, or the consumer price index (CPI) capped at 4.5 percent, in the second and third years. TSU claimed the offer could be less than the state government's own minimum wage policy and failed to keep pace with the true cost of living.

#### **Northern Territory public hospital pharmacists take action over staffing and pay**

Over 70 Professional Pharmacists Australia (PPA) members, including pharmacists and pharmacist technicians, are taking protected industrial action begun on August 26 at Northern Territory (NT) public hospitals over underfunding of pharmacy services, staffing shortfalls and for a pay rise. It is the first time NT pharmacists have taken industrial action.

As part of the action PPA members are not claiming federal government subsidies for medicines they dispense, which the union claimed could cost the NT government \$1 million a week. The NT Country-Liberal Party government said any pharmacist who participated in industrial action would have 25 percent of their pay docked.

The pharmacists are concerned about staffing shortfalls at Katherine Hospital, Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospitals, which are threatening patient safety. Current staff vacancy levels are at 30 percent while the Katherine Hospital faces a potential closure of its pharmacy department in a few months' time.

The PPA has been in negotiations for a new enterprise agreement 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.

#### **CBH Kwinana grain terminal workers locked out**

About 130 members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) have been locked out at the Co-operative Bulk Handling (CBH) Kwinana port grain export terminal in Western Australia since Monday. The indefinite lockout was in response to 24 maintenance workers refusing to work after management said it would pay only 9 percent of workers' salaries for implementing bans.

Workers want 6 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement to compensate for three years of below inflation pay increases in any new agreement. CBH has only offered a 2.5 percent increase despite a bumper grain season.

The MUA claimed the offer leaves the Kwinana maintenance workers far behind current pay rates at all other maintenance departments at CBH and leaves them with worse rosters and shift loadings compared to their current agreement.

The lockout is at the start of the annual terminal shutdown maintenance period prior to the winter-crop harvest and export program. CBH typically employs specialty contractors alongside permanent workers to undertake maintenance work during the shutdown. Media reported that some

contractors are ceasing or threatening to cease undertaking the maintenance work during the lockout period.

#### **Queensland public sector trades workers strike for 36-hour week**

Hundreds of state public sector trades workers from QHealth, QBuild and the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) walked off job sites for 24 hours on Monday and held rallies in major Queensland cities to demand a 36-hour week. The workers are represented by four unions—the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union, Electrical Trades Union and the Plumbers Union—who say a 36-hour week would bring them into line with "white-collar" public servants.

TMR workers were locked out after they voted to impose bans on paperwork and answering phones. The unions said further strike action is planned.

#### **Solvay Interox factory workers in New South Wales strike for higher pay and safety**

About 20 production workers from three unions at the Solvay Interox hydrogen peroxide manufacturing plant in Sydney walked off the job for 24 hours and rallied outside the plant on August 29 to demand a "fairer" pay offer and improved safety in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The workers voted to take industrial action in mid-August after six months of negotiations between the company and the Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union failed to reach agreement.

#### **Schindler Lift technicians in New South Wales on strike**

After 18 rounds of failed negotiations, Electrical Trades Union members from Schindler Lifts in New South Wales began an indefinite strike on April 28 in their long-running dispute for a better enterprise agreement deal with the company. Schindler locked out its entire workforce of 300 on April 8 following low-level work bans. The Fair Work Commission, however, declared the lockout unlawful and workers returned to work on August 15.

Workers want a 6 percent pay rise, the same amount Schindler recently gave to its Queensland workers, improved parental leave, rights for health and safety representatives and job security.

#### **Derwent Valley Council workers strike for pay rise**

About 40 Australian Services Union (ASU) members from the Derwent Valley Council (DVC) in Tasmania stopped work for three hours on August 28 to demand an improved pay offer in the council's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers have imposed work bans, which include not collecting fines and rate instalments, processing invoices, street cleaning, litter collection, mowing and the cleaning of public toilets.

Negotiations between the ASU and council have been ongoing since May 2024 without reaching agreement on a wage increase. The workers have not had a pay rise since July 2024.

Workers want a pay increase of at least 4.5 percent or the consumer price index (CPI) (whichever is higher), backdated to July 2024. Another demand is that there will be no reduction in the existing span-of-hours and that their demand for an increase of the Early Childhood Education Care funding doesn't erode the council's wage offer. The council has refused to budge from its original pay rise offer of 2.5 percent. Negotiations are continuing.

### **Hydro Tasmania workers prepare to strike**

About 130 workers at the state-owned power utility Hydro Tasmania, covered by the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), Australian Services Union (ASU) and Professionals Australia (PA), voted near unanimously on August 28 to commence industrial action after rejecting several pay offers in Hydro's proposed enterprise agreements.

ETU and ASU members (82 electricians and administrative staff) are covered by the same agreement while PA members (51 hydrologists and engineers) are on a separate agreement.

PA members' pay offer included market-based wage increases of up to 5 percent on their base wage and a \$4,000 sign-on bonus, which workers said was inadequate given that the purchasing power of their wages since the COVID-19 pandemic has gone backwards while their workloads have increased without compensation. ETU and ASU members are fighting to improve Hydro's pay increase offer of 2-3.5 percent (linked to CPI) after suffering through effective pay reductions during the high CPI years of 2022 and 2023. Their current agreement did not have a CPI safety net.

Hydro Tasmania is Australia's largest clean energy business and its largest generator of renewable energy. The company made \$193.7 million in pre-tax profits in the 2023–24 financial year.

### **Cascade Brewery workers in Tasmania strike for higher pay**

Over 20 production workers at the Cascade Brewery in Hobart began rolling one-hour stoppages on August 11, following six months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The Construction Forestry and Maritime and Energy Union (CFMEU) members have rejected the company's pay offer and are concerned that Cascade wants to introduce continuous production packaging without compensating workers, or add associated safety protections into the new agreement.

Electrical Trades Union and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members at the plant are currently voting on when to take industrial action. They previously rejected Cascade's low pay rise offer of 8.5 percent over three years.



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