

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

India: Bihar government agricultural research workers strike for pay parity

Workers from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), a district level Farm Science Centre set up by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), held a one-day strike on Tuesday to demand pay parity with their ICAR counterparts. KVK workers said they face discrimination in terms of salary, promotions, retirement benefits, and delayed payments.

The workers perform an important role in disseminating agricultural technologies to farmers through training, demonstrations and technical services. They performed critical work during the monsoon crop campaign, but threatened to boycott the winter crop campaign if demands were not met.

Hyundai Motor workers in Tamil Nadu reject wage settlement

Hyundai Motor workers at the Irungattukottai plant near Chennai struck work on September 18, to protest a phoney wage settlement between management and company union, the United Union of Hyundai Employees (UUHE). The striking workers are members of the Hyundai Motor India Employees Union (HMIEU).

Workers said that the wage settlement of 31,000 rupees (\$US349) per month would benefit only 3,000 workers, while 12,000 workers would be struggling at a wage of only 20,000 rupees per month. Management's security officers forcefully dispersed the workers and ended the strike.

Tamil Nadu contract power workers demand permanent jobs

About 90 Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) contract workers at Ramanathapuram stopped work and held a protest on September 23, demanding permanent jobs. Police intervened and detained all the workers.

The demonstration was part of a statewide protest organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, demanding the DMK government fulfil its election promise to provide permanent jobs for 8,000 contract workers along with related benefits like pension and higher wages. The Central Organisation of Tamil Nadu Electricity Employees (COTEE), representing workers in power distribution, thermal, hydro and general construction, claimed that there are close to 52,000 permanent job vacancies in TANGEDCO.

Tamil Nadu sanitation workers' protest shut down by union

About 1,000 Sanitation workers from the Madurai Municipal Corporation demonstrated in front of the corporation's office on September 19, demanding payment of wages on time and the reinstatement of 23 workers who were fired by the private contractor on false charges of violence. The Centre for Indian Trade Unions called off the protest after management gave "assurances" to the workers.

Madras Rubber Factory workers in Tamil Nadu strike over exploitation

Around 800 Madras Rubber Factory (MRF) workers at Tiruvottiyur, Chennai have been on strike since September 11 demanding advanced payment of annual medical insurance premiums and opposing the exploitation of new workers as trainees under a central government scheme.

The company is refusing to maintain the long-standing practice of paying the annual medical insurance payment in advance and allowing employees to reimburse it in small increments over 4-5 months. MRF is an India-based multinational tyre manufacturing company and the largest tyre maker in the country.

Pakistan: Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University workers strike

Academic and administrative staff at the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University (SBBU) in Sheringal, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, continued their strike for the third day on Wednesday, complaining that they had not been granted promotions since 2020 and their medical bills had not been approved. They held a sit-down protest outside the Vice Chancellor's office on Monday and announced a complete boycott of academic and administrative activities.

Strikers held a protest march inside the university campus before setting up a camp. They vowed to continue the agitation until their charter of demands is accepted.

Water and power utility workers across Pakistan protest privatisation

Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) workers held mass protests across Pakistan on Wednesday in opposition to the privatisation of electricity distribution. The demonstrations were organised by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union.

Workers from power distribution companies Iesco, Fesco and Gepco also complained of staff shortages, the rise in fatal accidents and other anti-labour government measures allegedly taken at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Protesters held black, red and green flags, as well as placards and banners inscribed with slogans against privatisation and in favour of their demands. They chanted slogans against the IMF agenda, the destruction of national institutions, poor economic policies, inflation, unemployment, as well as against privatisation.

The union demanded that 60,000 vacant posts in Wapda should be filled immediately and threatened that if the government sold national institutions, Wapda workers could cut off electricity supply to government residences, including the Prime Minister's House and President's House, and that over 100,000 employees would stage a sit-in outside Parliament House.

Punjab: Health workers in Rawalpindi protest sackings

Striking health workers demonstrated at Rawalpindi on Monday to protest against the District Health Authority and the district administration for terminating more than 48 permanent sanitary patrol workers and issuing show-cause notices to 400 others, allegedly due to inefficiency and presenting fake activities during the anti-dengue drive. Workers alleged that the dismissals were for political reasons and said they have been working since 2015 and were dismissed after just one activity, despite working tirelessly day and night.

Workers threatened that if their demands were not met and the dismissed employees were not reinstated immediately, the scope of their protest would expand and they would turn it into a sit-in that could continue indefinitely. Workers said that due to the dismissals and protests the World Health Organisation's campaigns against cervical cancer, dengue, polio, measles, and the Clean Punjab initiative could be affected.

Punjab province: Power-loom workers in Toba Tek Singh protest

Hundreds of power-loom workers at Toba Tek Singh marched from the Sadhar Industrial Area on Jhang Road to the Faisalabad deputy commissioner's office on Tuesday to protest the two-month long closure of the units where they were employed. Protesters set up a hunger strike camp outside the DC Complex. The Labour Qaumi Movement organized the protest.

Workers said that their families were on the verge of starvation and having their electricity disconnected because they couldn't pay their bills. The distressed workers announced that their sit-in and hunger strike would continue until their demands were met.

Sindh public sector workers strike against pension cut

Government employees in many cities, towns and villages in Sindh province went on strike on Tuesday in response to a call from the Sindh Employees Alliance (SEA). Workers were protesting against the recently introduced "black law" under which the pension has been reduced from 63.5 percent to just 15 percent. The SEA demanded that other allowances

and facilities be extended to all government employees.

In Larkana, a complete shutdown of educational institutions, health facilities and government offices was observed. Government departments closed. Teachers, paramedics and staff of various departments wore black armbands at their workplaces and at demonstrations. They displayed banners and placards inscribed with slogans in favour of their demands.

Bangladesh: Private bus company workers strike for wage increase

Workers from private bus operators stopped work on Monday to demand higher wages. The strike affected routes at Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Natore, Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Cox's Bazar. Workers ended the strike after 36 hours when the transport owners accepted their demands. Workers said drivers currently earn 350 taka (\$US11) per trip, supervisors 570 taka, and helpers 530 taka. They were demanding an increase of 500 taka in each discipline.

The same workers, who are employed at Desh Travels, National Travels, Grameen Travels, Hanif, and Hanif KTC, ended a two-day strike on September 9 after the owners falsely said they would meet their demands.

Bangladeshi teachers at non-government secondary schools issue strike threat

The Bangladesh Teachers' Association, representing teachers from non-government secondary schools under the Monthly Payment Order (MPO) scheme, issued an ultimatum on Sunday threatening to resume protests over long-pending demands. MPO schools receive financial support from the federal government, which covers teachers' basic salaries.

Teachers are demanding the nationalisation of MPO schools and an end to the disparity between them and government education institutions. Other demands include a 100 percent festival allowance, house rent and medical allowances as per government employees and salary upgrades for various classifications, such as head teachers and assistant head teachers.

Teachers threatened that if their demands were not met by October 18 they would hold a rally in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka and announce new actions from there.

The teachers' present monthly gross salary is 14,000 taka (\$US115), including 1,000 taka in house rent, and 500 taka in medical allowance. They get only 50 percent of the basic festival allowance. According to the union, the teachers do not have job security and since "independence" in 1971, the education sector has seen few major improvements.

The teachers have held repeated protests over their demands. In February, they held a sit-in protest for 22 days in Dhaka and in May, held strikes in different districts. Records for 2023 show that 396,368 teachers and 136,036 other employees are MPO registered in 28,655 non-government post-primary level educational institutions.

Sri Lankan School Development Officers maintain their protest

Hundreds of School Development Officers (SDOs) are maintaining a sit-down protest in front of the Colombo Fort Railway Station, which began on September 10. They are demanding immediate recruitment into the

national teaching service. The SDOs, who are already qualified graduates, are opposed to sitting for recruitment examinations, citing that their existing credentials and service experience qualify them for direct entry.

GrainCorp terminal workers at Newcastle Port strike for better pay and conditions

About 40 GrainCorp grain-loading terminal workers at the Port of Newcastle, New South Wales, walked off the job for 72 hours on Tuesday to demand an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

GrainCorp claimed the strike was affecting the loading of a 55,000-tonne wheat cargo bound for Indonesia, while workers alleged the company was using scab labour to keep at least one ship-loader operating.

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and Electrical Trades Union began negotiations before the current work agreement expired in July. Members rejected GrainCorp's pay rise offer of 12 percent over three years and on September 4 voted unanimously to approve taking industrial action. GrainCorp told media its offer also included an increase in casual loading from 20 to 25 percent, up to five weeks' annual leave for shift workers, and Saturday overtime paid at 200 percent.

The unions are working with management to ensure workers pay for any nominal increase in wages through stepped-up exploitation. The bureaucrats have offered to enhance "productivity" through measures such as flexible start times, claiming that would boost loading by 15,000-tonne a week. In response to workers' complaints of being required to work excessive overtime the MUA said it is seeking a fatigue day on the 14th day to ensure workers do not run into a second fortnight without having had a full day off.

Workers on the picket said they would push for the strike to be extended if GrainCorp failed to improve its offer.

Keolis Downer bus drivers in Newcastle strike for improved pay offer

On Monday morning, more than 200 bus drivers from Keolis Downer-Hunter who service Newcastle and Lake Macquarie in New South Wales, walked off the job for four hours and rallied outside the company's Hamilton depot. Workers voted to take further industrial action, including work stoppages and overtime bans.

The strike was called by the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) as part of a protracted enterprise bargaining process. It followed a 24-hour action in April, in which drivers turned off their Opal card readers (fare collecting machines), giving commuters ongoing free travel.

Workers are demanding 8 percent per annum pay increases over three years, improved safety, at least 72 hours' notice for changes to drivers' shifts and no reduction in conditions.

The state government awarded the French firm Keolis Downer a 10-year contract to provide bus commuter services in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas in 2016. Workers are calling for the operation of the bus service to be returned to the government.

CDC bus drivers in Victoria hold fifth strike for pay rise

On September 19, more than 600 CDC bus drivers in Melbourne and regional Victoria held their fifth strike since May to demand an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The 24-hour strike by Transport Workers Union (TWU) members affected services in Ballarat, Mildura, Oakleigh, Wyndham Vale, Sunshine, Tullamarine and Geelong. The strike was on top of work bans put in place on September 12, 15 and 16.

Negotiations between the TWU and CDC for a new agreement began in January, two months before the current agreement expired in March. Workers rejected CDC's pay rise offer of 13 percent over three years with the fourth year increase pegged to inflation. Workers said the offer was totally insufficient in light of their real cost-of-living increases, rising housing costs and the appalling conditions they had to work under. The TWU has reduced its original pay rise demand of 7 percent annual increases in a three-year agreement to annual 6 percent increases.

Workers have demanded improved rosters and secure and safe places other than their bus or a park bench to take lunch and amenities breaks. A union-management deal in 2022 added clauses to the current enterprise agreement allowing the company to introduce "on-road meal breaks," in which drivers are not able to return to their depot for meals. In many cases, this means parking up and eating behind the wheel of the bus, often with limited access to toilet facilities.

In addition, drivers are seeking to reverse the trend of casualisation. Currently, around 15 percent of the workforce is not permanently employed.

Dormakaba service and repair workers in New South Wales strike for improved pay rise offer

About 40 service and repair workers at commercial door manufacturer Dormakaba in Sydney have been taking strike action for the past month, seeking an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Electrical Trades Union members want pay parity with their colleagues at Dormakaba in other states who they say are paid 33 percent more. Workers rejected the company's offer of a 9 percent pay rise over three years and on August 22 voted near unanimously to take industrial action.

Ampcontrol electricians in New South Wales strike for higher pay offer

Close to 60 Electrical Trades Union members from Ampcontrol, a manufacturer and servicer of high voltage electrical equipment, walked off the job and protested outside the company's office in Tomago, an industrial suburb of Newcastle, on Monday. The workers voted on August 21 to take industrial action after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers are demanding a pay rise offer that recognises their highly specialised skills.

The union indicated it would negotiate a compromise deal that is agreeable to the company, saying on Facebook, "The members want to see this matter resolved and to return to their work, but until Ampcontrol is willing to meet workers halfway, the members are willing and able to continue the fight."

RSPCA animal care workers in South Australia strike against pay cut

Around 50 United Workers Union (UWU) members from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) stopped work for two hours on September 19 and rallied in front of the organisation's headquarters at O'Halloran Hill, a suburb of Adelaide. The animal care workers are opposed to the RSPCA's proposed enterprise agreement.

The UWU claimed that the RSPCA wants to slash inspectors' pay by nearly 20 percent, remove on-call allowances worth more than \$10,000 a year, and has rejected workers' demand for basic mental health support. A worker told media they want safe staffing, fair pay and basic mental health support: "This work takes a heavy mental toll. We're looking out for the animals but who is looking out for us?"

As the first responders to animal cruelty in South Australia, workers handle more than 4,000 cruelty reports each year, from rescuing abandoned animals to confronting some of the most distressing cases of neglect. Another worker said they deal with a high workload and constant understaffing that is expected to be covered by volunteers.

The striking workers approved a vote of no confidence in the RSPCA South Australia executive team, calling out poor leadership and industrial hostility, and expressed concerns about management's approach to industrial relations, workplace culture, and governance.

DHL Express workers at Brisbane Airport hold second strike for pay parity

About 50 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members from DHL Express at Brisbane Airport walked off the job on Monday, in their second strike since August 29 for a higher pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Management sent workers home on September 5 for wearing union badges while at work.

The workers sort and deliver freight coming through 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.

Infrabuild Mesh workers in Queensland strike again for improved pay offer

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members from Infrabuild Mesh walked off the job at 8 a.m. on September 19 at the company's Acacia Ridge site in Brisbane. The workers held their first 24-hour strike in two decades on July 28 to demand an improved pay offer in Infrabuild's proposed enterprise agreement.

Infrabuild Mesh manufactures steel products for the building industry. Workers rejected the company's latest pay offer saying it failed to include a decent base pay rate and recognise the importance of their work.

Superior PAK workers in Queensland strike for higher pay

About 70 Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members from the garbage collection truck manufacturer Superior PAK at Bundaberg, Queensland began an indefinite strike on Monday to demand an improved

pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers said the company's pay offer, which is tied to the consumer price index, fails to compensate for the soaring increase in the cost of living.

Northern Territory public sector health professionals strike against pay offer

More than 150 public sector allied health professionals in the Northern Territory commenced industrial action on September 17 after informing the territory government they would reject its latest pay offer of 12.55 percent over four years if it went to a vote. On Tuesday, they stopped work for an hour at 12:30 p.m. and rallied outside the Royal Darwin Hospital and the Alice Springs Hospital. Workers formally rejected the Country-Liberal government's latest offer in a ballot on Wednesday.

The workers are members of the Health Services Union (HSU) and include a wide range of professions, including physiotherapists, radiographers, social workers, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, dieticians, psychologists, pathology scientists, and sonographers.

Workers are demanding an 18.5 percent pay increase over four years, a \$2,500 professional development allowance, improved incentives for regional and remote work, improved recognition in the agreement with defined classification structures and stronger workload protection. The HSU claimed that NT allied health professionals are paid up to 20 percent less than their interstate colleagues.

The latest action was in addition to ongoing action that includes limiting meeting attendances, and a ban on entering Medicare billing codes into the pathology information systems.

Industrial action by MSS Security workers in Victoria enters sixth week

More than 150 workers employed by MSS Security, which is contracted to provide security for the Department of Defence, Homes Victoria, Monash Health, Melbourne University, Monash University, La Trobe University and the Thales Group, have been taking industrial action, including strikes, since August 22 in their dispute with MSS over its proposed enterprise agreement.

On Monday, MSS guards at the Department of Defence in Melbourne walked out and rallied outside their work place saying they are forced to work 12 hour shifts with no scheduled meal breaks and were hit with a pay cut in April. The United Workers Union (UWU) claimed MSS workers are paid hundreds of dollars less than guards at other companies doing the same work, and are denied basic work rights.

UWU members voted on August 11 for future industrial action that could include work stoppages from one minute to 24 hours or indefinite duration. They also foreshadowed five work bans, including overtime, supervising contractors and visitors and training other staff.



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