

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: Samsung Electronics union suspends 18-day strike

On Wednesday, Samsung Electronics management and the National Samsung Electronics Union reached a tentative agreement in their dispute over bonus calculations. The union subsequently suspended its planned 18-day strike, due to begin Thursday, while members vote on the deal between May 23 and 28. Details of the agreement have not been released.

On March 20, 93 percent of the union's 66,000 members voted to authorise industrial action after three months of failed negotiations over the calculation criteria for the Excess Profit Incentive (OPI), a performance bonus system capped at 50 percent of annual salary. Two days later, 37,000 union members confirmed at a rally outside Samsung's semiconductor campus that they intended to begin an 18-day strike on May 21.

The union demanded that management abolish the 50 percent cap and allocate 15 percent of annual operating profits to a worker bonus pool. It also sought guarantees that the changes would remain in place beyond this year. Management proposed one-off bonuses of 50 to 100 percent for employees in its logic chip division, but refused to remove the salary cap.

Samsung reported first-quarter operating profits of 57.2 trillion won (\$US38.6 billion) on April 7, an eightfold increase from a year earlier and the largest quarterly result in Korean corporate history. Analysts estimated the strike could have disrupted production worth 20 to 30 trillion won.

India: Punjab municipal sanitation workers still on strike

About 3,000 contract striking sanitation workers from the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation are continuing their sit-down protest outside the corporation's office. The multi-union walkout, which began on May 6, is demanding permanent jobs for workers who have worked on contract for more than ten years, a 15,000-rupee (\$US155) monthly wage, Provident Funds and health insurance (ESI).

Strikers have accused the government of ignoring their demands and the impact on the public, whose health could be exposed to deadly diseases during the industrial action.

Himachal Pradesh sanitation workers walk out in Shimla

The strike by over 900 sanitation workers at Shimla, Himachal Pradesh entered its fifth day on May 19. Workers protested at CTO Chowk in Shimla chanting slogans and demanding restoration of the 10 percent annual pay increment that has been withdrawn by the Shimla Municipal Corporation. Employed under the Shimla Health Beautification Environment and Heritage Society, the strikers said that they will only return to work if the municipal corporation fulfills their demands. The corporation has responded to the strike, which began just before the tourist season, by outsourcing some sanitation services.

Air India ground staff hold one-day strike in Mumbai

Air India Airport Services Limited (AIASL) ground staff held a one-day strike at Mumbai airport on May 19 severely disrupting Air India flights. Workers were demanding improved pay and conditions. The protest was organised by workers affiliated to the Akhil Bhartiya Kamgar Karmachari Sangh (ABKKS), which had earlier issued a "final ultimatum" to AIASL over long pending demands. The union claimed after the strike that AIASL had agreed in writing to address their demands.

The union's demands include permanent employment for fixed term workers who had completed five years' service, wage revisions pending since 2017, a "same work same pay" policy, transport and canteen facilities, a promotion policy, and refund of salary deductions made during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also wants compensation for employees retiring during service tenure, medical and accident coverage and no further recruitment of retired staff members.

Gig workers across India walk out against rising fuel costs and declining wages

An estimated 40,000 gig workers went on strike for about five hours in major cities like Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune and Kolkata on May 19. Their protest was mainly over increasing fuel costs and declining wages. The workers also demanded accident insurance, health coverage, retirement benefits, minimum wage guarantees, and transparent payment systems.

The Gig & Platform Service Workers Union has demanded an immediate increase in per-kilometre service rates from both the government and major digital platforms.

Maintenance workers strike at Woodside's LNG production plants in

Western Australia

About 70 specialised maintenance workers at Woodside's North-West Shelf and Pluto LNG production plants in Western Australia began rolling stoppages on Wednesday following failed negotiations with contractor UGL for a new enterprise agreement. Workers voted on May 8 to take future industrial action that could include stoppages from 30 minutes to 24 hours, plus seven different bans.

The workers are members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. Their bargaining unit is the Offshore Alliance (OA) which covers workers across Australia's offshore oil, gas, and maritime sectors.

The OA said UGL offered an enterprise agreement that was below industry standards and that industrial action would continue until an agreement was reached. The two plants involved in the dispute, the onshore Karratha Gas Plant and the offshore Pluto plant produce a total of 19.2 cubic metric tons of LNG a year.

INPEX LNG production workers in the Northern Territory announce future action

The Offshore Alliance (OA), which represents 340 Australian Workers Union members and 80 Electrical Trades Union members, has notified the Japanese-owned company INPEX that its members will commence rolling strike action at the company's Ichthys facility near Darwin, northern Australia on May 27. The action will include 243 half-hour stoppages and work bans from May 27 to June 10.

Workers voted on April 24 to take future industrial action following seven months of failed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. OA said that while six days of negotiations in the Fair Work Commission resolved some claims, the company failed to agree to benchmark pay and conditions and secure jobs. OA indicated it could reach a last-minute deal saying it was willing to resume two days of negotiations with INPEX on May 25.

Industry observers predicted the industrial action would most likely shut down production. The facility produces 9.3 million cubic metric tons a year, with Japan receiving 8 percent of its LNG imports from Ichthys and Taiwan receiving 8 percent of its LNG from the facility.

Brownes Foods dairy production workers in Western Australia hold third strike

About 60 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members at Brownes Foods dairy processing facilities at Balcatta and Brunswick in Western Australia walked off the job on Monday over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. It followed a 24-hour strike on April 1 and two days of rolling stoppages on April 22.

The TWU said that after 12 bargaining meetings since December, Brownes management still refuses to move on workers' key claims. These include a wage offer that keeps pace with inflation, job security and less reliance on labour hire and improved parental leave.

Union members voted on March 20 to take industrial action after rejecting the company's proposed sub-inflation pay rise of only 3 percent. The official inflation rate in WA's capital Perth is 4.6 percent, meaning the pay offer is a real pay cut.

The TWU said Brownes management became hostile during negotiations after the April 1 strike. A union spokesman told the media that management "have made it clear they intend to sell the company. They want a low wages outcome to try and get a higher price."

20,000 South Australian nurses resume industrial action for better pay and conditions

Following a three-month pause, 20,000 members of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) recommenced industrial action on Monday as part of their long running dispute with the state Labor government over its proposed enterprise agreement. The union bureaucracy suspended strike action in February, following an interim wage offer from the government just prior to the state election.

The interim offer, which was accepted by the ANMF, included a 4 percent pay rise backdated to January 1 and another 2 percent from October 1. In October the union said it wanted a 23 percent pay increase by 2027, and a further rise of 3 to 4 percent if the agreement extends into 2028. This was reduced to a 21 percent pay rise over three years, starting with 7 percent this year. Other outstanding issues like chronic staff shortages, overwork and worsening delays in emergency departments were not included in the interim offer.

Although ANMF members have shown a willingness during the dispute to engage in concrete industrial action involving strikes, the ANMF has severely restricted current action to working to rule measures and the promotion of union campaign material.

ANMF members began industrial action on October 30 last year with a stop-work rally outside the state parliament, and continued with ad hoc stoppages and rallies up until mid-February.

University of Tasmania educators walk out again for improved pay offer

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members from the University of Tasmania's (UTAS) four campuses stopped work for four hours at 1 p.m. on Wednesday in opposition to management's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a two-hour strike by 650 NTEU members on May 5.

The proposed agreement included sub-inflation 3 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement and a \$1,000 sign-on bonus, which was not offered to casuals. Workers rejected the offer, considering that the current annualised Consumer Price Index rate for Tasmania's capital Hobart is 5.1 percent, meaning the pay offer is a cut in real pay.

The NTEU wants a pay increase that compensates for the loss of pay during the COVID pandemic. It claimed that under the 2021-2025 agreement, members endured a real wage loss of 5-6 percent against inflation. Other demands are for reduced workload and protection against unregulated Artificial Intelligence at the university.

Blue Star Electrical installation workers in Tasmania begin industrial action

Sixteen Electrical Trades Union members employed by Blue Star

Electrical at the Hobart Airport Project began taking industrial action on Monday in their fight for a new enterprise agreement. After six months of failed negotiations the workers voted on May 12 to take industrial action that could include 27 separate work bans, plus stoppages ranging from 15 minutes to 26 hours.

The electricians want an 18 percent pay rise over three years, backpay written into the agreement, fair travel time and fares, improved severance and redundancy pay and better overtime conditions.

Stowe electricians in New South Wales strike for pay rise

About 170 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from electrical contractor Stowe stopped work on May 14 and rallied outside the company's head office at Rydalmere in Sydney. The ETU claimed that Stowe was trying to delay reaching a deal on a new three-year enterprise agreement by offering a one-off pay rise in a 12-month extension of the current agreement with no change in conditions.

The offer was rejected by workers who want annual leave increased to five weeks to compensate for the long hours and six-day weeks. The union alleges that Stowe's offer was designed to keep members locked in and unable to bargain for better conditions.

DP World security guards at Port Botany resume industrial action

Gate security guards at DP World's Port Botany Terminal, Sydney resumed industrial action on May 13 and 15 in their enterprise agreement dispute with their employer Certis Security. The MUA members delayed by five minutes allowing each truck into or out of the terminal, causing a major bottleneck. The company has threatened workers with termination and legal action if they did not end the action.

The security guards' go-slow ban was a resumption of industrial action that began on January 23, following Certis management's rejection of their demands. The workers are currently employed on minimum legal pay and conditions.

The Freight and Trade Alliance, an employer lobby group, reported that MUA had planned further industrial action at Certis Security on Monday and Tuesday between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. The union has not reported whether this action occurred.



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