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: Manipur government employees continue indefinite statewide strike

Manipur state government employees are continuing indefinite strike action they began on July 1 and are holding demonstrations across multiple districts. The strike is led by various union coalitions, including the Manipur Government Services Federation and the Joint Administrative Council.

Protesters want the government to grant a 10-point charter of demands. This includes enhancement of the Dearness Allowance and Dearness Relief, restoration of the Old Pension Scheme, an increase in the retirement age from 60 to 62 years, implementation of the 8th Pay Commission and permanent jobs for contract staff. The workers said they will continue their strike until their demands are met.

Mysuru hostel workers in Karnataka protest over unpaid wage increases

Hostel workers in Mysuru demonstrated against the delay in extending revised minimum wages to their sector. The group included cooks, cleaners and other hostel staff. Protesters urged authorities to enforce the revised wage structure immediately to ensure fair pay.

The struggle is controlled by Karnataka State Samyuktha Vasathi Nilayagala Karmikara Sangha, which is affiliated with the All-India United Trade Union Congress (AICCTU). Workers demonstrated outside the district panchayat office in Mysuru on Monday. They also demanded that the health insurance and provident fund be remitted by the contractors and paid into workers' accounts on July 13.

Bihar: Patna Medical College Hospital ward attendants call off strike

Hundreds of Patna Medical College Hospital ward attendants suspended their three-day strike on July 15, after the labour department ordered an immediate probe into wage irregularities. Workers, backed by the AICCTU, said that a private outsourcing agency and hospital administration had withheld wages for five months and violated minimum wage laws, paying only 8,000 rupees ($83) instead of the mandated 9,891 rupees after deductions.

Deputy Labour Commissioner Ranvir Ranjan claimed that there would be a rapid investigation and legal action if the violations were confirmed. Although attendants returned to work, they warned that their agitation would resume if these promises were not honoured.

Panipat refinery workers demonstrate in Haryana

Panipat refinery workers demonstrated on July 12 to demand resolution of wage-related issues and threatened to launch a protest hunger strike if their demands were not met promptly. The workers alleged irregularities in wage payments and sought fair compensation in line with all work agreements. The Indian Oil Panipat Refinery Employees' Union led the protest, calling on management and authorities to intervene. The Indian Oil refinery employs about 1,000 workers and tens of thousands of contractors.

Safai workers march in Mohali, Punjab

Safai Sewak Sangh members in Kharar held a protest march in Mohali as part of statewide indefinite action by sanitation workers that began on July 8. They demanded permanent jobs, abolition of outsourcing, and a minimum monthly wage of 40,000 rupees ($416) along with resolution of other outstanding issues. The march disrupted traffic briefly on the Chandigarh-Ludhiana highway before moving into the city's main market. Union leaders accused the Punjab government of failing to act on repeated assurances.

Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation workers walk out

Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation workers went on strike on July 10, and continued their action the following day, leading to the closure of hundreds of state-run liquor shops. Workers called for better wages and working conditions. A significant number of employees joined the protest, showing strong collective action.

Sri Lanka: Wildlife officers hold nationwide protest over recruitment procedures

Wildlife officers staged an islandwide "sickout" protest on Monday and took professional action against Civil Security Officer recruitment procedures. Officers protested in Battaramulla, a Colombo precinct, displaying banners and placards chanting slogans calling for fair

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promotions and recognition of years of service.

Many Wildlife Conservation Department offices were closed nationwide and, according to protesters, 95 percent of departmental activities suspended.

Railway gatekeepers demonstrate in Sri Lanka over unpaid allowances

Railway gatekeepers protested on Monday outside the Presidential Secretariat to demand payment of allowances for work carried out since Cyclone Ditwah.

Workers said that although the government previously paid an allowance of 500 rupees ($US1.48) for every eight hours of work, these payments completely stopped after the cyclone. Workers also allege that there is no fixed date for receiving monthly wages. The protesters have submitted a letter to the Presidential Secretariat demanding proper wages and permanent appointments for all affected workers.

Perth airport security workers stop work

Security screening officers at Perth Airport in Western Australia (WA) stopped work for one hour on Friday, switching off screening machines and walking off the job. The workers, employed by security contractor ISS, are demanding higher pay and improved roster arrangements, including more guaranteed hours of work.

The United Workers Union (UWU) said the workers are paid 13–19 percent less than their counterparts at airports elsewhere in the country, despite doing the same job and being employed by the same company, and are struggling to earn a living because of unfair rostering practices.

One worker told *WA Today*, “Many workers are only getting 16 hours a week. Many of those shifts are only four hours. Often they don’t know when their shifts will be until a few days before. It’s almost impossible to have another part-time job because the airport commands that week 24/7. They can roster you whenever it suits them.”

Another said, “There’s over 800 staff here and only 20 percent are full-time. I know someone who has been here 12 years waiting to be made full-time.”

Another stoppage is planned for Monday morning.

More BHP workers vote to strike in the Pilbara

As BHP workers at the Port Hedland iron ore export facility carried out an 8-hour strike Thursday, the first by mining industry workers in the Pilbara region of WA for decades, another section of the mining company’s workforce has voted overwhelmingly to strike.

Around 60 electrical workers on BHP’s high-voltage network voted 97.5 percent in favour of strikes of between 30 minutes and 24 hours, after 12 months of union-management negotiations.

The workers previously voted to authorise industrial action, including strikes, in March, but the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) has thus far restricted their struggle to minimal work bans, including limits on overtime, call-outs and stepping into supervisor roles. ETU WA Secretary Adam Woodage described these limited actions as “measured and responsible.”

As is the case throughout much of the Pilbara mining industry, the workers are currently employed under wildly disparate individual common-law contracts. The ETU claims there is in some cases a variance in pay of more than 30 percent among people doing similar work as a result.

Workers are seeking an enterprise agreement to provide pay parity and annual wage rises, protect existing conditions and set down a definite classification schedule, with clear paths for progression.

Peabody locks out Wambo mine workers again

Management at the Peabody Energy-managed Wambo mine in the Hunter region, north of Sydney, New South Wales (NSW), has announced a new 14-day lockout of 19 coal washery workers, escalating a pay dispute that has now dragged on for over two months. The lockout follows an earlier two-week lockout that ended on July 1, which was imposed in response to industrial action by Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members that began in early May. Both lockouts are legally protected “employer response actions” under Australia’s anti-worker industrial relations laws.

A Peabody spokesperson claimed the MEU’s remuneration demand would push workers’ annual earnings “closer to a quarter of a million dollars in the final year of the agreement,” reaching up to $234,000 annually for employees on a rotating day and night roster—a total increase of 17 percent over the four-year life of the agreement.

MEU Northern Mining and NSW Energy district president Robin Williams dismissed Peabody’s focus on worker earnings as a “deliberate distraction,” pointing out that the company’s CEO received a pay rise on the order of 29 percent last year. He accused the multinational of “choosing conflict over compromise” and said the dispute could be ended “tomorrow by putting a fair offer on the table instead of locking workers out of their jobs.”

Peabody’s original offer included below-inflation annual pay increases of 2.5 percent and changes to bonus arrangements that would leave workers worse off. The company is refusing to backdate any wage increase and is seeking to shift to fortnightly pay and to reduce crib breaks.

In a separate dispute, MEU members at three Glencore open-cut coal mines in the Hunter Region—Ravensworth, Mangoola and Wambo—voted overwhelmingly in three separate ballots on June 17 to approve future industrial action. Workers oppose the company’s plan to introduce three tiers in new enterprise agreements. The lowest tier has no bonus, with progression controlled by management rather than based on time or experience. The MEU has claimed the new lower tiers would lock in cheaper labour-hire rates that could reduce current annual wages by 24 percent, or around $38,000 per year.

UGL workers escalate industrial action at Western Australian gas plants

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members employed by maintenance contractor UGL have escalated protected industrial action across multiple Western Australian gas facilities, with workers at Santos’ Varanus Island joining the dispute on July 8, alongside ongoing stoppages at Woodside’s Karratha Gas Plant and Pluto LNG facility that have now entered their

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ninth week.

At Varanus Island, ETU members commenced protected industrial action during a scheduled shutdown period, a strategically timed escalation that maximises pressure on the company. Workers are demanding wages and conditions that reflect the enormous profits generated by these operations.

This follows the rolling stoppages and work bans that began on May 20 at Woodside's North-West Shelf and Pluto LNG plants, where approximately 70 specialised workers—members of the ETU, Australian Workers Union, and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union—have maintained industrial action for nearly two months.

UGL has offered agreements that the unions say fall well below industry standards. The union bodies are urging members to reject the latest offer—which includes a $4,000 sign-on bonus they label a "bribe"—when votes are cast between July 17 and 20.

The ETU members at Karratha, Pluto, and Varanus Island operate under separate enterprise agreements but face the same intransigence from UGL management, which has stonewalled workers with the familiar refrain that better pay and conditions are unaffordable.

The expansion of the dispute to Santos' Varanus Island facility signals growing determination among workers to defeat these offers, despite company efforts to hire temporary labour to serve as strikebreakers.

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