Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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India: Punjab sanitation workers' statewide strike continues

Sanitation workers across Punjab remain on strike after rejecting the "welfare package" announced by the Aam Aadmi Party-led state government on July 29. The strike, which began on July 8, disrupted garbage collection and disposal in several towns.

Workers are demanding a monthly take-home wage of 40,000 rupees ($US418), while the government has offered only 16,000 rupees. They also oppose a 45-year age limit for making contract workers permanent. Of the 30,000 workers employed on contracts, around 15 percent are already older than 45 and would therefore be excluded. Led by the sanitation workers' union, the strikers are also demanding compensation of 1 million rupees for the families of workers killed on the job, an end to manual scavenging and greater use of jet-suction machinery to clean sewers and sewage tanks.

Punjab power corporation employees end week-long strike

A week-long strike by Punjab State Power Corporation Limited employees ended on July 27 after the government promised time-bound action on their demands. Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema assured unions that a committee would deliver an interim report on financial issues by July 31 and a final report by August 15.

Workers said they had won a key concession: electricity benefits for employees recruited after 2011. The strike severely disrupted power restoration, especially in rural areas, as linesmen and technical staff remained off duty. The unions are continuing to demand equal pay for equal work and permanent positions for outsourced workers and have pledged to monitor the implementation of the government's commitments.

[subhead]Punjab road transport contract workers plan three-day strike[/subhead]

Contract workers employed by Punjab Roadways and other state-run bus services have announced a three-day strike from August 3 to 5, demanding permanent jobs and improved working conditions. Ahead of the stoppage, workers held rallies at depots on July 27.

Union leaders accused the Aam Aadmi Party government of failing to act despite 70 meetings over four years and of promoting privatisation. They said the fleet crisis is worsening, with 800 buses unserviceable and no new vehicles added, despite plans to procure 696.

Workers said promises to abolish contract employment and ensure full salaries remain unfulfilled. They have warned that they will hold a sit-down protest, or dharna, outside Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's residence if their demands are ignored.

Phagwara municipal workers enter second day of strike

Phagwara Municipal Corporation employees continued their indefinite strike for a second day on July 29, joined by activists from the Bhagwan Valmiki Action Committee. Protesters, led by Dharamveer Sethi, marched through key areas of the city before resuming their sit-in outside the municipal corporation office.

Workers rejected the Punjab government's salary increase for sanitation employees, calling it inadequate. Their demands include the dismissal of Barnala's deputy superintendent of police and station house officer over their alleged roles in the incident that triggered the agitation. They also demanded permanent jobs for contract employees and the resolution of other outstanding issues.

Employees vowed to intensify the strike unless the government takes concrete action, refusing to withdraw without firm commitments.

Sanitation workers in Sahnewal and Doraha enter 21st day of strike

Sanitation workers in Sahnewal and Doraha entered the 21st day of their strike on July 29, bringing garbage collection to a halt. The workers are demanding permanent jobs for contract employees, citing broken promises, a lack of recognition for their frontline work during the coronavirus pandemic and unsafe working conditions. They accuse authorities of indifference, spreading false reports that the strike had ended and subjecting workers to police harassment.

Protesters have highlighted the health risks of handling hazardous waste without medical support, while residents have reported unbearable smells and an increase in stray animals. Officials said talks were underway at the state level. The strike is being led by the Safai Karamchari Union.

Bangladesh: Tea garden workers block highway to demand wage increase

Tea garden workers blocked the Sylhet–Tamabil Highway on Saturday, July 25, during a protest demanding a minimum daily wage of 500 taka ($US4.18). The demonstration, organised by the Tea Workers Trade Union Centre, began at around 9:30 a.m. at the Khadim Tea Garden with a two-hour work stoppage before workers marched onto the highway.

Workers are demanding the cancellation of a government gazette that imposed a meagre 5 percent pay increase, as well as land ownership rights and elections for the Tea Workers Union. Speakers denounced the current daily wage of just 187 taka as “inhumane” amid surging commodity prices, describing the offered annual increase of only 8 taka as a “farce and mockery” of tea workers.

Union leaders said that despite living in the region for nearly 200 years, tea workers remain landless and are deprived of basic civil amenities and constitutional rights. SM Shuvo, the union’s chief coordinator, urged workers across all tea gardens to unite in the struggle for a daily wage of 500 taka.

Bangladesh’s tea estate sector comprises 172 estates and directly employs 102,000 permanent and 40,000 temporary workers, while around 500,000 people live within estate boundaries.

Peabody abandons third Wambo coal washery lockout

Peabody Energy has abandoned its third lockout of 19 coal washery workers at the Wambo mine in the Hunter region, north of Sydney, after the Mining and Energy Union (MEU) launched urgent proceedings in the Fair Work Commission challenging the company’s latest attempt to lock workers out. The company has also agreed to pay workers for the latest lockout, along with three earlier days where it refused to accept employees for work.

The pay dispute has now dragged on for over two months, with the company imposing repeated lockouts in response to industrial action by MEU members that began in early May. All three lockouts were legally protected “employer response actions” under Australia’s anti-worker industrial relations laws. 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, along with demands to change to fortnightly pay and reduce crib breaks.

MEU Northern Mining and NSW Energy District President Robin Williams said: “Peabody found the money to give its CEO a 29.4 percent pay rise. … But when the people who actually keep the washery running ask for an agreement that keeps pace with the industry, suddenly they’re told to lower their expectations.”

Despite these comments and the clear hostility of the company to its employees, Williams again appealed to Peabody for negotiation: “Three lockouts haven’t delivered an agreement. Maybe it’s time Peabody tried bargaining instead.”

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, with the lowest tier having no bonus and 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.

Victorian council workers strike again

More than 1,000 council workers from Hume, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay and five other metropolitan Melbourne councils rallied outside the state parliament on Thursday as part of a four-hour strike.

The workers, members of the Australian Services Union (ASU), are engaged in multi-employer bargaining across eight councils. They have enacted work bans in recent months, including refusing to collect kerbside bins, and held strikes in May and June.

The ASU is pursuing a wage claim of 10 percent in the first year and 4 percent annually thereafter—a demand that would barely keep pace with current inflation, let alone recoup the severe real wage cuts workers have endured since 2021. Under previous enterprise agreements enforced by the ASU, council workers have suffered as much as a 12 percent pay cut relative to inflation.

The union’s claim centres on an appeal to the state Labor government to lift rate caps, enabling councils to charge residents more. This is a dead-end plea to a government whose wage suppression policies have driven years of real pay cuts across the entire public sector, while eliminating thousands of jobs and slashing social spending.

South Australian nurses reject union-Labor sellout

Nurses and midwives in South Australia (SA) have decisively voted to reject a real wage cutting enterprise agreement offer from the state Labor government, despite an aggressive “yes” campaign by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) bureaucracy. Some 67 percent of the almost 13,000 health workers who took part in the ballot recorded a “no” vote.

The rejected agreement offered a 16 percent cumulative nominal pay rise, effectively over four years, as the previous agreement expired in July 2025. This would have fallen far short of keeping up with the soaring cost of living, let alone restoring losses imposed in previous union-government agreements.

The key staffing demand—that all babies in postnatal wards be counted as patients for the purposes of nurse?to?patient ratios—was rejected, with the government offering instead a vague promise to “review” the issue.

The ANMF leadership’s attempt to ram through the sellout deal followed months of postponed, cancelled and heavily restricted industrial action, including a protracted pause before and after the state election. The union bureaucracy held just two 24-hour strikes, isolated to individual hospitals, at Lyell McEwin Hospital on June 4 and Flinders Medical Centre on June 18.

The ANMF now insists that no further industrial action is possible, as the Labor government has flagged its intention to take the dispute to arbitration before the state industrial court.

Victorian doctors vote to strike

Public sector doctors across Victoria have this week voted overwhelmingly to strike, with a 97 percent result in favour of industrial action by members of the Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF). This is the first time in two decades that public hospital doctors in the state have voted to take industrial action.

Doctors are calling for a 30 percent pay rise over four years, and have also raised concerns over unsafe workloads, fatigue, excessive unpaid work, workforce shortages, as well as the broader decline of the public hospital system.

The doctors’ vote comes as industrial action by allied health workers and medical scientists continues across the state, as well as that of other public sector workers, including educators.

ASMOF has not yet called any industrial action, emphasising that the vote “does not mean industrial action begins immediately” and that “different actions may apply at different hospitals, locations or times.”

This should be a warning to doctors that, in the face of their unequivocal strike vote, the union bureaucracy will seek to minimise and isolate their struggle.