

# 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.*

## India: West Bengal waste treatment plant workers strike

Workers from the medical waste treatment facility of Greenzen Bio Private stopped work and held a sit-down protest outside the plant in Rajganj on August 16 to demand a wage increase.

Members of the Greenzen Bio Workers Union, affiliated to the All India United Trade Union Centre, said management has not negotiated for a wage settlement, even after the last wage agreement terminated four years ago. They alleged that most workers do not have Provident Fund, Gratuity and Employees' State Insurance (ESI).

Workers ended a four-day strike in June over the issue after management falsely gave an assurance that they would hold a meeting to resolve their grievances, but there has been no progress since.

## West Bengal rural health workers protest in Kolkata

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers demonstrated in Kolkata on August 12 to push for 16 demands, including permanency of service and a minimum wage. A large number of ASHA workers had started a protest march from Salt Lake City (north Kolkata) but were stopped by police.

Workers want a minimum monthly salary of 21,000 rupees (\$US327) and a monthly pension of 10,000 rupees in line with the 46th Labour Commission recommendations. Workers complained that during the COVID-19 pandemic the Modi government allocated a 1,000-rupee risk allowance to ASHA workers but most workers were never paid the entire amount.

The West Bengal ASHA Health Workers Union, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, submitted a memorandum to the director of the National Rural Health Mission in Kolkata.

## Delhi University teachers demand permanency positions

Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) members suspended classes and demonstrated at state parliament on August 10, to demand the absorption of existing ad hoc and temporary teachers into the permanent faculty. DUTA wants a bill or regulation to be introduced in parliament

that will satisfy their demand.

Teachers also want the release of additional teaching positions with the implementation of the 10 percent Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) expansion in the university.

## Punjab public transport contract workers strike against privatisation

About 8,000 contract workers from the government-owned commuter transport companies PUNBUS and Pepsu Road Transport Corporation held a three-day strike on August 14 to protest the state government's privatisation policy. They held sit-in demonstrations at 27 depots.

Workers called for an end to privatisation and for the strengthening of government departments. They accused senior transport department officials of acting against the interests of employees to please the demands of the private transport lobby group.

## Tata Marcopolo bus assembly workers in Karnataka protest minimum production level

Tata Marcopolo bus and coach assembly plant workers held a 14-kilometre march from the factory to the deputy commissioner's office in Dharwad on August 12 to oppose the mandated minimum-production level. The protest was organised by the Tata Marcopolo Kranthikari Karmik Union.

The union alleges that workers were not given any justice during a meeting chaired by the industry and which accepted the findings of a team of officials from the Department of Factories and Labour Department.

The government conducted a study on production-related issues at Tata Marcopolo and sided with management by mandating a minimum production level of 12 buses per shift per assembly line. Workers opposed this saying that the study was unscientific and could not be accepted.

## Sri Lanka: Colombo hospital health workers oppose budget cuts

Hundreds of health workers from the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, demonstrated outside the hospital in Colombo on Tuesday chanting slogans calling for the end of the Ranil Wickremasinghe government's austerity measures. Workers alleged that the budget cuts were endangering the lives of health workers and patients.

The health services united trade unions organised the protest in response

to health workers who called for the supply of urgently needed medicine and medical equipment. They also called for a recommended diet for patients, bank-loan concessions for workers and the end of austerity measures.

### **Pakistani power-loom workers end 17-day strike**

Over 40,000 power-loom workers in Faisalabad ended a 17-day strike on Wednesday, following a deal between power-loom owners and the workers' representative, the Pakistan Labour Quami Movement (Labour Education Foundation).

The strike was called on August 1 by the Pakistan Textile Garments and Leather Workers Federation and the Textile and Power-loom Workers Federation after power-loom owners closed about 450 units on July 26. The loom owners were responding to the workers' demands for payment of the government mandated 17 percent pay increase and social security cover that was to be paid from July 1.

In the agreement reached on Wednesday, owners said they would increase wages by 15 percent effective from July 21. The government said it would issue workers with social security cards, install earth-leakage circuit breakers in unsafe factories within 15 days, and act against power-loom owners who have installed substandard boilers.

### **Darwin Port workers strike for better pay and conditions**

Workers at the privately operated Darwin Port in Australia's Northern Territory (NT) began a week of rolling stoppages and work bans on Friday in their dispute for a new agreement. Close to 100 percent of workers who participated in a protected action ballot approved strike action after rejecting the Darwin Port Corporation's (DPC) 2 percent pay increase offer. The offer was well below the NT's official inflation rate of 5.2 percent.

The protected industrial action includes one-hour stoppages at 1 p.m. each day for seven days, and six separate indefinite work bans. These include not working non-rostered overtime and during meal breaks, restricting pilot vessel operation speed to 10 knots and other bans. The unions designed the industrial action in order to minimise the impact on port operations and profits.

The action involves workers across operations, administration and security and includes members of the Maritime Union of Australia, the Australian Maritime Officers Union, and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU).

The unions claimed that DPC has refused to return to negotiations with a revised pay offer. A spokesman from the MUA said members refuse to work harder and longer for a wage increase that is effectively a pay cut.

DPC is part of the Chinese-owned Landbridge Group. The port is Australia's nearest port to Asia and is a key support hub for the offshore oil and gas fields in the Arafura Sea, Timor Sea and waters off the coast of Western Australia.

### **Western Australian public sector workers protest at state parliament**

More than 1,000 public sector workers, including teachers, health

workers, fire fighters, and community support workers, demonstrated outside the state parliament on Wednesday to demand removal of the government's 2.75 percent cap on wage increases for public sector workers. The protest followed six weeks of limited stop-work meetings and rallies.

The action was coordinated by the Public Sector Alliance, consisting of nine public sector unions. Public sector wages are capped at 2.75 percent, or 2.5 per cent with a \$1,000 sign-on bonus. The current official inflation rate in Perth is 7.6 percent. Workers rejected the McGowan Labor state government's latest offer of 3 percent annual increases for two years, plus a one-time payment of \$2,500. However, the unions are calling for a pay increase of only 5 percent, in effect a pay cut when compared to Perth's inflation rate of 7.1 percent.

The McGowan Labor government want to maintain its 2021–22 budget operating surplus which is expected to come in at \$5.7 billion. A \$1.6 billion surplus is forecast for 2022–23.

### **Australian rail carriage parts manufacturing workers hold national stoppage**

Over 80 workers from the rail carriage parts manufacturer Knorr-Bremse stopped work and picketed their factories across Australia on Wednesday to demand a better enterprise agreement offer. The action followed a nationwide walkout on August 11 over the issue.

The workers, who are covered by the AMWU, Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Services Union, make the braking systems, entrance systems and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems for rail carriages and locomotives. The AMWU said the company is yet to come to the table with an offer that keeps up with the increasing cost of living.

### **Tasmanian hospital nurses continue stoppages over low pay and unsafe staffing levels**

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) members held a 15-minute stop work outside the North West Regional Hospital in Tasmania on Wednesday. Nurses held placards saying "Retain, Recruit, Recognise." The action was part of an ongoing campaign by the ANMF in protest against unsafe staffing levels, low pay and unsustainable workloads.

An ANMF representative told nurses that the union had secured a retention bonus from the government and a "suite of measures to address members' concerns." The offer included a \$2,000 one-off retention bonus, clinical coaches, additional permanent Transition to Practice positions, workforce modelling and commencement of enterprise agreement negotiations prior to November 2022.

The offer is not genuine. The bonus will replace the existing COVID-19 allowance agreement and does nothing to address chronic understaffing and unsustainable workloads. The union has not openly said that it supports the offer, saying that members will be consulted state-wide to seek their views.

### **Swinburne University teachers in Melbourne protest**

Teachers at the Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn campus, held an early morning demonstration in Melbourne on Tuesday to protest their pay being docked for imposing partial work bans. Protesters included members of the National Tertiary Education Union and Australian Education Union.

The NTEU said workers have been waiting two years for a new enterprise agreement that will deliver improved conditions, superannuation and a pay increase that brings them in line with other colleagues. The NTEU called a strike on May 18, saying it was an attempt to get management back to the negotiating table “with what you already promised.”

### **Victorian library workers maintain work bans**

Eighty workers at Eastern Regional Libraries Corporation (ERL), which provides library services to the cities of Knox, Maroondah and the Shire of Yarra Ranges in Victoria, have stepped up low level industrial action begun on August 4 in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement.

Although workers in June voted near unanimously for industrial action that approved work stoppages up to 24 hours, the Australian Services Union is restricting action to ineffective work bans. Instead of implementing strike action, which members voted for, the union has directed members to broaden the scope of existing bans that will have little effect on the functioning of the library.

The ASU has already partially stitched up a sell-out deal with ERL. While demanding a sub inflationary 2 percent wage rise, it has already agreed to accept ERL’s 30 percent reduction in minimum staffing levels to open library facilities and job reclassifications that could put some workers on a lower pay rate.

### **Air Calédonie domestic pilots strike**

Domestic flights have been cancelled this week in New Caledonia as a conflict between Air Calédonie and pilots continues. Since August 4, Air Calédonie has been affected by the industrial action, which has disrupted travel to the Loyalty Islands.

Air Calédonie decided to cancel all flights on Monday, after disruptions and strikes last week over the status of a co-pilot. Some flights on Tuesday were also affected. The co-pilot Chrystelle Cejo is reported to have had training gaps because of problems caused by the COVID pandemic, which resulted in the company suspending her contract without renewal, according to the union of Kanak workers USTKE.

USTKE insisted Cejo be allowed to resume work and her contract renewed immediately. A former company pilot said she did not understand why the criteria was “so harsh”, with company insisting she had only done six months training, even though she had done 12 months.

A meeting occurred this week between the government, the province of the Loyalty islands, the USTKE union and Air Caledonia to come up with a solution. USTKE decided to suspend the strikes in the meantime.



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