

# 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: Air India contract technicians set strike date for pay parity

Contract technicians at Air India have threatened to strike on April 23. The technicians said they do not receive the same pay as permanent workers even though they have higher workloads. The All-India Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Union said 75 percent of Air India's workforce consists of contract workers, whose demands are constantly ignored.

Last week, Vistara airlines pilots stopped work for several days to oppose a planned wage cut when the airline merges with Air India at the end of this month. Pilots will only be guaranteed pay for 40 hours per month, instead of the current guaranteed 70 hours.

## Tamil Nadu government hospital workers protest unpaid wages

Chengalpattu district government hospital contract workers held a sit-down protest on April 9 to demand four months' overdue wages. Workers blocked the road at the hospital for two hours before police intervened.

The 370 contract workers who clean the hospital and remove solid sanitary waste are only paid 9,000 rupees (\$US108) a month. They ended the protest after hospital management assured them that the wages would be paid.

## Telangana pharmaceutical factory workers demand compensation after deadly explosion

SB Organic factory workers, accompanied by family members, demonstrated outside the company's bulk drug manufacturing plant in Sangareddy district, near Hyderabad, on April 4 to demand compensation following a deadly explosion of the plant's chemical reactor the day before. Six workers were killed and many injured with 18 hospitalised.

Workers said there had been no news about compensation or medical treatment fees being paid by the company. Those killed included Subrmananyam from Andhra Pradesh, Suresh Paul from Madhya Pradesh and Dhayalan from Tamil Nadu.

## Kochi higher secondary school teachers threaten to ban exam duty

Higher secondary teachers in the Erankulam district, Kerala state, who are on exam evaluation duty from April 10, have threatened to boycott this work if salary arrears were not paid soon. The Higher Secondary School Teachers Association said a decision on work stoppages would be made over the weekend.

## Contract hospital workers in Gujarat strike for job security

About 300 outsourced housekeeping workers from the municipal-run SVP Hospital in Ahmedabad walked out on strike on April 4 to demand permanent jobs. They demonstrated on the hospital campus, calling for abolition of the contract system.

The workers are currently employed by the Sinduri Labour Company, however, with the hospital awarding a fresh manpower contract to a competing company starting from April 16, there is no guarantee they will keep their jobs.

## Chandigarh medical research institute contract workers strike

Emergency and outpatient services were interrupted at the Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh on April 3 when about 3,500 contract workers went on strike. One of their main demands is for the release of nine of their colleagues who were arrested by police the previous day for organising a protest.

Strikers included hospital attendants, clerical staff, sanitation, and kitchen staff, lift operators and security guards. Other demands were equal pay for equal work, health benefits and other entitlements. The strike extended into the next day until police released their work colleagues and institute administration gave assurances that their demands would be addressed.

## Bangladesh: Garment workers protest in Dhaka over unpaid wages and Eid festival allowance

Over 100 workers from several factories in Hemayetpur, on the outskirts of Dhaka, protested April 5 over the non-payment of wages and the Eid festival allowance. It followed several weeks of action across Bangladesh

by garment workers.

According to a media report, over 51 percent, or 4,849 textile and garment units outside the Dhaka metropolitan area, have not paid wages for the month of March. Festival allowances have not been paid at 18.65 percent of Bangladeshi plants.

### **Australian air traffic controllers voting on possible strike action**

The Civil Air Operations Officers' Association of Australia (Civil Air), covering hundreds of air traffic controllers at airports across Australia, has been granted permission from the Fair Work Commission to conduct a ballot of its members to decide on taking protected industrial action. Civil Air is in dispute with Airservices Australia over the government entity's proposed enterprise agreement.

Civil Air workers want a 20 percent wage increase over three years to compensate for previous below-inflation pay increases during the COVID-19 pandemic. Airservices has refused to offer anything above the Australian Public Service Commission's blanket limit of 11.2 percent over three years, or annual increases of 3.7 percent. Australia's current average consumer price index (CPI) is 4.1 percent, meaning the offer is a real pay cut.

The ballot closes on May 1 with traffic controllers deciding on action that could include work bans and stoppages up to 24 hours.

### **Antarctic research vessel officers and engineers vote on industrial action for pay increase**

Officers and engineers employed by Serco Defence Services on the Nuyina, an Australian Antarctic research ship and icebreaker, have voted to resume industrial action for an improved pay offer in Serco's proposed enterprise agreement. Action could include bans on running the engines, loading and unloading cargo, operating cranes, fuelling, watercraft transfers and running helicopters.

The 25 workers are members of the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) and Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE). The unions called off industrial action in January after Serco agreed to resume negotiations in the Fair Work Commission.

Serco insists that there be no change in conditions or pay rise in the new agreement. The unions argue that the current agreement, which began in 2020 and expired on January 6, 2024, has "fallen behind" workers on comparable vessels. Serco's government contract is bound by federal industrial conditions which brings it in the orbit of the Australian Public Service Commission's blanket pay increase limit of 11.2 percent over three years.

An AIMPE spokesperson claimed that pay and conditions are worse than for workers on vessels in Bass Strait and well below the rates of pay and conditions that apply to the Investigator research vessel, which is operated by the CSIRO. Prolonged industrial action could leave the Nuyina stranded at Port Hobart, Tasmania, during the winter months.

### **New South Wales child protection workers strike over staffing crisis**

Child protection workers across New South Wales plan to walk off the

job on April 17 to begin three weeks of rolling stoppages over chronic understaffing. The Public Service Association (PSA), which represents most childcare workers, is demanding the state Labor government approve an "immediate and substantial pay rise" to retain staff and increase recruitment.

Workers say the department needs an additional 500 caseworkers and want foster care placed back in the public sector. Statistics from the Department of Communities and Justice showed that the caseworker vacancy rate has increased 250 percent year on year, with the state losing more workers than they are employing.

A PSA spokesperson said caseworkers had finally decided to take action due to concerns that chronic understaffing was leaving the state's most vulnerable children at risk of serious harm.

### **Adelaide commuter rail workers strike for pay rise**

Over 200 Rail Tram and Bus union (RTBU) members employed by Keolis Downer on Adelaide's commuter rail network stopped work for four hours at 10 a.m. on Thursday after rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Negotiations for a new agreement began in December. The union has called two-hour stoppages during the peak-hours at 6 a.m. on April 16 and 4 p.m. on April 18.

While workers want a 20 percent pay rise over four years, Keolis Downer is only offering 14.7 percent, or annual increases of 3.9 percent. The current consumer price index for Adelaide is 4.8 percent. The Australian Bureau of "Statistics Employee Living Cost" index is 6.9 percent, meaning workers would need a pay increase of 27.6 percent over four years to keep up with the increased cost of living.

### **New Zealand bus and train workers attend stop work meetings**

Bus and train workers in New Zealand's capital Wellington stopped work on Monday to attend two-hour union meetings to discuss upcoming contract negotiations.

Tranzurban bus drivers attended a Tramways Union meeting while rail workers attended a Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) meeting. The meetings are a legal provision of the Employment Relations Act.

RMTU members employed by Transdev and Hyundai Rotem discussed remits workers submitted to the local branch. Their main demand is for a "general wage increase"—with a figure to be decided—and pay and allowance increases across the pay scales. Also discussed were improved entitlements such as medical retirement, superannuation contributions, restoring 1.5 previously lost sick leave days, and discounted and free travel privileges.

The workers want to restore clawbacks in wages and conditions cut as a consequence of decades of privatisation by governments and councils. Both transport unions have a history of shutting down strike action and imposing sell-out agreements. They have never run a co-ordinated industrial campaign across the capital's bus and train networks.



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