

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.

Bangladesh police open fire on protesting garment workers

At least 50 garment workers were injured last Sunday when police attacked hundreds of protesting Abanti Colour Tex employees demanding full payment of their March salaries. The protest blocked Dhaka-Munshiganj regional road, causing a two-kilometre-long traffic jam. The export-oriented plant employs 7,000 workers.

Protesters said factory management paid the Eid bonus on April 8 when the factory closed for the religious holiday while falsely promising that March salaries would be transferred via mobile banking services.

Twenty of the 50 injured protesting workers suffered bullet wounds. “We were protesting peacefully when police started to baton-charge and shoot at us,” one worker told the media.

“We are demanding our salary, is that a crime? So why did police fire on us? If we had been paid our salaries on time we would not need to take to the streets,” another garment worker said.

“We had no Eid festival this year as we weren’t paid our salaries, and I couldn’t go to my village. We always have to take to the streets every time to get the wages of our hard work. Are we human or something else?” one other garment worker said.

Sanofi India sales workers hold two-day national strike

Sales promotion employees from Sanofi India Limited held a two-day national strike on April 22 and 23 in protest over unfair and anti-democratic labour practices. India’s well-known multinational pharmaceutical company, which is headquartered in Mumbai, has about 800 sales workers who are members of the Hoechst All India Representatives’ Committee (HAIRC). The workers denounced management over its attacks on workers’ union rights.

Air India technicians call off planned strike after agreement with management

Air industry technicians employed by Air India Engineering Services called off planned strike action on April 23, after management agreed to grant some of their demands. While no details have been made public, the technicians had threatened strike action because there had been no promotions over the past seven years and that 75 percent of the workforce are contract employees for a government-owned engineering company whose major client is Air India.

Accredited Social Health Activist employees in Tarn Taran, Punjab demand higher retirement age and improved pensions

Accredited Social Health Activist workers in Tarn Taran, in Punjab’s Majha region, demonstrated outside the Civil Surgeon’s office on April 20 in protest over sub-standard wages and pensions, and the sudden dismissal of all 58-year-old employees. The protestors said that they had only worked for the scheme for 17 years before being terminated without prior notice and given no compensation.

Workers demanded that their retirement age be set at 65 and their monthly pension fixed at 10,000 rupees (\$US120). After the protest, they submitted a memorandum with their demands to the civil surgeon. The demonstration was called by the Democratic ASHA Workers Facilitators Union.

Pakistani water and sanitation workers demand outstanding wages

Water and Sanitation Employees Union (WASA) members rallied in Quetta on April 24 to protest the government for non-payment of two-months’ salaries. The demonstration began at the WASA office and ended with sit-down protest outside of the local press club. Workers said that their action against WASA management would continue until their demands are granted.

Fraser Island Council workers in Queensland take industrial action

Members of the Services Union (SU), Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the CFMEU employed by the Fraser Island Council stopped work and rallied outside the council's chambers in Harvey Bay on April 19. They were protesting the council's refusal to grant wages and conditions demands in a new Certified Agreement (CA).

The negotiations for the new CA also involve members of the Australian Workers' Union of Employees Queensland, the Automotive Metals, Engineering, Printing & Kindred Industries, Industrial Union of Employees Queensland and the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia.

While negotiations began in November 2023, they remain deadlocked because council management refuses to increase its original offer. SU members decided a fortnight ago to take industrial action. The last agreement expired in 2021.

The council is refusing to negotiate on any wage demand in the new agreement that exceeds a 14 percent increase, improves job security, increases superannuation contributions, changes work hours or includes a minimum four-hour call-out payment on weekends. Workers want wage increases in line with rises in the Consumer Price Index.

Saputo milk-processing workers strike in Tasmania

Milk-processing workers at Saputo's Burnie, Tasmania plant began a campaign of industrial action, including strikes, on April 23.

About 22 Saputo maintenance and process workers—members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union and the Communication Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU)—have unanimously voted to strike and applied a range of bans to win their claims in a new enterprise agreement.

While negotiations between Saputo and the AMWU and CEPU began in December 2023, when the last agreement ended, talks are now deadlocked. The company is refusing to negotiate on workers' key demand—for pay rates in Tasmania to be brought into line with Saputo's workers on the mainland.

The unions say Saputo workers in Victoria are currently earning 15 to 21 percent more than their comrades doing equivalent work in Burnie. The admission is an indictment of the union's decision to allow Tasmanian workers' pay rates to be aligned to the previous lower cost of living in that state. Burnie workers, however, are now facing prohibitively high house prices, rising rents and utility bills increasing by up to 20 percent.

Overtime bans by 200 South Australian Keolis Downer commuter train drivers were cancelled by the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) on Thursday to ensure residents in Adelaide, the state capital, could attend ANZAC day ceremonies.

RTBU train drivers are in an enterprise agreement dispute with Keolis Downer, operator of the Adelaide metropolitan commuter rail system, and the South Australia Labor government. The union announced on Tuesday that overtime bans would not be imposed on ANZAC day, Australia's pro-war national holiday.

The union has also called for two-hour stoppages during peak hours at 6 a.m. on April 16, and 4 p.m. on April 18, and another 24-hour strike on May 2.

Train drivers want a 20 percent pay rise over four years but Keolis Downer is only offering 14.7 percent, or annual increases of 3.9 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 doctors to strike after rejecting pay deal

About 2,500 junior doctors working in New Zealand's public hospitals will strike next month after rejecting the latest pay offer from Health NZ-Te Whatu Ora. The NZ Resident Doctors Association (NZRDA) issued a strike notice after saying bargaining had reached an "impasse."

The first junior doctors' strike in five years will see a full withdrawal of work for 25 hours from 7 a.m. on May 7. The NZRDA said Health NZ's proposals included a menu of "unacceptable set of remuneration options," including what would be pay cuts or a pay freeze for nearly 600 residents, including 300 GP trainees, in 2025.

Other issues include pay cuts of up to 12 percent, a pay cut for general practice trainee positions, lowering the cap on salary progression and removing the extra step in the salary scale once a registrar passes their first specialist training exam. While the offer contained a pay rise of up to 25 percent for some resident doctors, the salary model makes the impacts highly uneven.

NZRDA national secretary Deborah Powell said the doctors "are united in not accepting a pay deal which would cut the pay of any resident doctors, especially at a time when the RMO [resident medical officer] workforce already has 500 vacancies."



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