

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.

Asia

India: Tamil Nadu tea plantation workers protest for on-time wage payments and improved social conditions

Around 1,000 tea plantation workers from the privately-owned Karumalai Estate in Valparai, near Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, protested on April 28. The large estate, which has plantations at five different locations, employs over 5,000 workers.

Workers were demanding on-time payment of wages, improved working conditions, maintenance and repairs to the estate's accommodation, and the establishment of nearby hospitals with trained doctors, and good schools for their children.

The plantation workers, who said that they are not paid until halfway through each month, have numerous complaints about how they treated by the current estate director and want these issues raised with the estate's owner. State authorities mobilised about 100 police to intimidate the protesting workers.

Pudukkottai municipal cleaning workers in Tamil Nadu strike against harsh workloads

Around 30 striking contract cleaning workers protested near the Ponamaravathy bus stand in Pudukkottai district on May 1 over harsh workloads and poor pay. The highly-exploited workers are required to collect, and manually sort, at least 100 kg of bio-degradable waste every day. If they don't complete this schedule, they are not paid. The protesters, many of whom have been contract workers since 2014, denounced the municipality's back-breaking daily schedule and demanded permanent employment.

Sangrur brick kiln workers in Punjab protest for better wages and conditions

Brick kiln workers protested outside the Deputy Collector's office in Sangrur on April 29. The Lal Jhanda Punjab Bhatia Mazdoor Union members have not had a pay rise since 2012 or even the new minimum wage instituted by the Aam Admi state government in March 2024. The workers said that if they were not granted a wage increase by May 1, they would step up their protests.

Patiala college staff protest in Punjab over non-payment of wages

Workers from the Baba Banda Singh Bahadur Engineering College, an engineering institution in Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab, demonstrated on April 27 to demand the immediate payment of six months' outstanding wages. College staff told the media that they had been protesting for the last two months and presented a charter of demands to the college trust. They decided to "take to the streets" because college authorities had ignored their demands.

Australia Federal Court intervenes against striking Queensland Cross River Rail construction workers

On Wednesday, the Federal Court, acting on behalf of CPB Constructions, the lead contractor on the Queensland Labor government's \$6.3 billion Cross River Rail project in Brisbane, banned industrial action by the Construction, Forestry, and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU). It accused striking union members of engaging in unlawful behaviour, including locking project gates, imposing blockades, and intimidating workers.

Queensland CFMEU members have been on strike since Tuesday morning in an enterprise agreement dispute with CPB Contractors. Work on the Cross River Rail Project began in 2016.

The CFMEU's industrial campaign began at 3.15 a.m. last Tuesday with protest pickets by over 150 CFMEU members and their supporters outside the Brisbane Cross River Rail, Albert Street, Exhibition Station, Yeerongpilly, Dutton Park and Rocklea worksites. The strike follows six months of deadlocked enterprise negotiations with CPB Contractors and a near unanimous vote for industrial action by Queensland CFMEU members.

The union wants the new agreement to include a heat-stress policy, a contractor's clause to improve job security, the inclusion of traffic controllers and cleaners in the agreement, a wage rise of at least 5 percent, a travel allowance, and a substantial increase in rostered days

off.

The demand for a heat-stress policy follows the admission of more than 30 workers to hospital and one worker's death from heat stress between 2023 and 2024. Last July CPB workers went on strike after a man working at the Boggo Road Station site fell more than 12 metres at the project.

According to the CFMEU, the now expired 2019–2023 greenfields agreement was endorsed by another union, the Australian Workers Union (AWU), in a deal with the Queensland Labor government.

Taxi drivers strike in Hobart over safety, abuse and racism

On Monday, 250 taxi drivers in Hobart, the Tasmanian capital, went on strike from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and rallied in the city centre, calling on the state Liberal government to increase the safety of taxi drivers who are daily being assaulted and racially abused by youth.

An official speaking on behalf of the Hobart Taxi Drivers Association said that the strike followed an April 24 attack on taxi drivers and their vehicles by a gang of youth. The drivers, who say that they live in daily fear of being assaulted, insist that they are being targeted because of their South Asian origin.

Hobart's Metro Transport bus drivers have also revealed that they too are being assaulted and abused on a daily basis. A recent poll of Tas Rail and Bus Union members revealed 98 percent of respondents reported having been spat on, threatened, assaulted or abused during work.

Child safety support workers strike in Tasmania

Tasmanian child safety support workers walked off the job on Wednesday and protested in Hobart and Launceston against the Liberal government's failure to address chronic underfunding, understaffing, poor working conditions, reclassification and low pay. The workers assist vulnerable children and families in schools with complex health problems and disabilities.

Members of the Health & Community Services Union Tasmanian branch (HACSU) are in dispute with the government over their wages, staffing, increasing exploitation and their conditions for a new enterprise agreement.

The HACSU says Tasmania's child support workers' wages are lower than those paid in other Australian states by NGOs and by private-sector employers. The union wants wage parity for Tasmanian workers with those on the Australian mainland. The low wages paid to Tasmanian child safety sector workers are contributing to the chronic understaffing and inadequate service delivery because workers seek employment in higher-paid jobs.

Industrial court shuts down planned work bans by Queensland teachers

Last Tuesday, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) ruled that planned work bans imposed the previous day by the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) were "unprotected" and therefore unlawful. The QTU had previously told its members there would be bans on planning and the implementation of the Education Queensland's new ninth Australian curriculum.

The union leadership has said the state education department had not given Queensland teachers adequate time or funding to plan for the new curriculum or allowed for teacher shortages, the lack of teacher support and already high workloads in central and northern regional areas of the state.

The court's ruling provided the union with a legalistic mechanism to shut down its advertised bans and instead channel teacher opposition into useless appeals to the state Labor government to keep its 2020 election promises for increased recruitment and higher wages for teachers.

Unhappy with the union leadership's manoeuvres, more than 30 QTU members protested outside the state parliament on Wednesday, denouncing the QTU bureaucracy's capitulation to the QIRC ruling. One teacher told the media that their working conditions were so bad that could not wait until their actions were palatable to the QIRC.

Federation University educators in Victoria oppose the axing of 200 jobs

Hundreds of staff, students, and community supporters rallied at Federation University campuses at Churchill, Berwick and Mt Helen in Victoria this week to protest the proposed slashing of 200 full-time-equivalent jobs by the vice chancellor under its "Future Fed" program.

At least 12 percent of Federation University staff will be made redundant as the semi-privatised institution struggles to return to an operating surplus, following a \$79.1 million fall in its revenue since 2019.

Federation University is Australia's smallest tertiary institute with about 13,500 students in 2022. Education economists are predicting that the possible closure of Federation University will be the first of a slew of other Australian universities and colleges heading to meet the same fate.



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