

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 September 2024

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

## **India: Thousands of Maharashtra road commuter transport workers strike for pay rise**

Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) workers struck on September 3 after talks between the government and the Maharashtra State Transport Union's joint action committee failed last month to deliver a wage rise. About 250 depots across the state participated in the strike, which involved drivers, conductors, mechanics and others.

MSRTC workers went on strike for almost six months in November 2021 for the state government to take over the struggling corporation, increased wages and modernisation of the bus fleet. The corporation has 15,000 buses and 90,000 employees.

## **Tamil Nadu hotel workers protest harassment and victimisation**

Hotel workers from the state-owned Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) demonstrated in Thriukkadaiyur on September 1 to protest 12-hour shifts, understaffing and kitchen workers being forced to do housekeeping duties. Other complaints were the victimisation of two workers who refused to sign blank papers and management's reneging on a promise to pay 17,000 rupees in monthly wage but is paying only 12,000 rupees (\$US143).

Thriukkadaiyur is a popular tourist destination famous for its temples, where pilgrims and tourists visit and stay in the many hotels.

## **Neyveli Lignite Corporation workers protest job cuts**

About 120 contract workers from Tamil Nadu's state-owned Neyveli Lignite Corporation at Neyveli demonstrated outside Mines II on September 1 over their terminations at the end of their contracts. Almost all the workers were nearing retirement.

Seventeen years ago, the workers had handed their land over to the Mining Corporation in return for jobs. They accused the company of intentionally using private contract workers to displace them.

## **Tamil Nadu water treatment workers strike for pay increase**

About 54 Neyveli Municipal employees who purify and supply drinking water from Veeranam Lake to Chennai stopped work on August 31 to demand higher pay. The workers, who had been at the plant for 20 years, said their long pending demand for a pay rise had been completely ignored by management.

## **Coimbatore three-wheeler taxi drivers protest**

About 20 three-wheeler taxi drivers in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, protested outside the government telecom services office on September 3. They were demanding the implementation of auto meters, increased fare charges as per the gas price rises, and government regulation of platform providers such as Ola and Uber. The workers are organised by the All-India Trade Union Congress.

## **Indira Gandhi Medical College and Hospital workers on strike**

Rogi Kalyan Samiti (RKS)-Patient Cure Services workers at the Indira Gandhi Medical College and Hospital in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, began an indefinite strike on September 2 for permanent jobs and equal pay scales with permanent workers.

## **Gujarat sanitation workers demand unpaid wages and permanent jobs**

Sanitation workers from flood-impacted regions of Vadodra in Gujarat state, protested against the non-payment of wages and to demand permanent jobs. The workers were hired locally by the government during severe floods with the promise that they would be made permanent. They were sent to the flooded areas by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

## **Pakistan Public Works Department workers oppose job cuts**

Disgruntled employees of the Pakistan Public Works Department

(PWD) blocked the Srinagar Highway in Islamabad on Monday to protest the government's recent decision to abolish the department. The Asif Ali Zardari government claim that destruction of PWD is necessary because of "poor performance and corruption."

The protesting workers said the move will throw more than 10,000 people out of work. Pak-PWD is one of the oldest departments in the country.

The Pak-PWD Joint Action Committee opposed the department's privatisation and demanded reforms of the PWD and the elimination of interference of politics and bureaucracy.

### **New South Wales child protection workers strike over understaffing and low pay**

Public Service Association (PSA) members from NSW Child Protection Services held midday stop-work meetings at Community Services Centres across the state on Monday. They voted to remain off work until 5 p.m. It followed statewide stoppages in May and July followed by individual ad hoc stoppages in regional centres.

The walkouts are for increased pay and staffing to overcome the crisis in the child protection system.

PSA claimed that due to chronic understaffing only one in five children reported to Child Protection Services at risk of serious harm are being seen by a caseworker. The union says that only the most serious cases are allocated. Lack of staff means children will likely be removed from their families because there are not enough staff to intervene early in the cases.

Workers want the state Labor government to recruit an additional 500 caseworkers, provide an immediate and substantial pay rise to retain staff and put foster care back in the public sector instead of being outsourced to NGOs and charity organisations.

The PSA wants wages lifted from an average starting rate of \$76,000 a year to \$88,000, which the union claims is the going rate in the private sector.

### **Western Australian child protection workers stop work over staffing and scarce resources**

In their year-long battle for increased staffing and resources, Child Protection and Family Support workers are holding ad hoc stop work rallies across Western Australia. Community and Public Sector Union and Civil Service Association (CPSU/CSA) members at Northam, 100km northeast of Perth, stopped work and rallied in the town protesting that the state's child protection system is "falling deeper into crisis."

The crisis extends throughout the state. Last month, case workers in Armadale and Albany, in southern Western Australia, stopped work for half a day and locked their offices saying they had 139 open child protection cases that were unable to be allocated to a dedicated worker. At Bunbury, a port city south of Perth, caseworkers walked off the job in August last year over understaffing.

The CPSU/CSA claimed that there are currently 1,264 vulnerable children and families in the state who have not been allocated a dedicated caseworker.

### **Striking Etex plasterboard factory workers in New South Wales**

### **reject latest pay offer**

Thirty-eight Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union members at the Etex plasterboard factory in Matraville, Sydney, have been on strike since August 12 for a better enterprise agreement offer from the company. Workers overwhelmingly rejected its proposed agreement in a second vote last week.

Etex offered a \$2,500 one-off bonus and pay increases of 4.5 percent in the first year, 4 percent in the second year with no third-year guaranteed rise. Workers want 6 percent annual pay increases in a three-year agreement and an increase to the minimum 11.5 percent superannuation employer's contribution. They are maintaining a daily picket outside the factory.

### **Alliance Airlines maintenance workers in Brisbane fight for better pay and conditions**

Over 50 aircraft maintenance workers from Alliance Airlines, in Brisbane, began industrial action on Monday to demand higher pay and improved conditions in a new work agreement. On August 28, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Australian Licensed Aviation Engineers Union members voted unanimously to take industrial action that could include unlimited stoppages from one minute to 24 hours, an overtime ban and 17 other work bans.

Workers complained that their pay has stagnated while workloads continue to increase. They are also concerned about job security due to the increasing use of outsourcing and contract labour.

Alliance Airlines is based at Brisbane Airport, Queensland, with operational bases in Adelaide, Cairns, Perth, Townsville, Darwin, and Rockhampton. It owns and operates a fleet of Fokker and Embraer jet aircraft. For the 2023–24 financial year its profits increased by 65 percent to a pre-tax profit of \$86.3 million.

### **Tasmanian nurses and midwives strike over health crisis**

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation members at Tasmanian public hospitals have begun a series of short work stoppages in their campaign for increased staffing and reduced workload. Hundreds of ANMF members at the Royal Hobart Hospital stopped work and protested outside the hospital on Tuesday, followed by walkouts at North-West Regional Hospital in Burnie and Mersey Community Hospital in Launceston on Thursday and Launceston General Hospital on Friday.

Nurses complained that the state Liberal government was ignoring their demands over vacancies, increased workloads and extra shifts. One nurse told the media that she was only in her first year but already feeling burnt out over the lack of clinical facilitators and increased overtime. Ambulance ramping outside hospitals is commonplace because of overcrowded and understaffed emergency departments.

In early August, ANMF members at the Launceston General Hospital called a "Code Yellow" (internal emergency) due to the Emergency Department "overflowing with patients" and insufficient staffing numbers to cope with demand. Operating theatre nurses at the hospital have banned doing extra duties after being repeatedly asked to cover for staff shortages.

The ANMF has not called for further industrial action but urged members to send emails to the government and local newspapers to

“Share your concerns.”

### **Victoria University locks out educators demanding better wages and conditions**

Victoria University, with campuses in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, informed the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) on Monday that it would refuse to accept any work or pay any union member who participates in protected industrial action. This was in response to the union’s 370 members beginning a week of bans on teaching, extra duties and the use of on-line systems.

The NTEU members have been without an enterprise agreement for over two years. The NTEU says VU’s teaching model is super-exploitative, driving educators to work 50-hour weeks which are impacting health and safety.

The workers want an end to the double-block teaching model, reduced academic workloads, flexible hours and working from home provisions, job security and a wage rise in line with the cost-of-living increases.

While the NTEU says VU has brought in scabs to do the work of its locked-out workers to break the strike, the union has not called for statewide action in support of its locked-out members.

### **DON KRC meat processing factory workers in Victoria on strike**

Over 80 maintenance workers from DON KRC’s smallgoods meat processing factory in Castlemaine, Victoria, have been on strike since August 29. The strike follows several weeks of bans on overtime, call-backs and the use of electronic devices.

The strike follows two months of failed negotiations involving the Communications, Electrical & Plumbing Communications Union (CEPU) and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) over DON KRC’s proposed agreement.

The unions accused management of trying to reduce entitlements and offering an unacceptable wage increase. Workers are insisting that the company makes up for the wage concessions their unions agreed to during the COVID-19 pandemic. They want a 12 to 13 percent wage rise bringing them back into parity.

DON KRC is a division of George Weston Foods (GWF), one of Australia’s largest consumer products companies. GWF is a wholly owned subsidiary of Associated British Foods. The DON KRC division generated approximately \$A800 million in annual sales in its last report.

### **Journalists reject pay offer and plan industrial action at Guardian Australia**

About 140 journalists from the *Guardian*’s Australian media division have rejecting management’s latest pay offer and applied to the Fair Work Commission for a protected industrial action ballot. The move follows months of negotiations between the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and management for a new enterprise agreement.

The *Guardian*’s last pay increase offer consisted of 4 percent in the first year, and 3 percent in the second and third years. Workers want the new agreement to contain clauses providing for job security, improved

redundancy provisions in line with industry standards, better rates for freelancers, performance rights, career progression, a commitment to better workplace gender and cultural diversity.

### **Canberra’s public hospital doctors to vote on industrial action in pay dispute**

The Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF)-ACT (Australian Capital Territory) branch will ballot its members at Canberra Health Services (CHS) public hospitals. The union is in dispute with the government over CHS’s proposed enterprise agreement.

An ASMOF spokesperson said negotiations commenced over three years ago and since then ACT doctors’ pay has dropped from being amongst the highest 25 percent in Australia to the second lowest. ASMOF says that uncompetitive working conditions and pay had contributed to staff shortages and excessive workloads.



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