

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 May 2025

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

## India: Bhakra Dam Project workers in Punjab demand outstanding wages

Workers employed on the Bhakra Dam Project in Punjab held a protest at Ropar on Wednesday, demanding payment of outstanding wages and permanent jobs for contract and daily wage workers. The workers are employed under the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) and are calling for removal of the Central Industrial Security Force from the Bhakra Dam Project, which they say is causing disputes between the BBMB's partner states. The protest was organised by the All India Trade Union Congress and Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

## Himachal Pradesh ambulance workers strike

More than 200 ambulance and maternity care workers went on a 24-hour strike in Shimla on Wednesday to protest violations of working conditions and wage delays. The workers, covered by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, said that despite working 12 hours a day they had not received overtime payments.

## West Bengal tea plantation workers protest lack of clean drinking water and other issues

More than 1,100 tea plantation workers from four plantations protested at Jalpaiguri on May 28, demanding that clean drinking water be provided to their residential quarters, where around 850 of the workers live with their families. Workers said that the managers and owners of the plantations were given purified drinking water, while workers were deprived of it.

Workers also complained that provident fund (retirement savings) deposits had not been fully paid and wages were being withheld. They said they would continue the protest until their demands were met.

## Municipal workers in Hosapete, Karnataka strike for permanent jobs

Workers employed by the urban local body in Hosapete, Karnataka stopped work on Tuesday to demand permanent jobs. The strike affected all departments except for essential services like water and electricity supply for streetlights. Workers said they intensified the strike because the government has continued to ignore their demands.

## Sri Lanka: National school educators hold sit-in strike over long-standing issues

Hundreds of teachers from national schools stormed the Ministry of Education in Battaramulla (Colombo precinct) on Monday, demanding solutions to long-standing issues such as allowing their children to attend the schools where they work.

## Sri Lankan locomotive drivers strike over restrictions on leave approvals

Around 20 locomotive drivers took sick leave on Monday and Tuesday over the railway authorities not approving leave. Coupled with the ongoing shortage of drivers, the action contributed to five trains not being manned and the cancellation of several journeys. The deputy minister of transport threatened the workers with retaliatory action.

## Sri Lanka: Bank of Ceylon employees protest removal of incentive payment

Hundreds of Bank of Ceylon employees staged a protest on Wednesday opposing the government's decision to halt the incentive payment that had been approved by the bank's board of directors.

Workers expressed frustration that the bonus was withheld despite the bank network achieving a profit of 107 billion rupees (\$US35.7 million) in 2024, the highest ever recorded by a Sri Lankan institution. They demonstrated in front of 22 branches, holding placards announcing that workers of all branches, including the head office, would walk out by 12:30 p.m. Thursday.

## Sri Lanka: State sector postal workers strike over unfilled jobs

Postal workers across Sri Lanka held a two-day strike from midnight Wednesday to protest the government's delay in filling vacant positions, along with 10 other demands. The strike was organized by the Postal and Telecommunications Officers' Association and the Joint Postal Trade Union.

### **BMS Heavy Cranes workers in Victoria strike**

Close to 40 crane operators and related workers employed by Danish firm BMS Heavy Cranes at the Golden Plains Wind Farm construction site in Victoria have begun a campaign of strikes after long-running enterprise bargaining negotiations between the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CMFEU) and management failed to produce an acceptable offer. Negotiations began in December and workers voted on May 12 to take protected industrial action.

The CFMEU wants the company to agree to a nationwide standard of wages and conditions for workers on wind farms. The union is seeking minimum hourly rates ranging from only \$27 to \$33 depending on experience. Other demands are for living away from home allowances, roster flexibility and allowances for travel and workwear.

The industrial action began on May 22 with two days of four-hour strikes, then two days of six-hour strikes, and has continued with daily eight-hour strikes throughout this week.

The Golden Plains Wind Farm is a \$4 billion 1,330 MW project. It is 85 percent owned by TagEnergy, with Ingka holding the remaining 15 percent. When complete it will be the biggest wind farm in Australia. A 36-year-old worker was killed on the project in November last year, crushed by a massive wind turbine blade that came loose from scaffolding during assembly.

### **I-MED radiology workers in Victoria strike for pay rise**

On Wednesday, members of the Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA) at three of I-MED's 68 radiology clinics in Victoria stopped work for two hours at Frankston, Peninsula Private and The Bays, as part of a series of short work stoppages in their dispute with the company over its proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed two-hour stoppages at Werribee, Hoppers Crossing and Wyndham on May 22.

After I-MED refused to improve its pay rise offer workers voted near unanimously on May 7 to take protected industrial action that could include stop-work actions from 5 minutes' to 24 hours' duration, bans on billing and overtime and a number of other measures. VAHPA has over 190 members at I-MED's Victorian clinics.

The demands for higher wages and improved conditions being made by I-MED workers in this struggle are largely the same as those made when VAHPA members went on strike in 2022. Likewise, the union's limited strike tactics in this struggle are proving to be the same as in 2022, again starting with limited action, isolated to just a handful of sites.

The union-management enterprise agreement brokered in 2022 locked in sub-inflationary pay "rises" of just 2.5 percent per annum, despite being signed at a time when the official inflation rate was over 6 percent.

While I-MED workers have been slugged with successive real wage cuts as a result, the company is on track to record \$1.35 billion in revenue for the 2024–25 financial year.

### **Bus drivers at Dyson and CDC in Victoria strike for improved pay and safety**

Transport Workers Union members from two Victorian bus companies, LC Dyson Buses (333 workers) and CDC Ballarat (314 workers), stopped work on Wednesday and Thursday as part of their campaign for improved pay and safety in the companies' proposed enterprise agreements. The union claimed the strike significantly disrupted one-third of the state's bus and charter services.

The workers are employed under separate agreements. In March, Dyson offered a pay rise that included a 9 percent year-one rise. It was rejected by drivers, who said it was inadequate and substandard. The last wage rise Dyson drivers received was for just 2.19 percent on January 1 and for CDC drivers it was only 1 percent in July last year.

### **Auckland nurses take action over understaffing**

On May 26, about 370 hospital theatre nurses in Auckland began a month-long on-call strike, in protest against chronic understaffing and involuntary overtime. The nurses involved work at Auckland City Hospital, Starship Hospital and Greenlane Hospital and are members of the New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO).

Until June 23, the perioperative nurses will refuse to take part in the on-call roster that makes them available to be called into work for overtime. Union delegates said inadequate staffing levels was placing both healthcare workers and patients at risk.

The same group of nurses held a two-hour strike on May 1, which coincided with a day-long nationwide strike by thousands of doctors over a government-imposed wage freeze and staffing crisis.

Meanwhile, there is an unresolved pay dispute covering more than 30,000 nurses across all public hospitals. They held two partial strike days in December last year after rejecting a sub-inflation pay offer of just 1.5 percent over two years, but the NZNO has not organised any further industrial action or given any public update on the pay talks since then.

### **Doctors in Gisborne, New Zealand, hold 24-hour strike**

Doctors at Gisborne Hospital in New Zealand held a full-day strike on May 28 to protest against what they describe as a hospital on the brink of collapse. About 50 senior doctors, members of the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists, were involved in the strike at the hospital.

Doctor Alex Raines told Radio NZ that any delayed procedures caused by the strike "are small compared to the delays we have every week just due to short staffing." The action follows a nationwide strike by 5,000 doctors on May 1 over low pay and deteriorating working conditions.

The government agency Health NZ cited challenges in recruiting doctors to work in the Gisborne region, which has been understaffed for many years. Demand on the hospital has increased with a growing and ageing population, as well as the shortage of doctors in the community—the result of austerity measures imposed by successive Labour and National Party governments.



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