

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 June 2025

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

## **India: Punjab State Power Corporation hires scabs to break indefinite strike**

The Punjab State Power Corporation (PSPC) is advertising for qualified daily waged workers to try and break indefinite strike action by regular workers.

The striking Complaint Handling Bikes and Complaint Handling Wagons workers walked off the job on May 20 to demand proper safety gear, insurance and improved working conditions. The strike has severely hampered field operations across districts.

Meanwhile, PSPC contract workers in Ludhiana began an indefinite strike on June 1. They are demanding permanent jobs, less backbreaking work and safety gear.

## **ASHA workers' strike in Kerala enters fourth month**

Some 26,000 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers in Kerala have been on a state-wide strike since February 10 against poverty wages and poor conditions. For several months they have maintained a protest outside the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat. They are currently holding a day-night protest march from Kasargod to the Thiruvananthapuram secretariat.

Workers want their monthly wage increased from a meagre 7,000 rupees (\$US80) to about 21,000 rupees, a 5,000-rupee pension, and withdrawal of the compulsory retirement age of 62. Workers complained that they only receive 4,000 to 5,000 rupees of the current monthly pay.

Although critical ASHA services have been crippled, the state government is refusing to give in to the workers' demands.

## **Haryana: Health and science university outsourced workers at Rohtak begin indefinite strike**

About 1,270 outsourced workers from the Pandit Bhagwat Dayal Sharma University of Health Sciences at Rohtak, Haryana began an indefinite strike on June 1. Strikers are demanding to be hired under HKRN, a government body established to manage contract staff recruitment across the state.

Workers accused the private agency that supplies staff for the university of harassment, alleging arbitrary wage deductions through false absentee recordings.

The workers ended a strike in January after the university administration falsely said they would be transferred to HKRN. Workers said being transferred to HKRN would dismantle the exploitive contract system, offering regular leave and salaries paid on time.

## **Karnataka: Civic workers in Kodagu strike for permanency**

About 300 civic workers of Kodagu, a rural district in Karnataka state, began an indefinite strike on June 1. Sanitation workers, drivers and data entry operators are demanding permanent jobs.

## **Rajasthan apps-based taxi drivers on strike in Jaipur**

About 23,000 Uber, Ola Rapido and InDrive cab drivers and owners began an indefinite strike in Jaipur, Rajasthan on Monday. The Jaipur Gig Workers Association organised the walkout. The taxi drivers want an increase in fares as per the government norms and enhanced security for drivers and passengers.

## **Pakistan: Government school teachers in Gilgit-Baltistan strike**

Government school teachers in Gilgit Baltistan, northern Kashmir, continued protests on Wednesday after boycotting classes for the fourth consecutive day to demand promotions. The teachers' long-standing demand is for promotions. They condemned the provincial government for not implementing court orders depriving them of their rights.

For the past five days, teachers in the region have organised demonstrations and rallies outside education department offices in Hunza, Nagar, Astore, Skardu, Diamer, Ghanche, Shigar, Kharmang and Ghizer. A sit-down protest was held outside the Gilgit-Baltistan Directorate of Education in Gilgit city.

The Teachers' Coordination Committee organised the protests and has called on teachers from other districts to march toward Gilgit, the regional headquarters of Gilgit Baltistan.

## **Pakistan: Sindh province government clerks rally for pay rise**

All-Pakistan Clerks Association members rallied in Larkana on Tuesday calling for a pay rise. Protesters marched in the city carrying banners and placards and chanting slogans in favour of their demands. They held a sit-down demonstration outside the local press club.

Protesters said that rising inflation and low salaries, along with inadequate medical, conveyance and house rent allowances, had made it extremely difficult for them to manage household expenses. They threatened to hold another protest on June 16 and to march from the Karachi Press Club to the chief minister's house if their demands were not met.

## **Bangladesh: Protesting apparel workers attacked by police**

Apparel workers from the Bashundhara Garments factory staged a protest on Monday morning to demand payment of their April and May wages. They blocked the Dhaka-Aricha Highway in Hemayetpur, Savar for over an hour until police intervened and attacked them using tear gas shells and water cannons.

The factory issued a notice on May 17 pledging to clear all outstanding wages on May 25, but failed to do so provoking a protest by workers who blocked a local road near the factory. Management then made another false pledge to pay wages on June 1.

One worker said: "The factory owner keeps giving new dates but never pays us. We had no option but to take to the streets. The police fired tear gas at us, hit us with batons and sprayed water. Several workers were injured." Another worker said: "Even when the army summoned the owner and set a date for payment he did not comply. If we don't receive our wages and bonuses before Eid, how can we go home?"

## **Bangladeshi footwear workers demand unpaid wages**

MK Footwear factory workers demonstrated in Gazipur's Sreepur sub-district on Saturday to demand unpaid April and May salaries. They began their protest inside the factory around 10 a.m., then moved outside and blocked the Maona-Shailat regional road for almost two hours. They suspended the protest following an assurance from factory authorities that their wages would be paid.

## **Bangladeshi government sector workers continue protests against repressive ordinance amendment**

Government workers continued their protest on Tuesday outside the Secretariat, demanding the withdrawal of the Public Service (Amendment) Ordinance 2025, terming it a "repressive" and "black law."

The Bangladesh Secretariat Officers and Employees Unity Forum, an alliance of all staff and officers' associations, led the protest. A forum spokesperson threatened to step up their action if the interim government did not give a positive response by June 15. The protest began on May 24 and on Sunday the forum submitted a notice to the government demanding immediate cancellation of the new ordinance.

The amended ordinance allows dismissal of public servants for "administrative disruptions" within 14 days and without departmental proceedings, based on four types of offences. These are disrupting discipline, obstructing duties, unauthorised absence, or inciting others not to carry out their duties.

## **Vertech oil and gas production workers in Western Australia begin industrial action**

About 50 inspectors and rope access crew employed by Vertech at Woodside, Jadestone and INPEX oil and gas exploration and processing facilities in Western Australia began protected industrial action on May 28. Australian Workers Union members are in dispute with Vertech over its proposed enterprise agreement.

The workers are represented by the Offshore Alliance (OA), made up of the AWU and the Maritime Union of Australia, which claims Vertech wants to pay rates \$10 to \$20 below industry standards. It also has refused to include travel provisions in the proposed agreement and wants the ability to remove all existing travel payments whenever and however they like. OA accused Vertech of wanting to have the ability to unilaterally change rosters without reaching agreement with workers.

Workers voted unanimously on April 17 to take protected industrial action that could include stoppages from 30 minutes to one hour and multiple bans on administrative related work. The workers do critical work associated with safety.

## **Zinfra gas utility workers in New South Wales strike for pay rise**

Over 230 workers from New South Wales' largest gas distributor Zinfra walked off the job for 48 hours from depots in Sydney, Newcastle, Bathurst, Forbes and Unanderra on May 27. Workers stopped carrying out repairs, maintenance or connection hook-ups. Zinfra manages gas for more than 1.5 million residential and business connections across the state.

Australian Workers Union members are demanding 5 percent annual pay increases in a new three-year enterprise agreement. Workers rejected Zinfra's 3.5 percent increase offer, saying they need a higher increase to compensate for wages being frozen since November. Media reported that negotiations broke down after management reportedly awarded themselves a 7.5 per cent increase earlier this year.

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

The strike by 40 crane operators and related workers employed by Danish firm BMS Heavy Cranes at the Golden Plains Wind Farm construction site in Victoria walked off the job on May 22 after drawn-out enterprise bargaining negotiations between the Construction Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) and management failed to produce an acceptable enterprise agreement offer. Negotiations began in December and workers voted on May 12 to take protected industrial action.

The CFMEU wants BMS to endorse nationwide standards of wages and conditions for workers on wind farms. However, it 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 \$4 billion Golden Plains Wind Farm is a 1,330 MW project in remote rural Victoria. 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.

### **Qube crane operators in Queensland on strike for industry standard pay rates**

Over 30 Qube crane operators at the Port of Brisbane are maintaining strike action begun on May 8 to demand higher pay. Construction Forestry Maritime and Energy Union members are demanding Qube pay market rates and conditions on par with other crane hire companies.

In a provocative move, Qube announced a snap restructure of its mobile crane business after the workers began protected action and declared it would impose sweeping redundancies. It is advertising through labour hire companies for qualified crane operators to act as scabs. Several labour hire workers who turned up at the port left after realising they were being hired as strike breakers.

### **West Wimmera council workers' industrial action enters fourth week**

Australian Services Union (ASU) members from the West Wimmera Shire Council in western Victoria are maintaining industrial action begun on May 8 after rejecting the council's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers voted unanimously in April to impose over 20 work bans. These include not attending management meetings or responding to management emails, bans on using personal mobile phones for council work, and refusing to collect fees and charges. They have also banned overtime, mowing, street repairs, picking up and relocating dead animals, and other duties.

Negotiations for a new agreement began in October last year. The ASU accused management of not negotiating in good faith, pushing for cuts to entitlements including income protection, which had been part of staff agreements since 1999. The income protection cover is for personal illness or injury outside of the course of employment, distinct from the statutory requirements of workers' compensation.

Workers also oppose the council's attempt to alter redundancy and redeployment provisions and remove accrued carers' leave balances in the agreement. Workers want annual pay rises of 4 percent; management offered only 3 percent.

### **Noosa council workers locked out for second time during pay dispute**

Over 150 workers from the Noosa Shire Council in southeast Queensland were locked out for the second time for taking industrial action for a higher pay offer in the council's proposed certified agreement. The Services Union (TSU) and Australian Workers Union (AWU) members were locked out for two days in late April and again for 6 days on May 23.

The latest lockout immediately followed conciliatory talks in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission in which union

representatives failed to reach a wage deal with council management. The workers have held several strikes since late March and have applied work bans.

Negotiations, which began in October, reached deadlock after workers rejected annual increases of 6.5 percent, 3.5 percent and 3.5 percent in the three-year agreement. The TSU wants increases of 9.5 percent from February 2025 and 4.5 percent or consumer price index (CPI), whichever is greater, in each of the last two years of the agreement.

The council made a revised offer that included 15 percent over three years and four months, with wage increases of 6.5 percent in February 2025, 5 percent in July 2026 and 3.5 percent in July 2027, or CPI each year, whichever is greater. The unions rejected this, saying a base rate uplift before the first percentage increase was needed to make the offer acceptable.

### **South Australian public hospital health workers escalate industrial action**

More than 2,000 allied health workers from four major public hospitals in South Australia are escalating industrial action on June 11. Psychologists will join radiographers, speech and occupational therapists and other workers employed at Noarlunga, Royal Adelaide, Queen Elizabeth and Repat Hospitals. The industrial action, in the form of work bans, is to oppose the state Labor government's failure to address low wages and staffing demands in a new enterprise agreement.

Hospital psychologists say they are the lowest paid in the country, being paid 10 to 40 percent less than their counterparts in other states. They allege this is contributing to the ongoing crisis of understaffing, high workload and extended patient waiting lists. According to the South Australian Psychologists Association, the situation is so bad that no psychologists are available to treat patients in the state's Neuro-behavioural Units, Brain Injury Rehabilitation Units, Intellectual Disability Health Service and the Eastern Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service.

Without enough qualified psychology workers, critical shortages are occurring in education, child protection and community services.

Allied health workers will be joined by about 3,000 public sector doctors who held a one-hour stop work meeting on Thursday to consider taking industrial action. They want a pay rise that will attract and retain trainees and are seeking 10 percent annual wage increases in line with the increases awarded to police.

### **Country Fire Authority workers in Victoria begin industrial action**

Victoria's Country Fire Authority fire fighters (CFA) have commenced industrial action after six months of failed negotiations between their union and CFA management over wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement.

The CFA Professional, Administrative and Technical Union, a sub-branch of the Australian Services Union (ASU) said members have not had a wage rise since the end of 2023. They accused CFA of trying to impose the state Labor government's 3 percent mandatory wage rise cap imposed on all state public sector workers.

The ASU claimed CFA has refused to pay a wage rise above three percent while awarding its own executives a wage rise of more than 4 percent. Other demands include improved safety protocols on firefighting

operations and increased staffing.

Firefighters voted on May 22 to take industrial action that could include up to 29 work bans.



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