

# 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.*

## **India: Andhra Pradesh hospital sanitation workers at Vijayawada demand outstanding wages**

Contract sanitation workers from the Government General Hospital at Vijayawada stopped work and held a sit-down protest outside the superintendent's office on Tuesday to demand three months' outstanding wages and payment of Provident Fund (PF) and Employment State Insurance (ESI). Workers maintained the protest overnight and the next day.

The sanitation workers alleged that their contractor, who has been untraceable for several months, has failed to provide any written assurance regarding the outstanding payments. Talks were held between hospital authorities, union leaders and workers but ended without resolution due to the contractor's absence. The Centre for Indian Trade Unions supported the strike and protest.

## **School midday-meal workers protest privatisation in Andhra Pradesh**

The Andhra Pradesh Mid-Day Meal Workers Union, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, organised a street protest in Vijayawada on Monday to oppose the Andhra Pradesh government's moves to privatise the meal scheme. A spokesperson for the workers said that handing the program to private agencies would threaten the livelihood of thousands of low paid women workers involved in the scheme.

The midday meal workers, who are often classified as voluntary rather than state employees, want a minimum monthly wage of 10,000 rupees (\$US105) and other improvements, like a food shed in every school. They are currently paid a monthly honorarium of between 1,000 and 1,700 rupees and sometimes only for 10 months.

## **Sportking India factory workers in Punjab protest for wages and permanent jobs**

On April 19, textile workers from Sportking India Limited at Jeeda village on the Bathinda-Amritsa highway, stopped work and protested outside the factory gate over current wages and conditions. Other workers, including farmers, joined the action after police took up to 180 workers

from their homes. Workers blocked the highway on Monday demanding the release of their detained coworkers.

The yarn-spinning plant in Punjab has nearly 2,500 employees, including many who live in a hostel located on the factory complex. The textile workers want higher wages, better working conditions, permanent jobs and adherence to standard working hours. Workers allege they were paid less than the mandated daily wage rate.

Workers ended the protest after management agreed to a daily wage rate of 500 rupees (\$US3.16) for semi-skilled and 530 rupees for skilled workers.

## **Haryana fire and emergency services workers' strike enters fourth week**

About 2,200 contract and ad-hoc workers from the Haryana Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services are maintaining strike action they began on April 8 to demand compensation for the families of two workers killed while fighting in an industrial fire in Faridabad in February. Despite three initial rounds of talks, the government refused to resume negotiations once the strike began.

A senior fire official said the government had only offered 3 million rupees (\$US31,658) compensation each for the families of two firefighters. Workers want 10 million rupees paid in compensation and a government job for families of the deceased firefighters. They are also demanding regular jobs, 25,500 rupees grade pay, allowances and a retirement age of 58 years.

## **Bangladesh: Candidate teachers demand immediate government school appointments**

Candidates selected for government primary school assistant teacher posts held a sit-down protest on Sunday outside the National Museum at Shahbagh to demanding immediate issuance of appointment letters. Police intervened to block protesters after they attempted to march towards the Shahbagh intersection, leading to a brief scuffle and heated exchanges.

One protester said they had passed the required examination and recruitment test on January 9, completed health checks and were recommended. While over 69,000 passed the written test, the ministry only recommended 14,384 candidates for the jobs. Some workers said they had left their previous jobs to join the government primary schools.

A seven-member delegation of protesters met the state minister who issued a statement claiming that the teachers would be appointed when the recruitment process was completed.

## **Dorevitch pathology workers in Victoria strike for improved pay and conditions**

### **Bangladesh: Rana Plaza building collapse victims demand compensation**

Injured workers, relatives of the deceased, and labour rights activists held a rally on April 24 to demand justice, compensation and proper medical care for survivors of the 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy. The protesters also paid tribute to the victims by laying wreaths at the memorial built in honour of the deceased workers.

The eight-story Rana Plaza building collapsed on 24 April 2013, killing over 1,000 workers and injuring more than 2,500 others in the country's worst industrial disaster. Protesters said there had not been adequate compensation and rehabilitation for disabled workers, and that 48 percent of Rana Plaza workers remain unemployed.

Masuda Akter, a survivor who had been working on the seventh floor and narrowly escaped death, said that her memories remain as vivid as the injuries she still carries, and that survival itself has often felt like an unfinished burden.

### **Queensland rail workers resume industrial action**

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), representing train drivers, controllers and maintenance workers at Queensland Rail (QR), announced this week that it would resume industrial action over the next two weeks following failed pay talks with the Liberal-National Party government in the Fair Work Commission.

The union said the government's wage rise offer did not keep up with inflation and increased hours for some workers whilst reducing their penalty rates. It claimed management's offer was like the one already rejected by members. The RTBU said rolling strikes would affect different parts of the workforce, including maintenance workers and train signalers.

QR locked out 200 train controllers and shut down 300 passenger services on March 31 and affecting 20,000 commuters after workers engaged in minor industrial action, which, the union claimed, would not have affected commuter traffic.

Electrical Trades Union and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members are also taking industrial action and are involved in pay negotiations. The government has threatened that anyone taking industrial action, including partial work bans, will not be paid, even if still at work.

### **Downer EDI water mains plumbers strike in Victoria**

About 40 plumbers employed by contract water mains construction and maintenance company Downer EDI stopped work at Dandenong South in Melbourne on April 23 as part of their dispute with Downer over its proposed enterprise agreement. Plumbing and Pipes Trades Employees Union (PPTEU) members in late March voted to take future industrial action in response to the company's delay in negotiations for better pay and conditions in a new enterprise agreement.

Phlebotomists Council of Australia (PCA) members from Dorevitch pathology clinics in Victoria walked out for three hours on Thursday in their long-running fight for improved pay and conditions. The strike is in addition to a month of partial work bans after workers rejected management's "unacceptable" enterprise pay rise offer.

Negotiations between Dorevitch and PCA in the Fair Work Commission (FWC) have been ongoing for nearly a year. PCA officials said its members were not prepared to take on more work while being threatened with minimum-award wages.

Phlebotomists (pathology collectors) were recently recognised by the FWC as having been historically undervalued in the Gender Undervaluation Review of the federal award. That finding led to their reclassification and an increase to the base award wage. Pathology workers accused employers of attempting to use that award increase to absorb, and offset, enterprise agreement conditions previously negotiated, rather than genuinely improving wages and conditions.

### **Disability care workers in Victoria protest funding cuts**

On Wednesday, disability care workers employed by Possibility, a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider, stopped work and protested in the regional cities of Ararat and Stawell to oppose the state government's subsidy cuts. On December 31, the Jacinta Allan Labor government stopped paying subsidies to care providers for group homes that accommodate people with disabilities. NDIS hasn't filled the funding gap, threatening the closure of 26 homes in Stawell and Ararat.

The workers are members of the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) which covers over 400 workers at Possibility. The union is currently in dispute with the company over its proposed enterprise agreement. On March 12 union members voted to take future industrial action for an improved offer. Wednesday's protest was part of that action.

In February, HACSU members at Aruma, another NDIS group home provider took industrial action for a better enterprise agreement. The union accused Aruma of attempting to cut wages to force workers to pay for the government's subsidy cut. Aruma has applied to the Fair Work Commission to have the "Aruma Disability Services Agreement Victoria 2022-2025" terminated. If successful, frontline care workers would be forced into the minimum federal award conditions on lower pay and reduced entitlements.

### **Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology educators strike**

About 20 educators and team leaders at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) UP section stopped work and protested outside the university on April 23. UP provides "pathway programs" and English-language classes for international students to prepare for university.

The workers, who are members of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), voted in March to take future strike action to win a better wages and conditions enterprise agreement. According to the union, these workers have not had a pay rise since their current agreement expired in 2022, and they receive lower superannuation than other RMIT employees.

## **Wilmar BioEthanol plant workers in Victoria strike**

Six key workers at the Wilmar BioEthanol plant in Yarraville in western Melbourne, walked off the job for five days on April 22 after management told them they would not be paid if they imposed a five-day ban on forklifts. The ban was a part of industrial action begun on April 9 by Australian Workers Union (AWU) members in their dispute with Wilmar over its proposed enterprise agreement. Negotiations began at least six months before the current agreement expired in November 2025.

AWU members voted on March 19 for future industrial action, including wide-ranging work bans and strikes ranging from one hour to indefinite stoppages, bans on overtime, use of radios, forklifts and the labelling of drums and containers.

The expired four-year agreement, which was endorsed by the union in 2022, included sub-inflation annual pay increases of only 2.93 percent, well below the December 2022 quarter Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate of 7.8 percent, followed each year by 4.1, 3.8 and 2.5 percent. The current CPI rate for Melbourne is 4 percent and forecast to increase.

## **Victoria's state school nurses demand wage parity**

Victoria's Department of Education school nurses began low-level industrial action on Thursday to win improved wages and conditions in a new enterprise agreement. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has been negotiating with the state Labor government on behalf of its 339 state school members since June last year.

The Department of Education is refusing to exceed the Labor government's sub-inflation wages policy for public sector workers. The ANMF likewise is limiting its members' demands to wage parity with nurses employed under the Victorian Public Sector Nurses and Midwives Agreement 2024-28.

The union says its members are currently paid up to 20 percent less than equivalent public sector nurses working in hospitals, a difference that will increase to 30 percent under the government's wages policy by the end of 2027.

Last month ANMF members voted overwhelmingly for future strike action including up to 24 hours and a wide range of partial work bans. Despite strong support for strike action, the ANMF has restricted its members to wearing union badges at work, placing union material on notice boards, stopping work for ten minutes to explain their dispute to parents and other minor protests. The nurses provide crucial support to students from prep to year 12 in Victoria's state schools, promoting health, planning wellbeing and development aid.

The ANMF's wage demands stand in contrast with demands by the Australian Education Union (AEU) on behalf of its 52,000 members who work in the same schools. The AEU is demanding a 35 percent wage rise over three years for teaching staff. The Allan Labor government, which is facing an election in November, is offering teachers a 28 percent wage rise over four years.



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