

# 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: Karnal city municipal sanitation workers strike

Over 900 sanitation workers organised by the Municipal Workers Union at the Karnal Municipal Corporation, in Haryana, began an indefinite strike on May 1 over several demands. Media reported that by May 6 there was severe garbage accumulation across the city as waste collection, road cleaning and sanitation services were stopped.

Workers protested outside the Municipal Corporation offices demanding the filling of vacant posts through permanent recruitment, abolishing the contract system and implementing a monthly minimum wage of 30,000 rupees (\$US317). Workers vowed to continue the strike until their claims are granted.

## Punjab: Faridkot Municipal Corporation sanitation workers strike

Sanitation workers organised by the Municipal Employees Action Committee, and the Safai Sevak Union, began an indefinite strike at Faridkot on May 6 for permanent jobs and for the monthly wage to be lifted from 10,000 rupees (\$US105) to 40,000 rupees. About 90 percent of the workforce are contract workers.

Protesting workers chanted slogans denouncing Punjab's Aam Admi Party government, accusing it of failing to deliver on election promises and noting that the party's symbol was the broom, the major tool of a sanitation worker.

## Bangladesh: Garment workers in Chattogram demand unpaid wages and benefits

Garment workers from the Savar Sweaters and Orchid Sweater factories in Chattogram held a determined road blockade in the Kalurghat area on May 2 to demand unpaid wages and benefits. An attempt by the Chattogram Industrial Police to disrupt the protest failed with workers maintaining the blockade for nearly seven hours.

Workers accused factory management of systematically withholding outstanding payments. Tiffin (meal) allowances have not been paid since 2020, while overtime wages for 2022 and 2025 remain outstanding. Female workers also cited the denial of maternity benefits. Additional

demands included reduced overtime, timely monthly wage payments, establishment of a workers union, an end to victimisation of protesters and higher allowances and attendance bonuses. The two factories employ over 2,500 workers.

Protesters ended the action at 5 p.m., after authorities pledged to settle arrears within three days. Workers warned they would resume protests if payments were not made.

## Workers at eight Melbourne metropolitan councils walk out

More than 1,000 workers from eight Melbourne metropolitan councils struck for 24 hours on May 5 in the largest ever coordinated Victorian council workers' stoppage to protest wage suppression and chronic understaffing. Hundreds of workers rallied outside the Victorian parliament holding signs saying, "Under Paid and Over Worked," "Fair Pay is Overdue," among others.

The strike by Australian Services Union (ASU) members involved outdoor crews, library staff, aged care workers, maternal health nurses and administrative workers. Workers are demanding wage increases above inflation, staffing guarantees and measures to address escalating workloads produced by years of cost-cutting and state government rate-capping policies.

The ASU accused councils of offering substandard pay rises while workloads intensified and experienced staff left the sector. Several councils warned of widespread disruptions to bin collections, parks maintenance and community services. Industrial action notices lodged under the Fair Work Act indicate further stoppages and work bans are being prepared if negotiations remain deadlocked.

## Queensland Rail workers escalate industrial action

On Monday, workers from several unions at Queensland Rail escalated their campaign of industrial action as enterprise bargaining negotiations broke down amid growing opposition to the state government's refusal to raise its sub-inflation wage offers and cease its attacks on conditions in a new agreement.

The Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), together with several other rail unions, have imposed rolling stoppages, overtime bans and maintenance restrictions after rejecting the wages offer from the Liberal National Party state government and Queensland Rail management.

Initial industrial action began on April 1 after the RTBU instituted

limited work bans and the government responded with what union officials called a de facto lockout when it sent 200 workers home without pay.

RTBU officials are demanding the conflict be resolved by Australia's Fair Work Commission. The Commission has already refused Queensland Rail's application to terminate or to suspend protected industrial action while ballot processes and mediation hearings continue in the commission.

Stepped up industrial action is expected in the coming days, with unions warning disruptions will intensify unless workers secure substantial wage increases, staffing guarantees and protections against productivity demands tied to new technology and expanded workloads.

### **University of Canberra educators strike for better pay and conditions**

About 200 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of Canberra (UC) walked off the job for half the day on Tuesday and protested on campus over stalled negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. Talks have been ongoing since November with the NTEU having submitted 57 claims but no resolution on most issues, including salaries, workloads and job security.

Workers want a 20 percent pay rise in a four-year agreement, management want it extended to five years. The NTEU says that wages have gone down 8 percent in real terms in the past five years. Other demands include better guidelines around managing psychosocial hazards, enforceable workload protections, protections against "spill and fill" processes, enforceable access to flexible work conditions, and no forced redundancies.

NTEU claimed that management wants changes to redundancy clauses that would mean future UC employees would receive less in payouts and have shorter notice periods. Mass job cuts in the past resulted in increased workloads. UC management has yet made a pay offer on the table.

### **University of Technology Sydney educators strike over stalled wage negotiations**

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) walked off the job on April 30 and again for four hours the next day over management's delaying tactics in finalising a new enterprise agreement. The NTEU says UTS management is trying to end bargaining without having agreed to most claims. "They've dragged this process out and have just sent notice to cancel our bargaining meeting next week," the union said on Facebook.

NTEU is calling for a "fair" pay rise that meets cost of living demands, better job security and workloads, improved parental and reproductive leave rights and protections against Artificial Intelligence, among other demands.

### **University of Tasmania educators strike for improved pay offer**

About 650 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members from the University of Tasmania (UTAS) stopped work for two hours at 11 a.m. on Tuesday at the Hobart campus and Wednesday at the Launceston

campus in opposition to UTAS management's proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers rejected management's annual 3 percent pay increases in a 3-year agreement and a \$1,000 sign on bonus, which was not offered to casuals. The current annualised Cost Price Index rate for Tasmania's capital Hobart is 5.1 percent, meaning the pay offer is a real pay cut.

The union wants a pay increase that compensates for the loss of pay during the COVID pandemic. It claimed that under the 2021-2025 agreement, members endured a real wage loss of 5-6 percent against inflation. Other demands are for reduced workload and protection against unregulated Artificial Intelligence at the university.

### **NRMA roadside assistance mechanics in New South Wales walk out**

About 130 NRMA (National Roads and Motorists' Association) Patrol Officers (roadside assistance mechanics) stopped work and protested outside the company's head office in Sydney on April 28 to demand an improved pay offer in their new enterprise agreement. This was their first strike in 23 years.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members want a 17 percent wage increase in a four-year agreement (5 percent in the first year, and 4 percent in the next three years). The NRMA offered only 3.5 percent in the first year followed by annual 3 percent increases plus a 1 percent sign-on bonus. The current CPI (consumer price index) rate for Sydney is 4.4 percent and predicted to go higher. Even the 17 percent pay increase demanded by the union would not keep pace with inflation.

### **Wambo coal mine workers in New South Wales strike against pay cut**

Nineteen Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members from the Peabody Energy-managed Wambo coal mine in the Hunter Region north of Sydney stopped work for three days on May 1 to protest the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The workers are employed at the washery within Glencore's United Wambo Joint Venture. They said Peabody put forward a pay offer of just 2.5 percent per year and proposed changes to bonus arrangements that would leave them worse off.

A major concern is management's proposal to introduce three tiers in the agreement, the lowest of which has no bonus with progression controlled by management rather than based on time or experience. The MEU claimed the new lower tiers would lock in cheaper labour hire rates that could reduce current annual wages by 24 percent, or around \$38,000 per year.

Peabody is refusing to back pay any wage increases and continues to insist that workers go another full year before seeing further increases. It also wants to move to fortnightly pay and reduce crib breaks.

### **Keolis Downer bus drivers' dispute in New South Wales forced into court**

The 16-month long dispute for a new enterprise agreement between bus operator Keolis Downer Hunter (KDH) and Road Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) drivers at Newcastle has been forced into the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for resolution. On April 28, the FWC accepted

KDH's argument that negotiations had reached an impasse and issued an Intractable Bargaining Declaration.

This means that all protected industrial action must cease and the matter be moved into a defined post-declaration bargaining period, running until May 12. If agreement is not reached by the end of that period, the FWC will determine the outcome of the enterprise agreement, which is binding on both parties.

The drivers' current agreement expired in November 2024 with negotiations for a replacement agreement beginning the following month. RTBU members held several strikes and were maintaining bans put in place in April 2025, including a ban on the use of Opal (fare collection) machines.

After rejecting several offers, drivers in January rejected KDH's "enhanced offer" of a pay rise of 12 percent (or wage price index) over three years with an additional increase of 0.25 percent in the third year. The RTBU wants a wage that compensates for the lack of pay rises since November 2023, improved safety and family friendly rosters.

### **Western Downs Regional Council locks out workers**

On Wednesday, Western Downs Regional Council, in southeast Queensland, locked out workers from four unions upon commencing protected industrial action that included a two-hour strike. The workers, who want an improved pay offer, are represented by the Australian Workers Union, Transport Workers Union, Construction Forestry Maritime Employees Union and The Services Union (TSU). Council management earlier threatened workers that if they participated in industrial action pay would be withheld.

In negotiations in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (QIRC) last week, the unions were seeking annual pay increases in a three-year agreement of 6 percent in the first year, 5.75 in the second followed by 4.75 percent, with uncapped CPI protectors in the second and third years. Council rejected the demand and offered only 4, 4 and 3 percent, with a CPI protector capped at 4 percent for year 3 only. The offer was well below the CPI in Queensland's capital Brisbane which is 4.7 percent.

Without consultation with members, the unions reduced their demand to 6 percent in the first year (backdated from 26 March), 5.5 percent in year 2 followed by 4.5 percent with a CPI protector for year three capped at 5.5 percent. TSU said council negotiators did not take up the revised offer. The next mediation talks in the QIRC will be on May 18.

By contrast, the council lodged submission to the Local Government Remuneration Commission in October requesting pay rises of between 16 and 25 percent for the mayor, deputy mayor and councilors.

### **Douglas Shire Council workers in Queensland begin industrial action**

Australian Workers Union members from the Douglas Shire Council, in far north Queensland, have imposed overtime bans and other industrial action for better pay. Union officials have accused council management of threatening lockouts and intimidation. Further industrial action is expected in coming weeks, as workers confront employers demanding productivity increases while offering real wage cuts.

### **Ambulance Tasmania paramedics escalate action**

Paramedics from Ambulance Tasmania have escalated industrial action in opposition to the state Liberal government's low pay offer in its proposed enterprise agreement and over critically low staffing. As well as the current ban on overtime, paramedics are now taking all 000 patients to hospital, regardless of their clinical need and possible alternative treatment options, banning contract work at public events, such as horse racing, and will hold stop-work meetings.

Ambulance Tasmania workers from the beginning of the year have consistently rejected the government's pay offer of annual increases of 3 percent, 3 percent and 2.75 percent. The annualised March quarter inflation rate for Hobart, the state capital, is 5.1 percent.

A major concern is chronic understaffing, forcing workers to regularly extend their shift to 14 hours. Ambulance Tasmania is sending out ambulances with only one paramedic instead of a normal two-person crew. This means that once the patient is in the back of the ambulance, the driver is meant to monitor the patient and drive, a practice dangerous for the patient and paramedic.

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) says its members are fed up with being stuck on hospital ramps waiting to offload patients for hours after their shifts end, unable to get back on the road or home to their families. This has led to delayed responses, missed breaks and extended shifts, intensifying physical and psychological strain.

### **Tasmanian firefighters begin 10-days of action for pay parity**

United Firefighters Union (UFU) members from the Tasmanian Fire Service commenced ten days of industrial action on Tuesday in their fight with the state Liberal government for pay parity with advanced tradesman in the state's public sector. UFU members have banned practice building evacuations and will no longer silence fire alarms where there is no fire.

A union spokesman claimed that Tasmanian firefighters are paid thousands of dollars less than any other trade qualified employee in the Tasmanian State Service and are some of the lowest paid firefighters in Australia. "Over the past 14 months of negotiations, the government has shown little interest in addressing firefighter pay inequity," he said. He accused the government of not taking the dispute seriously.

A government spokesman tried to justify low wages saying that "In general terms, our cost of living is a bit lower here in Tasmania." However, the May quarter annual CPI rate for Hobart is 5.1 percent, the highest in Australia.

### **Dental health clinic workers in Tasmania strike**

Tasmanian government oral health workers from the Clarence Dental Centre and New Norfolk Dental Clinic stopped work for two hours on May 1 in solidarity with Dental Assistants and Sterilising Technicians across the state who are seeking back pay and higher classifications. Oral health workers at Sorell Dental Clinic walked off the job for two hours on Monday over the same issue.

The workers are represented by the Health and Community Services Union which said that despite 18 months of promises regarding backpay and higher classifications for these workers, the government continues to drag its feet in resolving the dispute.

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## Medical scientists in Victoria escalate action for higher pay

Victorian public sector medical scientists, represented by the Medical Scientists Association of Victoria (MSAV) are taking industrial action after negotiations with the state Labor government for a new enterprise agreement stalled. The dispute involves scientists, pharmacists, audiologists and psychologists.

As of April 29, they escalated their earlier bans to what the MSAV calls Stage 3 working-to-rule measures. This includes not working beyond their contracted hours, including early starts and late finishes, and only performing explicitly required tasks and withdrawing the "extra effort" that typically keeps the health system functioning. They are also refusing to work or be trained to use new software and technology.

The stage 3 action follows a strike and rally outside the state parliament in Melbourne on April 1 by around 1,100 MSAV members. Workers are demanding wages be raised by at least 28 percent over four years to bring them into parity with the state's public sector nurses.

Workers rejected the government's proposed enterprise agreement saying the pay rise offer of 3 percent per annum falls well below the rate of inflation and minimum safety net rates determined by the Fair Work Commission, and failed to address their other claims including improved career progression, reduced workloads and more support for professional development.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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