

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: Kerala private transport unions protest high fuel prices

Private transport unions affiliated with the All-India Trade Union Congress demonstrated in Thrissur on Tuesday over the rising cost of petrol and diesel. Protesters included three-wheeler taxi and taxicab drivers. Workers said that increases in fuel prices were higher than the varying prices of oil on the international market. Drivers also said that fare collection meters were not keeping pace with the rise in the fuel prices.

Statewide strike by Punjab sanitation workers ends

The statewide strike by Punjab sanitation workers was called off after 16 days on May 21 following talks with the Aam Admi Party-led government's finance minister. Workers' key demands include raising the minimum wage to 26,000 rupees (\$US270), permanent jobs, payment of outstanding salaries, the filling of vacant posts and implementation of welfare measures for sanitation workers. The unions previously warned that they would intensify their agitation if their demands are not granted.

Himachal Pradesh: Shimla sanitation workers end weeklong strike

The strike by over 900 sanitation workers at Shimla, Himachal Pradesh was called off on May 21 after the Shimla Municipal Corporation agreed to restore a 10 percent annual salary hike provision withdrawn by the corporation. The workers were organised by the Shimla Environment Heritage Conservation and Beautification Society in the government.

1.2 million Indian chemists and pharmaceutical distributors hold one-day national strike

Over 1.2 million chemists and pharmaceutical distributors organised by the All-India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD) struck for 24 hours on May 20 affecting distribution of medicines in most major capital cities. Hospital pharmacies were not impacted. AOICD members

were protesting the illegal online sale of medicines and predatory pricing by corporate firms.

The AOICD demanded the rollback of government notifications that facilitated the unchecked growth of online medicine sales. Independent and local chemists said they are fighting back against predatory, deep-discounting models used by corporate-backed players.

Bangladesh: Police attack protesting Chaity Composite garment workers

Police used tear gas and rubber bullets to attack protesting Chaity Composite factory workers in Tipurdi on Tuesday when their protest blocked the Dhaka-Chattogram highway. Workers were demanding payment of full wages for the current month and leave benefits in arrears. The protest erupted because factory management had paid only half of the current month's wages. Workers gathered outside the factory in the morning before protesting at the highway. Their demonstration caused an eight-kilometre traffic jam.

Energypac garment workers block Ashulia highway over unpaid wages

Energypac readymade garment workers in Dhaka's Ashulia industrial belt staged a road blockade on the Nabinagar-Chandra highway in the Baraipara area on Monday to demand payment of outstanding April wages.

The protest, which began at approximately 11:00 a.m., halted traffic for around one hour. Workers said that management had repeatedly promised to clear arrears in instalments but had failed to do so. "We have waited through several assurances, but the salary has not been paid," said a protester, adding, "Eid is approaching and without our wages our celebrations will be ruined."

Workers withdrew the blockade at noon following intervention by Ashulia Industrial Police who said they had held talks with the factory management which gave an assurance to solve the issue.

Gazipur police assault garment workers demanding Eid holiday and wages

Police fired sound grenades and teargas to disrupt a May 21 protest by

apparel workers from KSS Knit Composite in Sreepur of Gazipur and injured several workers. They were demanding 11 days of Eid-ul-Azha holiday, payment of outstanding overtime wages, full salaries for May and the removal of several factory officials.

The protest began after workers saw a closure notice posted at the factory gate along with a heavy police presence to block entry. Police used batons when workers attempted to force their way inside the plant. Management claimed it had already announced 10 days of Eid leave and 20 days' advance salary for workers. Additional police were deployed at the factory.

Early childhood educators across Australia to strike against pay cut

Thousands of early childhood educators from childcare centres across Australia plan to walk off the job for the day on July 15 to protest the federal Labor government's failure to include budget funding for a 15 percent pay rise. About 20,000 educators at 1,000 childcare centres signed an open letter urging the government to lock in the pay rise permanently, before its \$3.6 billion in funding runs out in November.

The government agreed to fund the 15 percent increase in late 2024, after a deal was reached in multi-employer agreement negotiations. However, the increase absorbed a substantial part of a 23 percent rise, phased in until 2029, in minimum award rates granted by the Fair Work Commission.

The United Workers Union (UWU) said without a clear funding commitment from the government most of the country's 60,000 educators faced a "pay cliff" of 4 to 15 percent in pay cuts. The union has called for another 10 percent increase over two years on top of the 15 percent to match its original wage claim.

The union threatened a mass walkout at childcare centres in 2024 but later suspended it, after the government promised to commit to increase funding.

Australian Capital Territory public school teachers strike for better pay and conditions

For the first time in 15 years, more than 3,700 public school teachers across the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) held a two-hour strike at 8.30 a.m. on May 22. Australian Education Union (AEU) members agreed at a stop-work meeting to hold a one-day strike on June 11 if the territory government's enterprise agreement does not address key concerns. These include staff shortages, excessive workloads, class sizes, violence and safety, and support for students with complex needs.

Workers want better pay, especially for experienced staff, more staff and better workforce planning, fewer collapsed or split classes, smaller and safer classes, and recognition for extra duties and specialist roles.

AEU members voted in early April for take future industrial action, following months of stalled enterprise negotiations. The union lodged claims in July last year but says that the education directorate did not respond substantively for seven months.

Salaried doctors at ACT's public hospitals strike for higher pay

About 350 Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation (ASMOF) members employed at ACT public hospitals began industrial action on May 22 to demand an improved pay offer in the territory government's proposed enterprise agreement. Doctors and specialists voted on May 13 to take action after rejecting Canberra Health's below inflation pay offer of 3 percent annual increases in a three-year agreement, plus a 0.5 percent superannuation increase at the end of that period.

ASMOF members approved 21 separate types of industrial action ranging from low-level, such as wearing a badge or sticker, to bans on specific administrative processes, certain meetings or use of specific technologies.

ASMOF is seeking 6 percent annual increases over three years. A federation spokesman said ACT doctors' wages have slipped to the second lowest in the country over the past five years. He alleged that uncompetitive working conditions and pay had led to chronic workforce shortages in ACT hospitals.

The union also called for action to begin over doctor-to-patient ratios, giving junior doctors six weeks' notice of their rosters (rather than the current four weeks), adjustment of the right to disconnect clause to make it realistic for doctors on call, better fatigue management and other health and safety work practices.

Lauriston Girls' School teachers in Melbourne escalate industrial action

About 80 teachers at the prestigious Lauriston Girls' School in Melbourne have escalated industrial action for an improved pay rise offer. Independent Education Union (IEU) members set in place low-level bans on April 20 and then on the afternoon of May 21 protested outside the school gates carrying various placards including, "Pay Us or Lose Us" and "Out on Strike."

A union spokesperson said that after 15 months of negotiations, the wages offered by management do not keep pace with inflation, do not include back pay and do not address worsening working conditions.

Negotiations with management began in May last year. Talks reached an impasse after 85 percent of the school's 200 staff rejected management's sub-inflation offer of a 9 percent pay rise spread over three years. Teachers later rejected an increased offer of 12.48 percent over three years. Melbourne's current official inflation rate is 4.6 percent, meaning the offer is a real pay cut.

IEU members want an 18 percent increase over three years as well as improved parental leave provisions, school superannuation contributions whilst on leave, better access to pregnancy-related entitlements, and expanded domestic violence leave which is crucial for the overwhelmingly female workforce.

Parks Victoria workers strike over low pay offer

About 300 Parks Victoria employees stopped work for one hour on Monday and protested outside the Parks Victoria head office in Melbourne in opposition to the government's low pay offer in a new enterprise agreement. This was the first industrial action at the agency since 2012.

Australian Services Union and the Community and Public Services Union (CPSU) members voted on May 15 for future industrial action after rejecting the state Labor government's sub-inflation 3 percent annual pay

increases offer. Parks Victoria claimed that it is prevented from increasing its offer under the state government's 3 percent wage cap.

A CPSU representative said the proposed agreement would lock in lower pay and conditions, and put workers behind colleagues across the Victorian public sector. Workers want pay parity and conditions on par with the broader state public service.

Allied health professionals begin industrial action in Victoria

Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association (VAHPA) members on Monday imposed work bans in public hospitals to demand an improved pay offer from the state Labor government. Workers are refusing to work overtime, taking all entitled breaks, wearing campaign t-shirts, adding campaign materials to email signatures and displaying campaign materials in the workplace. Bans on billing or charging patients are also in place.

The VAHPA wants substantial pay increases in line with the Fair Work Commission's flagged gender-based undervaluation findings. Workers want a 36.18 percent wage increase over three years. The government has yet to make an offer, despite 24 meetings over eight months. The union has threatened to "ramp up" industrial action in June if the government fails to make a decent offer.

Allied health professionals are university-qualified healthcare workers who diagnose, treat and rehabilitate patients. In hospitals, they are essential to multidisciplinary care teams, focusing on restoring a patient's physical, mental and social well-being.

DXC Technology workers strike again

Hundreds of workers employed by IT contractor DXC Technology across Australia stopped work for 72 hours on May 23 in opposition to low pay and cuts to conditions. The action followed a five-day strike on May 8 and 24-hour strike on April 2 by DXC's software developers, infrastructure specialists and security analysts who provide software design and support for the Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, ANZ and major government agencies.

The workers, who are members of Professionals Australia (PA) and the Australia Services Union (ASU), have not had a pay increase for five years. They have rejected DXC's enterprise agreement offer which included a below-inflation pay rise of 2.5 percent in the first year (with no back pay), followed by 3 percent increases in the second and third years. The proposal included the winding back of standby and on-call conditions, which the unions claimed could leave some employees more than \$10,000 worse off annually.

The unions claim that DXC is employing contract workers, who have not been given the required legal security clearance, as strike breakers. The US-based company's 5,000 Australian employees generated revenues of \$2.35 billion during 2023–24. It has publicly admitted to underpaying workers since 2017.



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