

# 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: Aluminium utensil manufacturing workers strike in Madurai**

Madurai district aluminium utensil spinning manual workers called an indefinite strike on June 22 demanding higher wages and Deepawali bonuses as per their work agreement.

A bilateral agreement between the aluminium utensil contract wage workshop manufacturers and the workers says there should be a wage increase every two years, and an annual bonus paid before the Deepawali festival. Workers claim the agreement was not honoured. Production and supply of aluminium utensils are disrupted, with potential ripple effects on businesses and consumers.

## **Uttar Pradesh: Workers at Greater Noida's Government Institute of Medical Sciences still on strike**

The strike by hundreds of contract workers, including nurses, technicians, attendants, and clerical staff, at Greater Noida's Government Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) entered day 9 on Tuesday. Surgeries, diagnostic services, and patient admissions have been severely disrupted, leaving many patients without care.

Workers said they were promised permanent positions at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic but are now being asked to clear recruitment exams, despite years of service. Workers are demanding job security. Hospital authorities insist recruitment must follow government norms and examinations, stressing that no current outsourced worker will lose their job.

Doctors and other staff support the strike and are demanding resolution of their grievances that include better working conditions, pending salaries, and other administrative concerns.

## **Punjab: Community Health Officers strike over long-outstanding demands**

Punjab Community Health Officers (CHOs) employed under the National Health Mission (NHM) began a series of state-wide strikes and protests on Tuesday. They suspended both online and offline duties and rallied outside the Civil Surgeon's office shouting slogans against the

government.

Workers want permanent jobs, a salary rise and equal pay for equal work, withdrawal of the new performance-based incentive system, creation of a dedicated CHO cadre, release of loyalty bonuses and the merger of incentives with basic pay. They highlighted their crucial role in rural healthcare, disaster response, and during the Covid-19 pandemic, claiming their contributions have been ignored.

Workers complained about increased workload, financial hardship, and mental stress due to government policies. Copies of the new incentive guidelines were burnt, and a memorandum of demands was submitted to the Civic Surgeon's office. The strike is to continue until July 1 and if demands remain unmet a protest is planned at Sangrur on July 2 near the Chief Minister's residence.

## **Cambodia: AJ Textile garment workers strike over sacking and conditions**

About 1,800 workers at the AJ Textile garment factory in Kampong Speu province stopped work on June 15 over working conditions and the dismissal of a supervisor. More than 100 workers protested outside the factory while 1,700 stopped work demanding better working conditions and reinstatement of a supervisor and unionist who had been dismissed for alleged union activity.

A spokesperson from the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union said workers raised concerns over salary miscalculations and deductions for sick leave. Under pressure from the Department of Labor workers returned to work the following day but the supervisor was not reinstated.

## **Singapore: Indian and Bangladeshi workers left unpaid with no accommodation**

Over 400 immigrant workers from Bangladesh and India employed at three Singapore companies are stranded in Singapore. The workers are owed four months wages and have no accommodation, the High Commissioner of India in Singapore announced on Wednesday.

According to the *Straits Times*, a common director of the three firms, SK Industries, KPA Engineering and VVR Plant Engineering, has been identified as Indian national Ramu Palani Velu, a permanent Singapore resident, who reportedly has left the country.

The stranded workers are being assisted by the National Trades Union Congress and the Ministry of Manpower who have provided them with a small amount of cash, supermarket shopping vouchers and are attempting

to find accommodation.

### **Glencore coalmine workers in New South Wales vote to strike**

Mining and Energy Union (MEU) members at three Glencore open-cut coal mines in the Hunter Region, New South Wales voted overwhelmingly in three separate ballots on June 17 to approve future industrial action. The mines affected are Ravensworth, Mangoola and Wambo.

Workers oppose the company's plan to introduce three tiers in new enterprise agreements. The lowest tier 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.

Meanwhile, in a separate dispute, 19 MEU coal washery members at the Peabody Energy-managed Wambo mine have been locked out for two weeks after two three-day stoppages and imposing work bans. Workers began industrial action on May 1 in opposition to the company's 2.5 percent annual pay rise offer and proposed changes to bonus arrangements that would leave them worse off. The lockout will remain in place until July 1.

### **Western Downs Regional Council workers strike again for pay rise**

Workers from two unions at the Western Downs Regional Council, in southeast Queensland, walked off the job on June 18, for the second time in two months, to demand an improved pay offer in the council's proposed enterprise agreement. Members of the Australian Workers Union and The Services Union walked out for two hours on May 6 when management refused to pay wages in response to them putting in place partial work bans.

The unions want annual pay increases in a three-year agreement of 6 percent in the first year (backdated from 26 March), 5.5 percent in year 2 followed by 4.5 percent with a consumer price index (CPI) protector for year three capped at 5.5 percent. The council has offered only 4, 4 and 3 percent, with a CPI protector capped at 4 percent for year 3 only. The offer is well below the CPI in Queensland's capital Brisbane, which is 4.7 percent.

By contrast, the council lodged a 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.

### **Viva oil refinery workers in Victoria strike again over wages and conditions**

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) members at Viva's oil refinery in Geelong, Victoria walked off the job for several hours on Monday in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Workers began a campaign of industrial action on June 12 with a four-hour stoppage and other action, including indefinite bans on overtime and callbacks.

The union claimed that their employer, UGL Operations and Maintenance, is aiming to strip away vital protections, including

redundancy and income protection, and force its 33 members back onto basic award conditions in its proposed enterprise agreement.

### **Keolis Downer bus drivers in Sydney begin industrial action for better pay and conditions**

Keolis Downer bus drivers in Sydney's northern beaches are taking industrial action for an improved enterprise agreement. Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members stopped wearing uniforms on June 2 and on June 18 turned off their bus Opal card readers (fair collecting machines) following seven months of failed negotiations.

As well as a pay increase that keeps pace with the increasing cost of living, drivers want the new agreement to resolve issues like the driver shortages, cancellations of services and overcrowding. The union claimed Keolis Downer was ignoring these key issues.

### **Canberra Hospital medical imaging staff strike for pay rise**

Health Services Union (HSU) members from medical imaging, sonography, and pathology departments at Canberra Hospital walked out for one hour on June 19 as part of industrial action in their dispute with the Australian Capital Territory government for a wage increase in a new enterprise agreement. The strike followed the imposition of low-level bans two days earlier which included not answering telephone calls and not responding to voicemail and electronic messages.

The HSU said that after bargaining for fair and decent wages and conditions for over six months there had been no meaningful offer from the government.

### **RACQ roadside assist mechanics hold third strike for pay parity**

About 80 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union employed as roadside assist mechanics at the Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ) walked off the job for 24 hours on Tuesday, their third 24-hour strike this month. Workers want pay parity with RACQ auto workshop mechanics in a new enterprise agreement.

The workers voted unanimously on June 2 to take industrial action and on June 5 went on strike for one day after RACQ refused to pay them over previously partial work bans.

### **NRMA roadside assist mechanics in New South Wales hold third strike**

National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA) patrol officers, who provide roadside assistance across New South Wales, stopped work for 48 hours and protested outside the company's Sydney head office on Monday calling for an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed 48-hour stoppages on April 28 and June 15.

About 260 Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members want a

17 percent wage increase over four years, with 5 percent in the first year and 4 percent in each of the following three years. The union says the patrol officers are among the lowest-paid mechanics in the state compared with those employed by local businesses.

After six months of negotiations, NRMA has offered a 3.5 percent increase in the first year, followed by annual increases of 3 percent and a 1 percent sign-on bonus. The union says this falls below Sydney's current annual consumer price index rate of 4.4 percent, which is expected to rise.

### **New Zealand firefighters continue strikes**

About 2,000 New Zealand firefighters involved in a long-running dispute with Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) are continuing one-hour strikes that began last October. The NZ Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) this week released a new schedule of stoppages beginning on June 24 and continuing Wednesdays and Fridays until July 10.

Firefighters have rejected a proposal by the government agency to significantly cut their wages and are angry over understaffing and faulty equipment—the result of budget cuts by successive governments. FENZ's current pay offer is a 6.2 percent increase by the end of 2027, well below inflation at 3.1 percent and forecast to hit 4 percent. Firefighters have not received a pay rise since July 2023 and FENZ is refusing to offer any backpay.

The only outcome of a meeting between the union's national committee and FENZ last month was an agreement to explore a corporatist High Performance High Engagement model promoted by the Maritime Union for purportedly improving the health and safety of workers at Ports of Auckland.

While FENZ has not made any offer to settle, the union says it is focused on "using every lever to put pressure on FENZ, and those that have influence over FENZ." In fact, the union's only strategy is more one-hour strikes, aimed at placating the firefighters' anger and wearing down their resistance to an eventual deal which fails to keep up with inflation or fix the broader crisis in the service.



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