

# 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 train drivers protest long working hours

Railway loco pilots protested against long working hours in Kannur, Kerala on June 1. They demanded their working day not exceed 10 hours and their weekly leave be extended to 46 hours up from the current 30 hours. About 30 locomotive pilots are refusing to return to duty until they have finished a 46-hour break. The action is expected to significantly disrupt train services.

There are over 1,300 loco pilots working in Kerala with 195 vacant positions. The All India Loco Running Staff Association has said that if pilots' demands are not met they will halt train services and not work past their end of duty hours.

## Tripura Anganwadi workers protest for higher pay

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers in Tripura state held a protest march in the state's capital Agartala on June 1. They were demanding gratuity on retirement as mandated by a recent Tripura High Court order.

Other demands included higher wages for Anganwadi workers and helpers, an extension of their working hours, and the reinstatement of retrenched Anganwadi workers. The protest was organised by the Tripura Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union in collaboration with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, All India Working Women's Coordination Committee and All India Democratic Women's Association.

## Tamil Nadu mosquito breeding controllers protest delayed wages

About 560 Domestic Breeder Checkers from the Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation demonstrated outside corporation offices on Monday over a 16-day delay in wage payments and to demand that wages be increased as per the orders of the district collector.

These workers perform many functions. They remove stagnant waters to prevent mosquito breeding, communicate the corporation's message to the residents, collect taxes for the corporation and take care of patients in Urban Health centres. Around 160 workers had been facing delay in their wages and 480 were waiting for a pay rise.

## Pakistan: Khanewal district doctors strike to protest unexplained transfers

Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) doctors in Khanewal district stopped work on Monday to protest the sudden transfer of doctors at the Kabirwala THQ hospital by the health minister. Outpatient departments of all government and private hospitals closed for the day. Doctors said they would attend emergency patients but will remain on strike until the transfers were cancelled.

The PMA said the strike was in response to the provincial minister's alleged insulting of hospital doctors and the transfer of doctors without any inquiry into the death of five child patients due to measles.

## Young doctors at teaching hospitals in Lahore strike over safety

The Young Doctors Association (YDA) called a strike at teaching hospitals in Lahore on Monday severely affecting patient care at several major hospitals. Lahore General Hospital and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital were completely shut while Mayo, Services, Punjab Institute of Cardiology, and Jinnah Hospital Lahore saw a thin presence of doctors.

The YDA said the incidence of violence at state run hospitals were surfacing every day and they demanded increased security for doctors.

## Bangladeshi university teachers demand withdrawal of new pension scheme

Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA) members from the Dhaka University (DU) and Jagannath University (JnU) held a half-day strike on Tuesday to demand cancellation of the new universal pension scheme.

FBUTA alleged that the scheme issued on March 13 by the finance ministry is discriminatory. They demanded inclusion of university teachers in super grade, and the introduction of a separate pay scale for teachers.

A spokesman for teachers said if their demands were not met by June 24, they would hold half-day strikes in all public universities on June 25, 26, and 27, and a full-day strike on June 30. Strikes at all public universities would be called from July 1 until teachers demands were granted.

## **Sri Lanka: Village level service officers remain on strike continue**

About 12,000 Grama service officers (representatives of the Sri Lankan village level government) continue strike action. Officers in Anuradhapura in North Central Province, Puttalam in North-West Province and Matara in Southern Province have been on strike since May 6 demanding uniforms, offices and field visit travel allowances. Workers are not reporting to their respective regional secretariat Offices.

## **Wilmar Sugar threatens to lockout its Queensland mill workforce**

Wilmar Sugar, Australia's largest sugar producer, has threatened that anyone involved in industrial action at its eight sugar mills will be locked out of work as of June 5. The threat is aimed at over 700 mill workers who have held three 12-hour strikes since May 9 in opposition to the company's proposed agreement.

The workers, members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union, have put in place overtime bans and began taking one hour stop work meetings to get a report back from the unions on the company's latest pay offer which has been put out for a vote. The unions are directing members to reject the offer, prompting management's threat of indefinite lockout.

Wilmar's latest pay offer is 14.25 percent over four years, or 3.56 percent a year. The current consumer price index for Queensland is 4.2 percent, meaning the offer is a real pay cut. Wilmar included a \$1,500 sign on bonus in the offer. Workers said they will reject the offer. The unions are demanding 22 percent over four years.

## **Tully Sugar in northern Queensland locked out striking workers**

Over 170 striking members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union, have been locked out at the Chinese owned COFCO Tully Sugar mill in northern Queensland. Workers walked off the job on Wednesday demanding an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

Tully Sugar's pay rise offer is 11.8 percent over a three-year agreement, equating to 3.9 percent annual increases. The unions are demanding 24 percent over three years saying it is needed to keep up with the rising cost of living.

## **Victorian ambulance paramedics escalate industrial action**

Emergency ambulance paramedics in Victoria have escalated industrial action begun in March as part of a long-running enterprise agreement dispute with the state Labor government. Paramedics in April overwhelmingly rejected a below-inflation nominal wage increase of 3 percent per annum, plus yearly lump sum payments of \$1,800. The Victorian Ambulance Union (VAU) has called for a nominal pay increase of 6 percent per annum or the consumer price index (CPI).

The VAU has limited industrial action to writing messages on ambulances, stopping work to speak to the media, refusing to collect

billing details and activating beacons if they are ramped at hospitals for more than 40 minutes. Paramedics overwhelmingly voted this week for 70 new work bans after 99 negotiation meetings with the government failed.

The VAU has been in negotiations with Ambulance Victoria and the government for over a year. The government's wages policy restricts wage rises in the public sector to just 3 percent per annum. The current consumer price index for Victoria shows a rise of 3.8 percent. Under the cap, any pay increase over 3 percent per annum must be paid for through productivity improvements. VAU claimed Ambulance Victoria is trying to cut sick leave, overtime and travel allowance entitlements.

As well as a wage increase, workers want increased staffing resources to relieve their heavy workload and improved end-of-shift management to end hours of forced overtime. VAU claimed that paramedics work a total of 800 hours of forced overtime each day, mostly due to low acuity cases or being ramped in a hospital corridor.

## **Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology educators strike again for better pay and conditions**

In their long running pay dispute at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has announced its members are initiating new work bans and will strike on June 13 from 12:30 p.m. and again for 24 hours the following day. Industrial action began in August when over 1,100 NTEU members approved taking protected industrial action, including strike action and bans in support of their demands in a new enterprise agreement.

The latest action follows a two-day walkout in October and one-day action in September. The union and RMIT have dragged out negotiations for over 22 months. RMIT workers have not had a pay rise since their current agreement expired in June 2021.

RMIT's proposed agreement included sub-inflation 3.5 percent annual wage rises, extension of the new agreement to four years and 13 percent superannuation. In return, management wants a new sessional staff category, increased teaching and work hours, as well as making changes to classification level testing. NTEU is seeking a 5 percent pay increase.

Currently workers come under two enterprise agreements, the RMIT University Enterprise Agreement 2018 and RMIT Vocational Education Workplace Agreement 2019. RMIT is refusing the union's demand that all workers be covered by a single agreement.

NTEU members are most concerned about job security. About 50 percent of vocational educators are casual and living precariously with many forced to take two or more jobs to survive.

## **Victoria University educators strike for pay rise and reduced workload**

Over 350 National Tertiary Education Union members at the Victoria University, in Melbourne, stopped work for 12 hours at midday on Wednesday in their dispute for a pay rise and reduced workload in a new work agreement. NTEU claimed that despite receiving the union's claims more than a year ago VU management had failed to make a concrete offer on pay or unmanageable workload.

It said the VU workforce has been reduced by nearly 20 percent since 2023 and management intended to increase teaching from 36 weeks a year to 40. NTEU alleged that VU's draft enterprise agreement sought to remove the NTEU as a party to the agreement, reduce staff rights to

representation and remove professional reclassification rights.

### **New Zealand carpet makers strike over pay**

Workers at the Lower Hutt factory of New Zealand carpet manufacturer Godfrey Hirst walked out on May 31 for 24 hours over a pay dispute. It was the first time workers at the facility had voted for strike action following an ill-fated company lockout of the strikers in Auckland in 2019.

The workers are FIRST Union members who make up more than half the plant's 150 personnel. A union representative told Radio NZ that there had been a "glacially slow approach to pay talks" by the company, which were now into their seventh month. Workers were seeking "fair wage increases above the rising cost of living," he said.

Apitialefaga Robin Tuiletufuga who works the overnight shift as a yarn spinner said after four years in the job, his hourly pay is barely above the minimum wage (\$23.15 per hour), and he could earn more stacking shelves in a supermarket. His is a highly skilled job, involving mastery of multiple complex machines. Some of his colleagues who have worked there for decades are paid less than staff hired this year, whom they were having to teach, he said.

The company claims that apart from those striking at Lower Hutt, unionised and non-unionised staff across three yarn plants have accepted a two-year deal. Godfrey Hirst is owned by global corporation Mohawk Industries which made \$US11.1 billion (\$NZ18.1b) in sales last year.



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