

# Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

## India: Protesting Tamil Nadu government nurses attacked and detained by police

Tamil Nadu police assaulted and detained around 500 protesting government contract nurses in Chennai on Tuesday. Many nurses were injured in the violent attack. Police held nurses in nearby halls until late in the evening and filed charges against them.

The 500 protesters were among 10,800 nurses recruited on contract through the Medical Recruitment Board (MRB) in 2015. Only 4,200 have been made permanent. The nurses have been protesting in Chennai for several days and were joined on Wednesday by nurses from the Government Multi Super Specialty Hospital in Omandurar Estate.

The Tamil Nadu Government MRB Nurses Welfare Association is demanding all contract nurses be made permanent. It said that nurses were initially recruited on a meagre basic salary of 7,700 rupees (\$US99) a month, well below the current basic salary of a permanent staff nurse of 38,000 rupees. In response to previous protests, the government increased their salary to 14,000 rupees and later to 18,000 rupees. Many nurses, however, are yet to receive the increment and are still only receiving 14,000 rupees.

## Kerala train drivers protest unsafe work hours and poor conditions

Loco pilots held a one-day hunger protest at eight crew-booking points in the Thiruvananthapuram and Palakkad railway divisions on June 6 over unsafe working hours and poor conditions. The All India Loco Running Staff Association demanded one day's rest per week, reinstatement of a special night-duty allowance, reduction in night-duty hours, new duty rosters where loco pilots get adequate rest and rest rooms for female employees.

## Kerala government commuter transport workers hold state-wide strike

Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) workers held a 24-hour statewide strike on Monday and began an indefinite protest outside the corporation's office in Thiruvananthapuram over the non-payment of salaries. It followed a 24-hour strike last month called by the Transport Democratic Federation (TDF) and BMS (Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh) over delayed wage payments. The strike was called after a meeting

between the corporation and the unions failed to resolve the issue before June 5.

KSRTC's finances have been in crisis since the state government withdrew funding and ordered the corporation to "find ways" to raise its own revenue. Workers have been receiving salaries in a staggered manner over the last few months.

## Jammu and Kashmir health workers protest non-payment of wages

National Health Mission (NHM) workers demonstrated in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on Monday to demand six months' outstanding wages. Protesters, mainly women with permanent services of between 25 and 30 years, blocked the fashionable Residency Road and chanted anti-government slogans.

The health workers said the government had failed to release the pending wages in April as promised and warned that if they were not paid by June 10 they would "sit day and night" in protest on Srinagar roads.

## Tamil Nadu sanitary workers in Tiruchirapalli demand salary rise

Sanitary workers and overhead drinking water tank operators protested at the state collectorate in Tiruchirapalli on June 6 to demand higher pay. The protest was called by the Local Administration Employees Association and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions. The workers also called on the government to supply uniforms, masks and hand gloves, establish a service register for all employees and provide gratuity and pension payments to retired workers.

## West Bengal childcare workers demonstrate over low wages

Thousands of anganwadi (childcare) workers protested near Salt Lake in Kolkata, West Bengal on June 6 for higher wages and better working conditions. The protesters submitted a six-point charter of demands to the director of State Women and Childcare Development. The protest was organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

## Bangladesh police attack garment workers in Dhaka demanding higher pay

Dhaka police opened fire with gunshots and teargas as well as using

batons against protesting garment workers at Mirpur and Azampur on June 4, leaving many workers injured. Thousands of factory workers from Chaity Garment, Intraco Fashion, Intraco Design, MBM Garment, Vision Garment, IDS Group, Kolka Garment, and Dmox blocked roads in Dhaka demanding higher wages to compensate for escalating price rises.

The garment workers want their wages increased from between 8,000 taka (\$US87) and 10,000 taka, for helpers and skilled workers respectively, to 15,000 taka (\$US161) and 20,000 taka. Their last pay increase was in 2018.

Desperate to stop further industrial action, the ministry of labour and employment officials told a meeting of factory owners and union officials that the government would establish a minimum wages board to address the issue.

### **Tasmanian firefighters hold protest march for higher pay**

Over 100 members of the United Firefighters Union and Fire Rescue (UFU Fire Rescue Tasmania), accompanied by supporters, held a protest march from the Hobart Fire Station to Parliament House on Wednesday demanding an improved pay offer in the Liberal state government's proposed enterprise agreement. Firefighters from Davenport, Launceston and Burnie stopped work to join the protest.

After five months of negotiations, and five rejected offers, the government's latest offer, below inflation, includes pay increases of only 2.35 percent in the first year, followed by 2.5 percent the next year with no back pay. Australia's official consumer price index (CPI) is up 5.1 percent and predicted to increase further.

The firefighters' previous agreement expired in July 2021 but was extended with union support until January 2022 when negotiations for a new agreement commenced. The workers want pay parity with firefighters in other states who they claim are paid 10 percent more. They have also called for improved superannuation and more state funding for the Tasmania Fire Service.

### **Regional Express airline pilots to vote in strike ballot**

The Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP) is holding a "protected action" ballot of its members from the domestic air carrier Regional Express (Rex) to approve industrial action.

An AFAP spokesperson said the federation had been in negotiations with Rex for a new pay deal since 2018, and that the airline's latest offer was now below its original offer. The federation claimed that the offer represents a cut in salary of more than 5 percent since 2018, does not contain back pay, and does not account for CPI increases over the previous four years.

### **Maintenance workers at the University of Queensland on strike**

Nine Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members employed by maintenance contractor UGL Solutions at the University of Queensland St Lucia campus in Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, are picketing and remain on strike after walking out on May 30 to demand a better pay offer from UGL. The workers stopped work for 24 hours on May 6 after

rejecting the company's proposed enterprise agreement.

The ETU said members were determined to remain on strike until UGL offered a pay increase that makes up for three years without a wage increase and keeps up with the rising cost of living.

### **Newcastle bus drivers to turn off fare-collecting machines during pay dispute**

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members employed by Keolis Downer, commuter bus services contractor in Newcastle, New South Wales, gave notice this week that they will turn off their fare collection machines on June 14 until their pay demands are won.

The RTBU said that Keolis Downer had refused to consider increasing drivers' wages, telling them that they could only increase their pay if they worked longer hours. RTBU claimed the company demanded drivers work Sundays and volunteer for extra shifts before it would consider increasing its pay offer.

Newcastle's bus services were privatised in 2017. According to the union, Keolis Downer claimed that they can only pay what the government gives them.

### **Victorian government security guards protest low wages**

Security guards employed by the Victorian government demonstrated outside the state parliament in Melbourne on Monday demanding a pay increase. They are members of the United Workers Union (UWU). The union said its members' pay and conditions have been cut over the past decade and has called on the state Labor government to return to "Safeguard" conditions they had 10 years ago.

The UWU claimed that government security guard wages had dropped by 7 percent relative to the award over a decade and that some were paid below the minimum wage. The guards are employed at public spaces and government buildings such as hospitals and parliament.



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