

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and New Zealand

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

## India: Private hospital nurses in Kerala strike for pay increase

United Nurses Association (UNA) members from 30 private hospitals in Kerala state's Thrissur district held a 72-hour strike on Tuesday and demonstrated across the district with several demands.

Nurses' demands included an increase in wages to 1,500 rupees (\$US18) per day and adherence to the latest pay commission recommendation, implementation of the labour law and abolishing the contract laws. Nurses alleged that the minimum monthly wage was set at 20,000 rupees in 2017 but most hospitals did not pay the increase and there has been no further revision.

On the first day of the strike six hospitals agreed to a 50 percent pay increase and on the second day 23 hospitals agreed to increased wages. The UNA then called off the strike even though one hospital has refused any wage increase.

## Madhya Pradesh rural health workers walk out indefinitely

Thousands of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) who work in rural health are on an indefinite strike across Madhya Pradesh to demand an increase in their monthly stipend and permanent employment. The strike is having a major impact on pregnant women because ASHA workers vaccinate them.

ASHA workers are only paid a 2,000-rupee (\$US24.5) monthly stipend along with extra incentives for child deliveries. One ASHA worker said, "We should be regularised and our salary should at least be 15,000 rupees for supervisors and 10,000 rupees for ASHA workers."

ASHA workers called off a state-wide strike in 2021 after the state government gave false assurances that their demands would be met. Strikers said this time they will not budge until their demands are met.

## Alliance Air (India) pilots end strike without resolving issues

About 80 Alliance Air (India) pilots took sick leave on Monday as part of their long-running campaign demanding restoration of salaries and allowances to the pre-Covid levels, along with other demands. Nearly all of the state-owned carrier's flights suffered major disruptions. The action followed a strike in September over the same issues.

The pilots returned to work on Wednesday following threats from management and a commitment from the company to begin negotiations. None of the pilots' grievances have been resolved.

Alliance Air was previously part of the now-privatised national carrier Air India. It has around 200 pilots and operates about 130 domestic flights per day. The pilots' salaries were cut by 60 percent in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Blinkit grocery delivery workers in Delhi strike over pay cut

Hundreds of gig grocery delivery workers on the Blinkit platform struck on Wednesday to protest the company's new pay structure which workers said severely cuts their pay. One worker said he used to be paid 50 rupees per delivery but is now only receiving 7 to 18 rupees per delivery. Workers protested in Gurugram, Faridabad and several other parts of Delhi-NCR.

A spokesperson from the All India Gig Workers Union said Blinkit's policies were unlawful and in direct violation of the Shops and Establishments Act. She said Blinkit employees were working 12 to 14 hours a day for starvation wages. Workers filed a complaint with the Labour Commission.

## Garbage collection workers strike in Sydney and Canberra over pay and conditions

Cleanaway garbage collection workers at City of Sydney depots and in the suburbs of Randwick, Erskine Park and Silverwater, as well as in Canberra, walked out for 24 hours on Tuesday in their dispute for a new proposed enterprise agreement.

Five 24-hour strikes have been held in the past four months, but Tuesday's walkout was the only one held simultaneously at all the depots. Each depot has separate agreements with Cleanaway, a division exploited by the union and employer to prevent united action.

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) told the media on Tuesday that it was willing to reach a deal that includes retention of existing

conditions and a “fair” pay increase. It has not presented any specific pay increase figure to the national company which has contracts in every state and reported a net profit of \$80.6 million in the 2021-22 financial year and \$49 million after tax in the first six months of this financial year.

Cleanaway has offered sub-inflation wage rises of 5 percent for the first two years and 4 percent in the following two years conditional on the introduction of a two-tier employment agreement. The company wants new starters to be employed under worse conditions, including working seven-day rosters, 10- to 11-hour shifts and no penalty rates.

Workers have rejected this, demanding the new agreement include job security, no loss in conditions, retention of existing rosters, no weekend work, and a pay rise consistent with the current rate of inflation, which is 6.8 percent.

TWU members at Cleanaway depots in Victoria and Queensland are currently voting on whether to take industrial action in their enterprise agreement disputes. Cleanaway workers from nine local government areas in Perth, Western Australia have given notice that they will strike on April 19 in opposition to the company’s proposed agreement.

### **University of New South Wales academics to strike**

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) announced this week that they will strike for one hour every day for three weeks starting on April 17. The NTEU has declared that UNSW management is “dragging their feet” on delivering a fair pay rise, protections against overwork and job security for casual and fixed-term staff in a new enterprise agreement.

On March 30, NTEU members voted overwhelmingly for industrial action. Of 645 participating in the ballot 607 voted for taking action, including a ban on working outside rostered hours and strikes ranging from five minutes to 24 hours.

### **PPK Mining Equipment workers in New South Wales hold second strike**

About 70 PPK Mining Equipment workers in Newcastle walked out on Thursday, following a 24-hour strike action on April 5. The maintenance and manufacturing workers have not had a pay increase since 2019 when the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Australian Workers Union (AWU) did a deal with PPK to freeze wages to facilitate a merger with another company.

PPK increased its revenue by 23 percent last year but only offered an 11 percent pay increase over five years (2.2 percent annual increases). The offer represents a real pay cut when compared to the current inflation rate of 6.8 percent. The unions, however, have not made a specific pay claim. An AWU spokesman told the media that they wanted “sensible negotiations” and to “find a compromise.” PPK has operations in Newcastle and Port Kembla, New South Wales, and Mount Thorley and Emerald in Queensland.

### **Melbourne suburban library workers fight for higher wages**

Whitehorse Manningham Libraries (WML) workers in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs began low-level industrial action on Monday in their campaign for higher wages and better conditions in a new enterprise agreement.

Australian Services Union (ASU) members voted in March to take industrial action after rejecting WML’s sub-inflation pay increase offer of only 2.4 percent over two years. The ASU outlined in a January media release that it is willing to accept wage deals tied to the state Labor government’s pay cap of 3.5 percent for government employees. WML workers are employed as government sector workers and the union is using this to justify not seeking an increase above the government’s wage cap.

### **New Zealand kindergarten teachers to vote on below-inflation pay offer**

The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), the union covering teachers in the pre-secondary education sector, will put a below-inflation pay offer to kindergarten teachers to vote on next month. The union said the potential deal included five more sick days per year than the previous offer from the education ministry.

The offer includes a pay rise offer previously rejected by kindergarten and primary teachers—\$4,000 from December 2022, with a further \$2,000 or 3 percent in December this year—but with the addition of a third pay rise in December 2024. The increases total 11-14 percent over three years, which is below the official annual inflation rate of 7.2 percent.

An NZEI spokesperson claimed it was a “huge” increase in sick days amid the difficulties teachers faced with COVID-19. The teacher unions played a critical role in enforcing the Labour government’s reopening of schools last year after COVID health protections were ditched.

Primary and area school principals will also take partial action over their pay claims from the start of the second school term, refusing to do any work involving the Education Ministry from April 24 until the end of June.

Along with primary teachers, secondary teachers who are members of the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA) have rejected the ministry’s latest offers. Both unions are seeking to divide teachers and block the development of a mass movement against the Labour government’s austerity agenda. There has been no repeat of a March 16 nationwide strike which involved 50,000 primary, secondary and kindergarten teachers.



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