

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: Strike by Blinkit grocery delivery workers in Haryana in second week

Several thousand gig workers on the grocery delivery platform Blinkit have been on strike since April 12 in Delhi-NCR and neighbouring city Gurgaon. Only 10 percent of employees are working and nearly 200 Blinkit dark stores have been closed. Strikers accused Blinkit of using workers from another app-based platform Repido to try and break the strike.

Their action was in response to Blinkit's new pay structure which severely reduces pay. Workers said they were previously paid between 25 rupees (30 cents US) and 50 rupees per delivery. Now they receive only 7 to 18 rupees for a delivery plus a bonus of 500 rupees for 100 deliveries and 1,000 rupees per 1,000 deliveries. Delivery workers pick up groceries from one of the many Blinkit warehouses and are expected to complete their delivery within ten minutes.

As well as restoration of the previous pay system, workers want a valid parking area, a space to sit and basic facilities, including toilets and drinking water. A meeting with the Labour Commission on April 15 failed to resolve their issues.

Strikers have threatened to organise with other platform gig workers, such as Ola, Uber and Swiggy, who have been protesting against low pay and similar unbearable working conditions.

Blinkit operates in more than 30 cities in India. In June 2022, multinational restaurant food delivery company Zomato announced its acquisition of Blinkit for \$US568 million.

West Bengal municipal workers strike over unpaid wages

Nearly 1,700 contract cleaning workers from the Durgapur Municipal Corporation in West Bengal stopped work on April 15 and protested outside the corporation's main gate demanding overdue wages. Due to the strike, garbage in the city was not collected.

The workers, who are usually paid in the first week of the month, have still not been paid. The workers, who are employed by a private contractor, had to hold a similar protest in March over unpaid wages. Some had not received wages for three months. Workers want timely payment of their wages and the minimum wage fixed by the government.

Airbus Pacific aircraft maintenance workers in New South Wales locked out

Following seven weeks of protected industrial action, about 80 aircraft maintenance workers at the RAAF air base at Richmond, west of Sydney, were locked out for two hours by their employer on Monday in a pay dispute. Workers began industrial action in early March, which included a ban on overtime work, work-to-rule and a strike on March 24.

Australian Workers Union (AWU) members are in dispute with Airbus Australia Pacific over its proposed enterprise agreement. Negotiations stalled in February when the company's sub-inflation wage offer of 7.5 percent over 3 years was rejected by workers. The current annual inflation rate is 6.8 percent. The AWU claimed that Airbus has refused to negotiate improvements to its original offer.

The workers have not had a pay rise since August 2021. Negotiations for a new agreement began in July last year.

Education union calls another token strike at Curtin University in Western Australia

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), covering academic staff at the Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia, called members out for a two-hour strike on Monday in their long running dispute over management's proposed enterprise agreement. A three-hour strike on March 13 had little effect on management's original pay offer.

Over 700 NTEU members in November voted to take industrial action because there was no real improvement in conditions and they were offered only 2.2 percent annual pay increases over five years, well below Perth's inflation rate of 8.3 percent in the 2022 December quarter. The university posted a \$113 million surplus last year but the NTEU is only demanding 5 percent annual increases, a real pay cut.

Academics want extreme workloads cut and greater job security, particularly for casual staff. The NTEU says it now wants ongoing positions and job security for the 5,800 casuals it abandoned in previous agreements.

Casuals are currently providing 70 to 80 percent of the teaching in some departments. They have no access to sick leave and are not paid a wage between semesters. Many are paid per assignment, instead of per hour, an arrangement that was costing them thousands of dollars in lost salaries annually.

Even though 94 percent of members had voted to take strike action of up to 24 hours duration, the NTEU has only called short-duration strikes that cause minimum disruption but are used to dissipate workers' anger.

Cleanaway garbage collection workers in Perth strike

Cleanaway garbage collectors from seven suburbs of Perth walked off the job for 24 hours on Wednesday in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. It was their first strike in 20 years and is taking place in parallel with industrial action by Cleanaway workers in Queensland, New South Wales and Canberra.

Striking workers from suburb depots in Vincent, Bayswater, Victoria Park, Kalamunda, Fremantle and South Perth rallied outside the Malaga depot. Police intervened when a protesting worker was struck by a truck attempting to break the picket line.

Cleanaway is negotiating separate agreements with the Transport Workers Union (TWU) at most of the company's depots across the country. Cleanaway 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 is offering sub-inflation wage rises of 5 percent for the first two years and 4 percent in the following two years, conditional on changing the current five-day roster to seven days and eliminating overtime through the use of contract labour.

Workers in all states have rejected Cleanaway's proposed agreement and are 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 rate of inflation.

Aircraft refuellers at Melbourne airport strike again for pay rise

Over 40 aircraft refuellers at Melbourne Airport (Tullamarine) employed by contractor Rivet Energy Aviation walked off the job for 24 hours at 5 p.m. on Wednesday to demand improved wages and better conditions in a new enterprise agreement. Their union, the Transport Workers Union (TWU), entered "crisis" talks with Rivet on Tuesday evening without reaching a deal.

Workers struck for 24 hours on March 8, forcing Qantas and freight companies Australia Air and DHL to make alternative arrangements. The TWU has been in negotiations with Rivet for over a year.

Rivet made two sub-inflation pay offers which workers rejected. The TWU is prepared to accept 4 percent annual pay rises, which compared to the inflation rate of 6.8 percent for the twelve months up to March this year is a real pay cut. The workers have not had a pay rise since May 2020.

Rivet Energy Aviation is part of the multi-national Rivet Group, which includes mining and trucking. It also provides refuelling services at Adelaide Airport in South Australia. Customers include Qantas, DHL, Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines, Fiji Airways and Qatar Airways.

The TWU has been making useless appeals to Qantas and other customers to intervene and pressure Rivet "to engage in discussions with its workers." TWU alleged that scab labour was being used to circumvent the strike.

New Zealand nurses protest over deepening health crisis

Protests and rallies involving several thousand nurses and other health workers were held in 20 locations around New Zealand last Saturday, calling on political parties to address staff shortages. The NZ Nurses

Organisation (NZNO) called on its 57,000 members to unite against unsafe staffing levels and an "under-valuing" of their work.

NZNO chief executive Paul Goulter appealed to politicians for policies to address the nursing shortage in the coming elections. "[D]ecades of poor planning, inadequate funding and outright neglect across successive governments have led us to a time of absolute crisis in terms of pay, staffing resources and morale across the nursing sector," he declared. Up to 5,000 nurses have moved to Australia seeking better pay.

The NZNO has collaborated for years with successive governments to drive down pay and conditions for nurses, including shutting down strike action and imposing below inflation deals in the past two pay rounds. Last week's protests, unaccompanied by any industrial action, were a cynical exercise in letting off steam amid the deepening health care crisis.

New Zealand Community Corrections staff strike

Almost 2,000 Community Corrections staff went on strike for two hours on April 13 and 20 after turning down the government's latest pay offer, following nine months of negotiations. The workers included probation officers, managers of people on home detention or electronically monitored, and bail support workers.

A Public Service Association (PSA) spokesperson said the recent pay offer from Corrections was rejected by workers, and followed by a ballot to show they were willing to strike three times. She said the group was the lowest paid collective in the public service. "If you're being paid \$23 per hour in a cost of living crisis with ever-increasing pressures, it comes to a point where you say enough is enough," she declared. A further strike is planned for April 27.

Wellington night-club dancers protest over exploitative conditions

A group of Wellington night-club dancers protested outside parliament last Sunday over exploitative and abusive conditions rife in the industry. The dancers were fired by the Calendar Girls club earlier this year after seeking to bargain collectively for better contracts.

The dancers oppose the notorious "wage theft" practices that include a strict fining system and employers withholding \$50 to \$100 each shift as "bond" money.

In a petition, which has more than 3,000 signatures, the group is calling for legislation to establish the right of independent adult workers to collectively bargain while maintaining an independent contract status; outlaw all fines and bonds between employers and contractors; and establish a nationwide mandatory maximum of 20 percent that an employer could take from a contractor's profits.



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