

# 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: Tamil Nadu childcare workers demand pay rise and job security**

Thousands of Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers participated in a protest across Tamil Nadu on April 19 with several demands, including a pay increase. Workers with 10 years' experience get 12,000 rupees (\$US146) and helpers 7,000 rupees.

Anganwadi workers want recognition as government employees on a fixed minimum salary of 26,000 rupees. Other demands are for a pension of 50 percent of the last salary drawn and helpers being promoted into workers after five years on the job with no pre-conditions.

Social Welfare and Women Development operate 50,000 centres across the state of which nearly 5,000 are mini-centres. Workers alleged that the government is planning to merge some centres rather than fill vacant posts, and that they are forced to pay electricity bills which they want stopped.

## **Kerala telecommunications workers protest outsourcing**

Hundreds of contract workers from the government-owned telecommunications company BSNL have been demonstrating in front of the general manager's office in Kozhikode, Kerala since April 17. They are protesting the outsourcing of jobs and demanding timely wage payments and welfare measures. Protesters have begun a protest hunger strike.

Workers complained that since outsourcing was introduced in 2020 BSNL's Kerala workforce has been reduced from 7,500 to only 2,000. Contract workers are paid less than permanent. They complained that if their jobs were outsourced wages would drop from 15,000 rupees (\$US183) to between 8,000 and 10,000 rupees. Workers said they will maintain the protest until BSNL agrees to end outsourcing.

## **Workers protest across Tamil Nadu after government extends working day to 12 hours**

Workers demonstrated in major cities across Tamil Nadu on April 21, immediately after the DMK state government passed its Factories

(Amendment) Act 2023. The Act extends the working day for factory workers from 8 to 12 hours. The trade unions have called for a general strike on May 12 while declaring that they only oppose the Act "in its current form."

The government met with the unions and opposition parties on Monday, reaching an agreement to temporarily withhold implementation of the Act. The Act was expected to boost industrial production and attract billions of dollars in investments to the state from companies such as Apple suppliers Foxconn and Pegatron, as well as Nike shoemaker Pou Chen.

## **Bangladeshi survivors of the Rana Plaza tragedy demand compensation**

A group of survivors of the Rana Plaza building collapse tragedy ten years ago demonstrated in Dhaka on April 22. They demanded authorities grant lifetime compensation, access to rehabilitation treatment facilities and assurances that the owners of the building and the factories will be punished.

Rana Plaza, an eight-story building at Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka, housed five garment factories. It collapsed on April 24, 2013, killing over 1,000 people, mostly apparel workers, and injuring over 2,000.

While murder charges have been filed against 37 people, including the building owner, factory owners, and local government officials, the building owner is the only person in custody with many others granted bail.

A recent survey of 200 survivors by ActionAid Bangladesh found that 54.5 percent still are unemployed. Many survivors and family members of those killed have not yet received full compensation.

Nilufa Begum, a Rana Plaza victim, suffered major spinal cord injuries in both legs. "How long do we have to wait for justice? It has been 10 years since I lost my walking ability. I've been waiting for these many days to see justice," she told the media.

Bangladeshi apparel workers are among the most exploited workers in the world. They are compelled to work under intolerable sweatshop conditions with very few safety measures.

## **South Korea: Contract parcel delivery workers at Coupang distribution centre establish union**

Delivery workers for subcontracted companies to Coupang Logistics Services at Yongin in the Seoul Capital Area formed a union on Monday. Coupang is the largest online marketplace in South Korea and is often referred to as the "Amazon of South Korea."

A union spokesperson claimed workers are suffering from Coupang's harsh productivity demands and working conditions, as well as layoffs. He said that during surges of delivery orders workers were expected to complete all deliveries within previous deadlines. "Just recently, five of Coupang delivery workers were laid off because they could not finish delivering their goods on time," he said.

The union accused Coupang of enforcing an illegal employment process, under which the company refuses to guarantee employment for six years or guarantee extension of the employment contract, a basic right under South Korea's Consumer Logistics Service Industry Development Act. The union said delivery workers are also forced to do additional work, such as classifying parcels with no extra pay.

### **Deakin University academics in Victoria strike over pay and workloads**

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at Deakin University held their first strike in ten years on April 21 and protested on the Burwood campus in Melbourne, in opposition to the university's proposed enterprise agreement. The NTEU claims the proposed agreement will not resolve increasing workloads but cut real wages and conditions.

After seven months of negotiations, Deakin offered sub-inflation annual pay increases of just 2.85 percent. It also wants increased casualisation, zero-hour contracts and an end to the current workload model of 40 percent teaching, 40 percent research and 20 percent administration.

The NTEU claims it is demanding annual wage increases equal to the consumer prices index (CPI), plus 1.5 percent but has indicated it would settle for a 15 percent increase over the life of a four-year agreement. This equated to annual increases of only 3.75 percent, well below the current CPI of 6.8 percent. Nor does it account for workers' wage losses since their last pay rise of 2 percent in June 2020.

Deakin management plans to by-pass the union and put its enterprise offer straight to its employees. The NTEU wants maintenance of the 40/40/20 work model and conversion of 150 casual positions to full-time. It is directing its 745 members at the university to vote 'NO' to Deakin's proposal.

### **Cleanaway garbage collectors in Queensland strike for improved pay**

Over a dozen Cleanaway garbage collectors at Harvey Bay, 200km north of Brisbane, walked off the job for 24 hours on April 21 in opposition to the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The industrial action followed 24-hour strikes over several months by Cleanaway garbage collectors in New South Wales, Canberra and Western Australia, who are also in dispute over the company's enterprise offer.

Cleanaway is negotiating separate agreements with the Transport Workers Union (TWU) at several of the company's depots across the country. 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 by using contract labour.

Cleanaway has contracts in every state, many with local councils. The company 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. Workers 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.

The TWU is drawing out the dispute and restricted industrial action to ad hoc one day strikes and making useless appeals to local councils and state governments to intervene and put pressure on the company.

### **New Zealand teachers take further industrial action**

New Zealand secondary teachers initiated a campaign of rostered home learning, rolling strikes and a ban on staff attending out of hours meetings when the second school term began this week.

Teachers will roster students of different year levels for home learning on varying days over four weeks. If talks remain deadlocked by week three, rolling strikes will be held from May 8. The Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) wants salary increases to match inflation and more guidance staff.

The PPTA and NZ Educational Institute (NZEI), with a combined membership of 50,000, are negotiating multiple collective agreements for kindergarten, primary and secondary school staff.

The Ministry of Education has made only one offer to PPTA during 11 months of negotiations. It was rejected by members. In a move welcomed by the union, a period of "facilitated bargaining" has begun with the Employment Relations Authority. The authority warned that the Labour government's public sector pay "restraint" policy is a "potential constraint" on any pay offer.

Primary school principals also began action this week to reduce their "unsustainable" workload by banning after-hours work for two months. The ban includes a freeze on work that principals usually do for the ministry.

Primary teachers are due to vote between May 8 and 12 on whether to accept a new offer being recommended by the NZEI. It includes a below-inflation pay offer of 11-14 percent and more classroom release time, sick leave, and a cultural teaching allowance. Kindergarten teachers will vote at the same time on a revised offer to being them.

The two unions, following a combined one-day national strike in March, have deliberately isolated the teacher workforces from each other while seeking separate settlements with the ministry.



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