

# 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.*

## Nation-wide strike by teachers in Nepal enters second week

Nepal Teachers Federation (NTF) members are maintaining their indefinite strike begun on April 7 to demand implementation of the School Education Act, which provides improved pay and conditions. Thousands of teachers gathered in Kathmandu on April 2 and have been holding demonstrations and sit-ins at Maitighar-Naya Baneshwor in the city centre. They are defying government instructions to end the strike and begin student enrolments for the new academic year.

The federation reaffirmed its position on Tuesday and directed all school principals and teachers to refrain from any official duties, including exam paper checking, publication of results, admissions, training sessions and participation in academic programs like seminars and educational trips.

The teachers oppose the government's failure to endorse the school education bill which has been in a parliamentary committee for over 18 months. The bill contains improved conditions for teachers, such as regular payment of monthly salaries, equal pay and entitlements with civil servants, retention of teachers under the federal government and lifting the entry age of teachers to 40. Teachers also want a dedicated hospital for teachers in line with army, police and civil service hospitals.

The federation is refusing to hold talks with the government. A federation spokesperson said, "We have had ample dialogues and have reached different agreements in the past. Let the law be enacted incorporating the already-agreed provisions."

## India: Karnataka truck owners end indefinite strike over diesel prices

Indefinite strike action begun on Monday over diesel prices and tolls by about 600,000 truck owners was called off yesterday, after talks with their union and the state government. Truck owners are complaining about the price of diesel, which has increased by 5 rupees since June 2024 when the government increased the sales tax on diesel from 18.44 percent to 21.17 percent.

Truck owners were also protesting the collection of toll fees at 18 state highway toll booths, unique to Karnataka. No other Indian state imposes such charges on state highways. The association wants the government to cease collecting the tolls and roll back the diesel price increase.

Although the indefinite strike exempted vehicles transporting essential commodities—vegetables, food items, milk and medicines—the near-complete halt of lorry movements from other states disrupted these

supplies. The Karnataka State Lorry Owners' and Agents' Association has not released any information about the negotiations.

## Mizoram state government workers employed in Centrally Sponsored Schemes demand permanent jobs

About 10,000 temporary government workers employed in Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) in Mizoram state, stopped work on Tuesday to demand permanent jobs. The strike was organised by the All-Mizoram CSS Employees Coordination Committee.

A union spokesperson accused the government of using delaying tactics, saying that the government has no intention of solving the issue. "The office memorandum has so many checklists which cannot be met by us since there were no recruitment rules pertaining to our appointments years ago," the spokesperson said.

The government implemented "no work no pay" to intimidate the striking workers, which they ignored and went ahead with the state-wide strike.

## ASHA workers' strike in Kerala enters third month

Some 26,000 ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists) workers in Kerala have been on a state-wide strike since February 10 against poverty wages and poor conditions. They are determined to maintain their protest outside the Thiruvananthapuram Secretariat and are holding a protest hunger strike and have begun cutting off their hair.

Workers want their monthly wage increased from a meagre 7,000 rupees (\$US80) to about 21,000 rupees, a 5,000-rupee pension, and withdrawal of the compulsory retirement age of 62. Workers complained that they only receive 4,000 to 5,000 rupees of the current monthly pay.

Although critical ASHA services have been crippled, the state government is refusing to give in to the workers' demands and cynically attempted to wipe its hands of the dispute by promising to increase the ASHA honorarium only if the central government "chips in."

## Tamil Nadu power loom workers and owners strike

Power loom workers and owners in Coimbatore and Tiruppur have been on strike since March 19 demanding higher wages from textiles manufacturers. They began a protest hunger strike on April 11.

There are about 150,000 workers from thousands of power loom units in the region. The workers and small-business power loom owners want increased wages and prices to keep pace with the rising cost of living. The workers decided to strike after textile manufactures repeatedly ignored their demand.

### **Pakistan: Punjab health workers protest again over privatisation**

Hundreds of workers from various health unions organised under the Grand Health Alliance (GHA) are continuing a province-wide protest they began on April 10 against privatisation.

Announced in March, the government's privatisation policy includes the outsourcing the operations of Basic Health Units (BHUs) and Rural Health Centres (RHCs). These facilities serve as the foundation of primary healthcare in the province. Public hospitals will also be privatised, according to the announcement.

The union bureaucracies say they oppose privatisation but have made clear to the government that they are willing to compromise and are calling for dialogue with the government "to explore alternatives."

### **Bangladesh garment workers protest factory closure and unpaid wages**

About 200 apparel workers from the AST Garments factory in Narayanganj blocked the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway on Tuesday to oppose closure of the factory and demand unpaid wages. They withdrew the blockade after officers from the Narayanganj Industrial Police and Siddhirganj Police Station forcefully intervened. The workers decided to act after learning on Tuesday that the factory had closed, and equipment removed without prior notice.

US tariffs on Bangladeshi garment exports, particularly the recent 37 percent tariff, are expected to have a devastating impact on the garment industry. The tariffs threaten to significantly reduce garment orders from US buyers, leading to factory closures, job losses, and a decline in household incomes.

### **Keolis Downer bus mechanics in Sydney strike for higher pay**

About 50 heavy-vehicle maintenance mechanics employed by commuter transport contractor Keolis Downer struck this week at the Brookvale and Mona Vale bus depots in Sydney's northern beaches this week. They walked off the job for three hours on April 11 at 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. to demand a substantial pay rise and improved conditions.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) accused Keolis Downer of failing to negotiate proper pay and conditions. A union spokesperson alleged that members' pay has not kept pace with industry rates, saying Keolis Downer is paying \$41 an hour while other companies in the industry are offering \$48 an hour. Workers want pay parity with other mechanics doing the same job.

### **Keolis Downer bus drivers continue industrial action in Newcastle**

Keolis Downer bus drivers in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie in New South Wales turned off fare collecting machines indefinitely on April 3 to force the company to resume negotiations for a new enterprise agreement. The drivers, members of the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU), are maintaining free travel for commuters.

A spokesman from the RTBU claimed Keolis Downer had repeatedly delayed negotiations by rostering local union delegates on shift leaving them unable to attend meetings. He said two key demands were a pay increase and at least 72 hours' notice for changes to drivers' shifts.

### **Fire Rescue Victoria administrative and technical staff strike for pay rise**

Corporate, administrative and technical workers from Fire Rescue Victoria began a week of limited strike action on April 10 in their fight with the state Labor government for a pay rise. Workers at seven fire stations held two-hour stoppages on April 10 and 11 followed by two-hour end of shift stoppages at all FRV facilities from Monday to Thursday.

The United Firefighters Union (UFU) claimed these workers have gone without a pay increase for five years and the government's pay and conditions offer falls far short of their expectation.

### **St Mary's Community Health workers in Tasmania strike over workload**

Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) members at the state-owned St Mary's Community Health Centre on Tasmania's east coast have been taking low level industrial action since March 25, complaining of being "overworked, under-staffed, stressed, and taken advantage of." The Centre provides eight acute/palliative care beds, an Outpatient and Emergency service, physiotherapy and visiting services.

On April 11, staff stopped work for one hour and protested outside the facility accompanied by supporters from the community. Workers are demanding that the state Liberal government provide safe and manageable working conditions.

### **XXXX brewery workers in Queensland strike again for pay rise and protection of existing conditions**

About 20 Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members from the Castlemaine Perkins brewery in Brisbane, which produces XXXX beer, struck for several hours on Thursday in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a 24-hour strike on April 1, which also included around 80 United Workers Union (UWU) members who are part of the dispute.

The unions have been in negotiations with the company since December, demanding a 15 percent pay rise over three years and retention of conditions for workers and apprentices. They claimed Castlemaine Perkins, a division of the Japanese-owned company Lion, is attempting to strip away crucial entitlements.

The company wants to include apprentices in the new agreement but not carry over existing entitlements, such as laundry allowance, side allowances and Christmas bonuses. Workers are also concerned that the

company wants to impose new conditions when they access personal leave for significant health issues.

### **New Zealand senior doctors to strike over pay, staffing**

Up to 5,500 senior doctors in the New Zealand public health system will go on strike next month for higher pay rates and workforce shortages. Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) members voted on April 15 to walk out for 24 hours on May 1, with 86 percent voting in favour.

ASMS director Sarah Dalton said it was the union's first 24-hour strike since it was established in 1989. She said union has been negotiating with Health NZ since last August, but the organisation had not moved "an inch."

Hospital specialists want a 12 percent pay rise but are being offered around 1 to 1.5 percent. Dalton said specialists with 15 years of experience were earning less than a first-year specialist in Australia.

A Health NZ spokesman said if the strike went ahead it could lead to 4,300 elective surgeries or specialist appointments being cancelled. Between 3,000 and 4,300 radiology procedures could also be postponed.

The industrial action follows ongoing strikes by medical laboratory workers and stoppages in December by 30,000 nurses over a pay dispute that remains unresolved.



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