

Forty thousand Indian railway workers march on parliament

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.

Chinese handbag workers strike

One thousand workers at a luxury handbag factory in Guangzhou returned to work on Tuesday, after a nine-day strike. The stoppage was called over long overdue social insurance and housing provident fund contributions. According to local housing and social insurance bureaus, cases of unpaid contributions extend back to 1999.

The factory is owned by Simone Holdings which supplies luxury brands, such as Marc Jacobs, Coach and Michael Kors, with handbags, footwear and other leather products. The company claims to account for 30 percent of the American market and 10 percent of the worldwide market for luxury clothing accessories.

The strike ended after Guangzhou Panyu Simone Handbag Limited President Park Ki-choon agreed to pay all workers their social insurance July 31 and housing provident fund contributions by the end of the year.

Hong Kong taxi drivers protest

Hong Kong taxi drivers held a protest on Thursday morning against Uber's use of unlicensed cabs. Sixteen members of the North West Taxi Driver and Operators Association gathered outside Hong Kong police headquarters, calling for an investigation into Uber for registering drivers with "false documents."

Taxi drivers noted that while Uber advertises tens of thousands of available vehicles in Hong Kong, it has reportedly only obtained several hundred licenses.

In another protest on the same day, some 40 taxis slowly drove around near government offices at Admiralty and Wan Chai, demanding that Uber be banned from the city. Another 60 cabs parked outside the company's office.

Indonesia: Surakarta taxi drivers strike to defend bonuses

Thousands of drivers working for Go-Car in Surakarta, Indonesia

returned to work last Sunday after a strike that began on March 7. The stoppage was against the company's decision to raise the threshold in a points scheme that determines whether they receive bonuses.

Go-Car taxi service is run by PT Gojek Indonesia, whose head office is in Jakarta. GoJek not only raised the minimum number of points to be eligible for a bonus from 12 to 16 but also lowered the bonus amount from 300,000 rupiah (US\$21.80) to 250,000 rupiah.

One driver stated: "We reject the new points threshold. Even to reach 12 points, we have to work 14 hours a day. Raising it to 16 means killing us slowly." Many of the drivers are now threatening to leave Go-Car. Rivals Uber and Grab operate similar taxi services in Surakarta.

Papua New Guinea miners stop work

Gold miners employed by the Western Australian-based multinational St Barbara returned to work at Simberi in Papua New Guinea (PNG) on Thursday, after striking on March 7.

Around 60 percent of the workforce took part in the stoppage, which was reportedly part of a protracted dispute over leave provisions and cuts to conditions. The company responded by labelling the strike as "illegal" last week and shutting down production entirely. St Barbara threatened to sack all employees who did not report for work on Monday.

The PNG government, which has a record of violently suppressing strikes and protests, intervened with representatives of the Department of Labour and Human Resources overseeing mediation this week. St Barbara issued a statement on Thursday declaring that work at the site had resumed, after "misunderstandings" were resolved.

Thousands of Indian railway workers march on parliament

About 40,000 to 50,000 rail workers marched to the Indian parliament on March 13 to demand withdrawal of a new employee-contribution national pension scheme. Prior to introduction of the current scheme, all government employee pensions were noncontributory. The demonstrating rail workers were also demanding that the minimum monthly wage be increased to 26,000 rupees (\$US400), up from the current 18,000 rupees.

Indian rural child health care workers protest

Around 500 rural child health care (anganwadi) workers and helpers protested in the streets in Jammu & Kashmir on March 13. The low-paid workers were demanding immediate payment of outstanding wages, an increase in the honorarium payment, implementation of a pension scheme, and gratuity of 200,000 rupees for workers and 100,000 for helpers. Currently these workers only paid 3,600 rupees per month and their helpers just 1,800.

Ongoing protests by Bangladesh garment workers

About 2,000 workers from Barnali Fabrics in Dhaka demonstrated on March 10 for the immediate payment of three months' outstanding wages. The protesting workers blocked the Dhaka-Munshiganj highway in the Char Mukhtarpur area of Munshiganj for about three hours. The blockade ended after district administration officials, the police and the Munshiganj deputy commissioner claimed they would talk to company authorities to resolve the conflict.

On March 11, garment workers from ATS Apparels in Kaliakair stopped work and staged a demonstration to demand payment of their February wages. The striking workers, who obstructed traffic on Dhaka-Tangail highways, were baton-charged by police and attacked with tear gas and rubber bullets. Up to 20 workers were injured and hospitalised by the police violence.

Pakistan: Government health workers strike in two provinces

Balochistan government hospital paramedics and Young Doctors Association (YDA) members held a two-day strike late last week. The health workers were demanding a pay rise and adequate funding for the resource-strapped hospitals in Pakistan's poorest province.

The province-wide walkout forced the closure of outpatient departments and disrupted many other hospital services. Health workers accused provincial government leaders of failing to honour previous promises and warned that there would be ongoing strike action. The YDA has repeatedly protested over these issues but ended action after being told by the government officials that their demands would be met.

On March 7, paramedics from government hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa went on strike and demonstrated outside the Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar. The workers were demanding the establishment of a new service structure, promotions and provision for limited private practice as previously agreed by the provincial government. They also demanded withdrawal of punitive transfers for rank-and-file workers.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Paramedics Association, which called the protest, warned there would be more industrial action in two weeks if the government fails to resolve their demands.

Pakistan power workers demonstrate in Lahore

Large numbers of workers from the state-owned Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) protested outside the company's headquarters on March 13. They were demanding permanent jobs for all contract employees and improved workplace safety. The protest was organised by the All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union.

LESCO and other power distribution companies under the authority of the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), have been earmarked for speedy privatisation by consecutive Pakistan governments. While power workers have repeatedly protested against the sell-offs, their union has opposed nationally unified action and ensured that workers are restricted to limited strikes and protests.

Sri Lankan non-academic workers ban all essential services work

Around 15,000 striking non-academic workers from all Sri Lankan universities banned all essential services work this week. The two-week-old strike has brought university operations throughout Sri Lanka to a standstill.

The latest ban, which was announced by the University Trade Union Joint Committee (UTUJC) after the government and education authorities refused to negotiate, began on March 14.

The non-academic workers want a 20 percent wage rise, a language-proficiency allowance, increased concessionary loans and the introduction of medical insurance and a pension scheme.

Sri Lankan government surveyors begin strike action

Sri Lankan Government Surveyors Association members began three-day strikes on March 14. The industrial action is in protest against the government's decision to transfer surveying duties to the US-based Land Administration Solutions group. Association members struck last December over the same issue but have been ignored by the government.

Sri Lankan healthcare workers demand livable wage

Seventy-three contract healthcare workers from Chilaw General Hospital went on strike late last month in protest against drastic cuts to their daily wage.

The contract workers were previously employed by the North West Provincial Council and paid 850 rupees per day. Their services, however, were privatised late last year and taken over by Floor Care, which slashed their daily wage to 400 rupees (\$US2.50), after deducting provident funds.

This new daily wage is not enough to purchase food and other basic necessities, forcing the contract workers to resign or seek loans or other financial assistance from fellow hospital workers.

The strike ended after hospital management promised to replace the contracting company. The workers, however, have yet to be fully remunerated for their work this year.

Bus maintenance staff in Canberra to impose work bans

Around 80 bus maintenance workers at ACTION, which operates bus services in Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), have voted to impose work bans in their dispute for a new Enterprise Agreement (EA). The previous agreement expired in the company in mid-2017.

ACTION management wants cuts to working conditions and other demands, including an extension of workshop operating hours, to drive up productivity. The negotiations stalled after maintenance workers rejected these demands.

Following an application by the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), the Fair Work Commission (FWC) granted a 30-day period when workers can take so-called “protected” industrial action.

The limited action, which includes bans on overtime and paperwork, is an attempt by the union to dissipate workers’ anger over management demands whilst having minimal impact on bus services.

New Zealand: Lyttleton port workers strike

Lyttleton port workers began strike action on March 13 in protest against low wages and a management proposal to run the port 24/7. While the industrial action at the South Island facility was due to continue for two weeks, the Rail and Maritime Union (RMTU) withdrew strike notices the next day until the following Tuesday.

The RMTU, which is desperately working to divert port workers’ frustrations, did not call any industrial action until after 22 fruitless meetings with LPC management.

The RMTU announced a March 8 strike but then postponed to March 13, which further angered workers, because the LPC refused to pay them full wages for work done on March 8 and 9. LPC only agreed to pay full wages after the union withdrew continuation of March 13 walkout.

Last week in Auckland, the RMTU called off planned industrial action by rail workers who are attempting to stop the introduction of driver-only operations and destruction of 200 jobs in the city’s public transport system. The union has provided no details about their negotiations with Transdev and Auckland Transport.



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