

Around 1.5 million Uber and Ola drivers strike in India

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 March 2018

Indian taxi drivers strike for higher pay

About 1.5 million Uber and Ola drivers began an indefinite strike last Sunday midnight to demand better pay. While the strike was centered in Mumbai it also included drivers in New Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune and other major cities.

The strikers said they were only making a fraction of what they had been promised when they began working for the taxi companies. According to reports, ride-sharing companies made \$US371 million in India last year.

One driver, Tanveer Pasha, told the media that he makes about \$10 a day but that most of this goes to repaying his car loan. "I can't live on the remaining Rs200 [\$3] and run a family," he said.

Strikers told the *Times of India* that they had been promised monthly incomes of about \$1,500 and that many workers quit their salaried jobs and took out car loans to become Uber or Ola drivers. Small farmers also reportedly sold their land and bought cars. The drivers are threatening to remain on strike until Uber and Ola commit to paying the monthly wages they had promised.

Indian rural healthcare workers demonstrate

Hundreds of rural healthcare (anganwadi) workers and helpers and midday meal employees demonstrated in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, on March 20 for payment of long overdue wages and better working conditions. The protest organised by the Centre for Indian Trade Unions, which is affiliated to the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist).

Andhra Pradesh Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union officials denounced the state and central Indian governments at the protest and called for anganwadi workers' minimum salary to be set at 18,000 rupees per month (\$US359) and for payment of a 3,000-rupee monthly pension.

Municipal workers protest in India over non-payment of wages

Municipal workers in Ludhiana, Punjab protested on March 20 over the non-payment of wages. Members of the Municipal Safari Union, Municipal Workers Union, Municipal Mechanics Union and the Disposal Workers Union were involved the demonstration.

The cleaning workers said that they had not received any wages for the

past eight to nine months and that if the council did not pay in the near future, they would take indefinite strike action.

Rajasthan ambulance workers take state-wide strike action

Ambulance workers began a state-wide strike in Rajasthan on March 19. The walkout impacted on about 1,500 emergency services across the state.

The strikers called for the government to end privatisation of the services and for a 1,000-rupee annual pay rise, introduction of a pension scheme and an end to inhumane and backbreaking working conditions. The ambulance workers struck for similar demands in 2010, 2013 and 2015 but the government ignored their demands.

The Rajasthan Ambulance Employees' Union called off the industrial action Thursday night following a 5 percent pay increase deal with management and a 2 percent performance increase starting on April 1. Ambulance management has reneged on previous deals.

Pakistan livestock department workers demand promotions

Livestock & Dairy Development Research of Agriculture Department workers in Peshawar demonstrated outside the Press Club on March 14 to demand faster promotions.

During the protest workers denounced the government for failing to upgrade employees' positions despite previously agreeing to do so. Most workers, especially low-ranking laboratory workers, have not received a promotion for the last ten years.

Pakistan steel workers demand outstanding pay

Hundreds of Pakistan Steel Mill (PSM) workers blocked the National Highway in Karachi last Saturday to demand five months' outstanding wages from the state-owned enterprise. Union officials called off the demonstration hours later after authorities promised to release the pending salaries.

PSM has been targeted by Pakistan's Privatisation Commission, whose program is closely monitored by the International Monetary Fund. The mill's operations have drastically been reduced in the past three years and

hundreds of contract and daily-wage employees' positions axed from PSM's workforce.

Steel workers have repeatedly opposed privatisation of the steel mill and ongoing salary payment delays.

Bangladesh cleaners end industrial action

About 1,600 temporary workers and 541 permanent employees from Barisal City Corporation (BCC) called off an indefinite strike on Tuesday. The walkout began on February 17 and was over the non-payment of six months' salaries.

Barisal mayor and Barisal Deputy Commissioner met with workers and assured them that the BCC would pay them two months' salaries and three months' provident fund. The remaining arrears, workers were told, would be paid gradually.

BCC workers have taken industrial action four times in the past two years over unpaid salaries. The BCC is a self-governed municipal administration. Most of its temporary workers are involved in cleaning the city.

Bangladesh garment workers attacked by police

At least 20 workers from United Trousers Garments in Gouripur, near Dhaka, were injured when police attacked a demonstration last Friday. The workers were protesting outside their factory the night before to demand unpaid salaries.

The police attacked one worker at about midnight on Thursday and then provoked other garment workers. Protesters refused to return to work the next day.

Sri Lankan university non-academic workers continue strike action

About 15,000 non-academic university workers remain on strike, three weeks after walking out at the end of February to demand a 20 percent wage rise, a language-proficiency allowance, increased concessionary loans and the introduction of medical insurance and a pension scheme.

Last week the industrial action was extended to all essential services, bringing university operations throughout Sri Lanka to a standstill. Thousands of strikers protested in Colombo on March 20.

The University Trade Union Joint Committee (UTUJC), which called the strike, said that March 19 talks with the finance ministry and the coordinating secretary to the prime minister had collapsed and the strike would continue.

Sri Lankan government surveyors union ends strike

Around 700 striking government surveyors returned to work on March 21, following negotiations between their union, the Sri Lankan Government Surveyors Association, and the government. The union shut down all industrial action after agreeing to present the government with

new productivity proposals.

The strike was in protest against a government's decision to transfer surveying to the US-based Land Administration Solutions group. Hundreds of surveyors demonstrated in Colombo on March 16 as part of their industrial action.

Cambodian villagers protest shoddy road construction

About 100 protesters blocked a road at the Ang Knol commune in Cambodia's Takeo province last Sunday morning. Villagers closed the road by burning tires and demanded that state authorities address their concerns about the road, which generates large amounts of dust during the dry season.

According to residents, heavy vehicles pass through the 18-kilometre stretch of road. Construction of the road began in 1998 but has never been completed or covered with asphalt.

Takeo's deputy governor, Chhour Sothea, issued an empty promise, claiming that the Transport Ministry would fix the road but also cited "budgeting issues." More than half of Cambodia's 6,000 kilometres of roads are classified as "poor" or "bad."

Melbourne waterside workers strike over wages and conditions

Maritime workers at the MIRRAT car unloading facility at Melbourne's Webb Dock struck on March 17 and 18 after negotiations with their employer, Qube Logistics, broke down over the terms of a new workplace enterprise agreement. The company responded to the walkout and a picket by flying in strike-breakers by helicopter to unload a ship.

The Maritime Workers Union (MUA) says that negotiations over a new agreement have been going on for the last two and a half years and the company has reneged on a promise to restore previous rosters at the facility. In 2015, the MUA negotiated a cost-cutting deal with the company which ended a roster system consisting of seven weeks' work and one week off.

Qube Logistics has applied to the Fair Work industrial relations courts to have the agreement terminated. If this occurs, workers' wages could be cut by up to 40 percent. MUA members returned to work this week but will only work seven-hour shifts.

Sydney waterside workers call snap strike at Port Botany

MUA members at Hutchinson Ports at Port Botany in Sydney walked off the job on Wednesday in a dispute over training issues. The union wants the company to appoint a union-employed trainer.

The walkout violates Australia's Fair Work laws, which only allow industrial action during the bargaining period for a new enterprise work agreement, and then only after a secret ballot and approval by the Fair Work Commission (FWC).

Hutchinson Ports issued a memo threatening to fine individuals involved in the strike, which it claims is "unlawful behavior." The MUA members have since returned to work and the training issue conflict will be heard in a conciliation conference in the FWC.

Queensland brewery workers plan rolling work stoppages

The United Voice union issued a press release on Wednesday stating that 100 workers at the Castlemaine Perkins brewery in Milton, Queensland will walk off the job on March 26 as part of a campaign of rolling stoppages for a new enterprise agreement.

The workers previously voted to take industrial action over the company's new enterprise agreement "offer," which includes job cuts. In recent years the company has slashed the brewery's workforce by about one third or about 40 jobs.

Perkins management has threatened to shut the brewery if workers do not accept the latest attacks on their conditions and further increased casualisation of the workforce.

Castlemaine Perkins is owned by Japanese-based brewing giant Lion, which has other breweries in Australia, including Tooheys in Western Sydney, West End in South Australia and Boags in Tasmania.

New Zealand port workers continue strike at Lyttleton

Around 200 workers at the South Island's Lyttleton Port continued strike action this week, starting midnight Tuesday and continuing for five days. The strike began on March 13 and was set to run for two weeks but the Rail and Maritime Union (RMTU) deferred the strike after one day.

The union issued the deferral after media reports claimed the strike would have an adverse impact of Lyttleton Port Company's profits and other industries in the Canterbury region.

The workers are striking over pay and safety concerns because the LPC wants to introduce a 24/7 roster. There is also division over workers represented by the RMTU and the Maritime Union NZ. RMTU workers have rejected the roster that Maritime Union NZ workers have but want equal pay.

The RMTU continues to divide the port workers, cutting them from the rail workers in Auckland and Wellington, where the union is working with management to impose deals that will result in the destruction of hundreds of jobs and lower wages.

New Zealand nurses prepare for industrial action

New Zealand nurses are preparing to reject a pay offer from the District Health Boards (DHB) and vote to strike for a better deal. The ballot ended on March 23.

The DHBs, which are critically starved of funding from decades of successive National and Labour governments, offered a 2 percent annual salary increase in December last year. New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) rejected this deal.

Nurses have issued a petition demanding the government increase pay and have established a Facebook page, which now has over 40,000 members, to discuss and take forward their demands. While the union plans to organise nationwide protests, NZNO spokesperson Cee Payne has rejected strike action, claiming that "everybody in hospital is critically ill."





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