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Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Protests involving thousands of workers took place across China last week, coinciding with May Day.

Rallies and strikes occurred in Shijiazhuang province, in Zhumadian city in Henan Province, Yuncheng in Shanxi Province and in Jiangxi Province. Hong Kong's Cable News stated that there had been "worker protests demanding a salary raise and improved labour conditions at construction sites and public spaces in 20 to 30 cities" across mainland China.

Over 10,000 crane operators protested in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, demanding a larger salary. In the city of Anji, in East China's Zhejiang Province, crane operators from different private companies had been on strike for a week "with no result."

"The drivers are 24 hours on call with a monthly salary as low as 4,000 yuan (\$611), and they have nowhere to live but a large, poor container on the construction site," a worker named Jack Li told the *Global Times*. He explained that the work was "high risk," adding, "what the drivers are asking for is a monthly salary of at least 7,000 yuan and normal working hours." Protesters have reportedly denounced the state-controlled unions.

South Korean workers celebrate May Day

Thousands of workers rallied in Central Seoul on May Day, demanding a higher minimum wage and improved working conditions. The rally was organised by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. Authorities estimated that 10,000 workers participated.

Protesters chanted slogans calling for a 10,000-won minimum wage and job permanency, with full wages and conditions, for so-called irregular workers. Nearly five million South Koreans out of a total workforce of 26.4 million are classed as irregular workers. They are on temporary contracts and denied many rights and benefits.

Workers also denounced the restructuring of the shipbuilding and car industries, which are being sold off and closed piecemeal.

Protests in Hong Kong

Up to 5,000 workers in different areas of Hong Kong marched on Tuesday's Labour Day, demanding standard working hours and opposing government proposals to access employees' pensions.

The largest march was organised by the Federation of Trade Unions (FTU). Participants wore panda-themed caps, with black rings around the eyes signifying a lack of sleep from long hours. They condemned the plans to use workers' pensions to cover long service leave and severance payments. Other demands from workers included the introduction of 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.

India: Petroleum workers strike in Assam state

Thousands of petroleum workers took strike action in Assam state beginning on April 26. The stoppage, which also hit the neighboring mountainous and land-locked state of Meghalaya, sparked warnings of fuel shortages.

The strike was called by the Assam Petroleum Mazdoor Union (APMU). The workers were demanding higher pay, including a monthly wage increase of 15,000 rupees for oil tanker drivers, 8,500 rupees for handymen and 10,500 rupees for pump operators. The stoppage was called off by the APMU on April 30 without the wage dispute having been resolved.

The strike was carried out in defiance of a ban on all industrial action in the oil and gas sector, imposed by the Assam government in March under the Essential Service Maintenance act.

Tata Motors workers strike for deceased co-worker in Uttarakhand

Tata Motors workers in the Indian city of Pantnagar, in Uttarakhand state, temporarily stopped work on April 30, after one of their co-workers died of cardiac arrest on April 28.

The workers, many of whom are employed on a casual and part-time basis, went on strike demanding compensation for the deceased worker's family. They also called on the company to hire one of his relatives.

The plant produces the famous Tata ACA Indian mini-truck. A spokesperson for Tata management pledged to settle the dispute "amicably." He denounced the strikers for disrupting production, however, declaring that "some temporary workers are leading an agitation

in the plant premises seeking unreasonable demands from the management.”

Air India workers in Maharashtra protest privatisation

Air India workers belonging to various unions participated in protests against the proposed privatisation of the carrier on May Day. The action was called by a joint forum consisting of 12 unions.

Representatives of the bourgeois Congress party and the fascistic Shiv Sena organisation attended the rally, and falsely claimed to oppose the sell-off.

The BJP government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi sanctioned disinvestment from the debt-laden airliner early last year. The administration is planning to offload up to 76 percent of its equity capital. The move is part of a broader pro-business agenda, continuing a raft of privatisations imposed by previous governments, including those led by the Congress Party.

The unions have sought to channel widespread fears over mass sackings and pay cuts behind impotent appeals to the government, and the promotion of illusions in Congress and other capitalist parties.

Bangladesh jute mill workers hold half-day strike

Workers at eight state-owned jute mills in Khulna division staged a half-day strike last Sunday. They carried out protests blocking the Khulna-Jessore highway in the Atrai Industrial Area and in front of Jessore Jute Mill.

Their demands include payment of overdue wages and the establishment of a commission to improve pay and permanency.

The workers, members of the Alim Jute Mill Workers Union, declared they would take further action if their demands were not met by May 4. They have also stated that they will boycott the upcoming Khulna city election.

In January, more than 25,000 workers at the eight mills held several demonstrations and strikes.

Bangladeshi police attack protesting auto-rickshaw drivers

A clash between police and auto-rickshaw drivers in Habiganj, in north-eastern Bangladesh, left at least 40 workers and 10 cops injured on April 27.

Several hundred drivers formed a human chain by the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway to protest harassment and extortion by highway police officers. A contingent of police arrived at the scene and demanded that the protesters leave.

When the drivers refused, the police charged with batons and dispersed them.

Shortly after, the drivers returned and blocked the highway. Police fired blank shots and threw teargas shells.

Punjab trainee nurses strike for dues in Pakistan

Trainee nurses at government-run hospitals in Jhang and Sargodha took strike action on April 25, demanding the immediate payment of dues.

More than 100 trainee nurses at Sargodha District Headquarters Teaching Hospital protested. They have not been paid for the past 11 months. The doctors and paramedics associations in the hospital supported the stoppage.

Trainee nurses at the Jhang District Headquarters Hospital have not received wages for the past 10 months. They are supposed to be paid a meagre 20,000 rupees (\$US172.75) per month. The nurses said despite the government's failure to pay them, they were charged for food and other amenities.

The authorities previously promised to pay the outstanding funds, but failed to do so. The demonstration was called off after an official promise that the issue would be resolved within 10 days.

Pakistan: Sindh prosecution department employees protest

Prosecution department employees and government lawyers in the Mirpurkhas and Khairpur districts of Sindh boycotted court proceedings to demand increases to pay and allowances, including health benefits.

A demonstration was held outside Mirpurkhas district and sessions court on April 26. In Khairpur, public prosecutors and court staff struck from April 25-26 to call for their pay grades to be raised in line with other the judicial staff.

Nurses' union calls off Sydney strike action

A ballot of several hundred nurses and midwives at Manly and Mona Vale hospitals in Sydney on April 27 registered overwhelming support for strike action.

The result underscored widespread opposition to the handling of staff transfers from the two hospitals to the new Northern Beaches hospital to be run by private operator Healthscope.

Manly Hospital is scheduled to close in October this year and Mona Vale Hospital will become a walk-in health and rehabilitation centre.

A four-hour stoppage was due to take place Wednesday but was called off by the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association the night before, after Healthscope agreed to negotiate staff transfer issues.

Workers have raised a host of concerns including shift times and being allocated qualification appropriate duties. Nurses and midwives who wish to return to the public health system have not been guaranteed they will retain their leave entitlements following the transfer.

New Zealand: More bus driver strikes in Auckland

Around 50 drivers in Auckland's Birkenhead area have voted in favour of a strike. First Union reported on April 26 that a stoppage has been scheduled, but no further details have been publicly announced.

Birkenhead bus drivers are demanding improved pay and a resolution of rostering issues. They are protesting a company flat pay rate and the removal of allowances for long-standing employees.

Drivers in Auckland, also represented by First Union, as well as the Tramways Union, took part in rolling stoppages from April 17. They were

set to continue for two weeks but were called off by the union after only three days.

Hundreds of New Zealand midwives protest poor pay

Midwives in several New Zealand cities marched on Thursday to protest poor pay and increasingly difficult working conditions. The average hourly wage for rural midwives is \$7.23 and for urban midwives, \$12.80. This is well below the national minimum wage of \$16.50.

Along with obesity and an increasing number of scans, midwives cite socio-economic pressures as contributing to their workload. They are only paid for seven visits they make to women. Further visits go unpaid, aside from a bonus they earn after twelve visits. They are also unpaid for travel costs and administrative work.

Two hundred midwives in Wellington delivered a petition to parliament with over 13,000 signatures, in line with the attempt by the unions to channel anger behind impotent appeals to the parties of big business. Minister of Health David Clark and Minister for Women Julia Anne Genter met with protesters but have made no promises to increase their wages.

The protests are taking place as thousands of nurses are voting to strike against low pay and stressful working conditions. The government has refused to boost nurse's wages.

New Caledonia health workers strike

For the past two weeks nurses and other health workers have been on strike at the Magnin, Baie-des-Citrons and Anse-Vata private clinics in New Caledonia. Doctors joined the industrial action on April 30. Patients have been referred to Noumea's public hospital.

The workers are angry about the underfunding of the health system, including the fact that reimbursements for the private hospitals have not been adjusted for years.

Negotiations are continuing, involving mediators appointed by the French territory's government, clinic directors and the COGETRA trade union alliance.

The ongoing industrial action follows a general strike in French Polynesia in February against a plan to raise the pension age. It also coincided with a visit to New Caledonia on May 4 by French President Emmanuel Macron, whose government is implementing drastic austerity measures that have triggered mass strikes and protests in France.



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