

Delivery drivers strike in China, Korean Airline pilots and workers demand dismissal of company chairman

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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## Chinese delivery drivers strike against pay cut

Lalamove delivery van drivers struck in at least five Chinese cities over the past two weeks in protest against sudden pay cuts. The fees they received per delivery were slashed overnight late last month.

Lalamove was founded in Hong Kong in 2013. The company, which operates in more than 100 cities across Asia, claims to match 15,000,000 registered customers with a pool of 2,000,000 registered van, truck and motorcycle drivers.

The Chinese drivers, employed on a contract basis, were previously paid 38 yuan per delivery. This was previously slashed to 30 yuan and was last month further reduced to 28 yuan. An allowance per kilometre travelled was also cut.

On May 6, a row of about 50 vans moved slowly through the streets of Shenzhen displaying placards opposing “unilateral pay cuts.” Other protests have since occurred in Changsha, Chengdu, Kunming and Xi’an districts. Drivers have also denounced rising fuel prices and the fact that they have to pay for the maintenance of their own vehicles.

## Korean Air Lines staff stage protest

Hundreds of Korean Air Lines workers protested in Seoul on May 4, demanding the resignation of company chairman Cho Yang-ho and his family members. The rally followed an incident last month, during which Yang-ho’s daughter, Cho Hyun-min, who is also a company executive, threw water at an attendee during a business meeting.

Workers, including pilots, flight attendants and administrative staff, carried placards stating “No mercy” and “Cho Yang-ho, OUT.” They also demanded greater transparency in the operations of the company.

There is widespread hostility among workers to the activities of family-run conglomerates and their quasi-aristocratic practices. In 2014, Cho Hyun-ah, another of Yang-ho’s daughters, demanded that a plane cancel its flight prior to take off, after objecting to the manner in which she was served nuts in a first-class flight from New York.

In response to the recent backlash, Yang-ho and his daughters have stepped down from their positions at the airline and made public apologies for their behaviour.

## India: Department of Horticulture workers strike in Tamil Nadu

About 600 contract workers from the Department of Horticulture began indefinite strike action in Nignal on May 5 to demand permanent jobs and the same benefits as full time employees. Many of the workers have been on contracts for over 20 years and are paid only 250 rupees (\$US3.70) per day.

On Monday, the District Collector told strikers that the district administration would discuss their demands with state authorities. The protesters, however, refused to return to work, declaring their claims should be settled immediately. The next day they held a sit-down protest outside the Government Botanical Garden. The industrial action was organised by the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), which is under the control of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (CPI).

## Ola-Uber drivers strike for 72 hours in Assam

Ola-Uber drivers in Assam began three-day strike action on May 7 to demand a minimum 2,500-rupee daily pay, increased incentive payments, an extra bonus for more than eight hours work, a freeze on new vehicle enrolments and other demands.

The industrial action was organised by the All Assam Cab Operators’ Union (AACOU). Drivers also called for a welfare scheme and a maximum 10 percent commissions for app-hailing operators so that drivers receive a minimum fare of 100 rupees.

AACOU president Ismael Ali told the media that Uber had not paid incentives to cab drivers for at least two months. “If the authorities do not respond this time, we will call an all-India strike as cab drivers and owners across the country are facing similar problems,” he said.

Uber management responded to the industrial action by falsely accusing the drivers of “violence and vandalism.” The allegations were rejected as “baseless” by the AACOU.

While the All India Road Transport Workers Federation supported the industrial action it made no effort to expand the strike.

## Indian rural health and childcare workers strike in Punjab state

Hundreds of anganwadi (rural health and childcare) workers went on strike and protested across Punjab on May 6 for higher pay. Strikers demonstrated outside the homes of several Legislative Assembly members and cabinet ministers from the state's ruling Congress Party government. In Abohar protesters waved black flags and chanted slogans denouncing the state government.

The All Punjab Anganwadi Employees' Union, which organised the industrial action, wants its Punjabi members paid the same rates as anganwadi workers in Haryana state.

### **Pakistan: Lahore doctors protest**

Young Doctors Association members in government hospitals in Lahore demonstrated on May 3 over delays in the implementation of the service structure and time-scale promotions. Demonstrators also demanded higher pay packages for house officer, medical officer and postgraduate trainee positions, and opposed privatisation of government healthcare services

The protest involved doctors from the Jinnah Hospital, Services Hospital, Shaikh Zayed Hospital, General Hospital and Punjab Institute of Cardiology. The demonstration brought traffic to halt for three hours on the city's main roads.

### **Islamabad teachers end four-month strike**

A four-month strike by thousands of daily-wage teachers from government-run educational institutes owned by the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) in Islamabad was called off by the Daily Wages Teaching Association (DWTA) on Tuesday after authorities agreed to make them permanent employees.

Over 2,000 teachers are employed by FDE in so-called model schools. They are paid as little as 12,500 rupees (\$US108.14) per month. While the DWTA ended all industrial action, it is not clear whether the government agreed to double teachers wages and pay at least nine months outstanding dues as demanded by the strikers.

### **Pakistan: Peshawar woodworkers demonstrate**

Pak German Wood Working Centre employees in Peshawar demonstrated on Tuesday in support of their demand for permanent jobs. The protest was held outside the Small Industrial Development Board office in Peshawar.

More than 100 employees have worked for the company for 18 years on a fixed wage basis and without a proper service structure. The demonstration, the second since March, was organised by Pak-German Wood Working Employees Union. Company management continue to ignore workers' demands.

### **Sri Lankan railway workers demand salary rise**

Railway workers from 11 grades, including station masters, engine

drivers, guards and superintendents, began a national strike on midday May 9 for higher pay and other demands.

The Railway Services Joint Trade Union leadership ended the strike within an hour, however, claiming that they had been contacted by senior government ministers and told that the cabinet had agreed to grant the union's wage claims.

No concrete details or a timeframe have been released on when the increases will be granted. Sri Lankan Railways employs more than 14,000 workers.

### **Thousands of Australian workers participate in "Change the Rules" protests**

Up to 100,000 workers took part in a protest in Melbourne last Wednesday, called by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, as part of its bogus "Change the Rules" campaign. An estimated 3,000 participated in a Brisbane rally on Monday, following smaller protests in Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and regional centres across the country.

The Melbourne event included a partial stop-work by large sections of workers in construction, the electrical trades and the ports. Other sections of workers, including teachers and public servants also had a strong presence. The march brought traffic in the city to a standstill throughout much of the afternoon.

The attendance reflected growing opposition to the assault on jobs, wages, conditions and social spending. Union officials who addressed the gathering sought to divert these sentiments behind the re-election of a big business federal Labor government. They were silent on the fact that the current industrial relations regime, which outlaws virtually all industrial and political action by workers, was imposed by the previous federal Labor government, with the full support of the unions.

### **South Australian nurses campaign against external triaging**

Nurses at Royal Adelaide Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in South Australia have initiated a public campaign against external triaging, and the broader gutting of safety standards as a result of overcrowding and insufficient resources stemming from decades of cuts to healthcare funding.

Under the practice, nurses are forced to begin triaging patients in waiting rooms and in ambulances parked outside hospitals. The injured and sick are sometimes left alone, as nurses go from one ambulance to another to triage patients.

Nurses have warned that the practice is endangering their own safety and that of their patients. They have also reported feeling sick as a result of prolonged exposure to exhaust fumes.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Association has sought to limit the campaign to nurses wearing purple scrubs. This is in line with their fraudulent claims that the healthcare crisis can be resolved through appeals to hospital administrations along with Labor and Liberal-National governments.

### **New Zealand Uber drivers to strike**

Uber drivers are planning to strike on Monday over low pay and lack of company support. Uber drivers in New Zealand often earn below the minimum wage of \$NZ16.50, particularly in Auckland, the country's largest city.

One driver representing the group, Sher Abid, told the media that it was impossible to work for Uber full time when a trip to Auckland airport only earned him as little as \$6 or \$7. Uber takes 25 to 28 percent of the fare.

The drivers are also want clearer information on what insurance coverage they have, how they should be paying taxes, and a more transparent complaints procedure so they can rectify mistakes and avoid having their accounts deactivated.

The group is calling on other drivers to join them in the strike.

### **Bus drivers strike in rural New Zealand town**

Sixteen school bus drivers for Go Bus struck on Tuesday in Te Awamutu, a rural town in the North Island's Waikato region. In March, the semi-retired drivers were given a pay rise of a few cents above minimum wage, according to the First Union.

The union says the drivers want a "living wage," or around \$4 above the minimum wage of \$16.50. Go Bus claimed its wage increase was "very generous" and "well in excess of inflation."

First Union organised limited strikes for Auckland bus drivers in April. The industrial action was originally scheduled to run over two weeks but was dropped after only three days.

### **New Caledonia health workers strike suspended**

After nearly two weeks on strike, health workers at three private hospitals in New Caledonia returned to work on May 7.

The strike was suspended until May 20, while negotiations continue with mediators appointed by the French territory's government, clinic directors and the COGETRA trade union alliance.

The issues that led to the strike have not been resolved. Nurses, doctors and other workers at the Magnin, Baie-des-Citrons and Anse-Vata clinics are angry about the underfunding of the health system, including the fact that reimbursements for the private hospitals have not been adjusted for years.



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