

Indian garment workers demand higher pay, teachers demonstrate in China

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Chinese teachers protest

About 200 teachers demonstrated last Sunday morning at Lu'an in China's Anhui province over unpaid performance bonuses. Teachers marched to the municipal government office with banners demanding payment of arrears and better treatment.

Hundreds of police arrived at the scene and allegedly beat some of the demonstrators. Sixteen were reportedly arrested. Photos and a video being circulated on Chinese social media show police officers pulling and shoving individuals as they try to escape arrest and a woman on a hospital stretcher.

Officials have claimed they do not owe the teachers any pay or benefits.

The strike comes a week after more than 2,000 teachers across the northern region of Inner Mongolia took to the streets of the regional capital Hohhot. Teachers from kindergartens and elementary and high schools demonstrated against the Chinese Communist Party's widespread layoff of teachers, demanding reemployment, compensation and pension plans.

India: Karnataka garment workers to protest for higher pay

Over 400,000 Karnataka garment workers are threatening protests for immediate payment of previously agreed wage rises. In the lead-up to February's state assembly elections, the then Congress government promised to increase minimum wages in the tailoring industry.

Congress leaders said unskilled garment workers in Bangalore would receive 445 (\$US6.63) rupees per day, double the existing salary of 220 rupees, high-skilled workers 593 rupees and there would be higher salaries for other workers. Draft legislation for the increases, however, was withdrawn by the Labour Department in late March, after industry bosses objected.

Under existing labour laws, wages are supposed to be increased at least once every three years or a maximum of five years. There have only been four revisions in the last 38 years. The last garment sector wage increase was in 2014, after a High Court order.

The garment industry employs around 450,000 people across the state, with 350,000 in Bangalore. According to the Garment and Textile Workers Union, 90 percent of the garment workers in Bangalore are women, most of whom are the single bread-winners for their families. Almost 10 million people are employed in related industries such as

printing, dyeing and spinning.

Shivraj Press workers protest in India's Maharashtra state

Fifty-five workers from Shivraj Press staged a sit-down protest at Samvidhan Square, in Nagpur on May 19 to demand implementation of service rules and regular pay. Despite being employed by the state-owned company for more than 20 years the workers are paid just 5,000 rupees per month under the Minimum Wages Act. The Shivraj Litho Press Kangmar Union had already submitted a memorandum to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, demanding that they be considered as industrial workers and paid accordingly.

Union officials, who have been appealing to the state government ministers since 2015, told the media that protests would be staged across the state if their long outstanding demands were not met within 15 days.

Striking Haryana sanitation employees return to work

A 16-day strike by sanitation workers in Haryana ended last Sunday after the state government reportedly agreed to increase workers' salaries and allowances and end contract employment.

The decision was announced at a press conference with the Municipal Workers Union and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh officials and three state government ministers. The sanitation workers will be paid a 13,500-rupee lump sum per month by the municipal authorities who will also end the use of contract workers, the government ministers told the media. Broom, washing and holiday allowances will also be increased.

The unions have hailed the outcome as a victory, but union officials will collaborate with municipal management to formulate the end to contract work. No deadline or details, however, have been provided over this issue.

Pakistan government cuts pay of protesting Punjab health workers

Hundreds of workers from the government's Lady Health Workers program in Bahawalnagar, Punjab have been fined for demonstrating to

demand the immediate payment of several months of outstanding dues.

After demonstrating for hours outside the Punjab Deputy Commissioner's office, the protesting workers entered and occupied the building on May 25 and called for an immediate solution to their demands. Workers were persuaded to call off their protest after authorities agreed to resolve the problem by June 5.

On May 26, however, the authorities filed a case falsely claiming that about 800 workers had damaged the property and taken staff hostage. The union had not yet made an official response to the allegations.

Karachi teachers demonstrate over non-paid salaries since 2012

As part of their continuing struggle to secure unpaid wages, hundreds of government school teachers protested outside the Sindh provincial parliament on Monday. Over 3,600 teachers in the Karachi district and over 220 teachers in the Ghotki district have not been paid since 2012. Teachers in Sukkur, Shahdadpur and Sanghar districts are also affected.

Although the teachers still continue to work, the government has refused to make any payments, claiming there were anomalies in the administrative process when they were recruited. The Pakistan government has mobilised police to ruthlessly crack down on teachers' protests and strikes.

Bangladesh: Garment workers demand wages and festival allowances

Garment workers established a human chain protest outside the National Press Club in Dhaka last Saturday to demand payment of their wages and festival allowances before the Eid-ul-Fitr religious festival.

The demonstration was organised by the Bangladesh Garments Workers Unity Council (BGWUC), an alliance of various garment workers' federations. BGWUC leaders issued pathetic appeals to Bangladesh Prime Minister Shiek Hasina to intervene and make sure the payments were made on time. The union president threatened to "encircle the factory owners' houses, if necessary" to secure their legal entitlements.

Bangladesh Minister for Labour and Employment claimed that the government had ordered to pay the May salaries and bonus by June 14.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association claims that some 1,200 garment factories across the country may not make the payment before the upcoming festival. Bangladesh police told the media that 200 factories might default on the payments.

Sri Lankan water supply workers strike

National Water Supply and Drainage Board workers held a half-day strike on May 30 to demand payment of a 25 percent salary increase promised at the beginning of this year. The increment was to make up for three years of outstanding salary increases.

After management did not respond to the industrial action, the Water Supply Joint Trade Union Alliance announced that industrial action would continue and imposed bans on all overtime work. Water supply workers struck over the same demand in January and February.

Cambodian garment workers protest over unpaid wages

Workers at the First Gawon factory in Chak Angre Krom commune in Phnom Penh are continuing a protracted strike and protest outside the plant. Their employer has not paid wages since last December. In January, the South Korean-owned firm sacked 600 employees after they refused to obey a court order demanding an end to industrial action.

On Tuesday hundreds of workers attempted to present a petition to the Cambodian labour ministry and the South Korean Embassy but only two workers were allowed to approach the building.

President Hun Sen referred to the dispute on Wednesday at a meeting of thousands of garment workers in Koh Thom district in Kandal province. He claimed that the First Gawon workers had also attempted to deliver their petition to his private residence. Amid growing fear that the dispute could become the focal point of a broader movement of the working class, Hun Sen said he had ordered the Labour ministry to "extinguish this fire."

University of New South Wales staff strike for 24 hours

Hundreds of staff at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney walked off the job for 24 hours on Wednesday as part of a dispute over a new workplace agreement. The stoppage caused the cancellation of a number of tutorials and lectures on campuses in Sydney and Canberra.

The staff are protesting high rates of casualisation, unsustainable workloads and the lack of consultation for major changes, including the university's moves to introduce a trimester system. This would result in three semesters per academic year rather than two, resulting in a greater number of classes and shorter breaks.

According to the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), over 70 percent of UNSW staff are on contracts or employed casually. This is a result of union-enforced job cuts.

The NTEU restricted the UNSW strikes to just 24 hours and has not scheduled further industrial action, instead calling for negotiations with management.

Sydney chemical company locks out workforce

Workers at the Ixom chemical plant in Sydney's Botany Bay Industrial zone were locked out by the company this week after they notified management that an indefinite strike would begin on Monday.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) claims that in negotiations for a new workplace agreement, the company has demanded wage cuts of 30 percent.

The workers had offered to bring the chemical plant safely off-line before going on strike. Management imposed the lockout having made arrangements for a replacement workforce to keep the facility operating around the clock.

The AWU told the media the management's actions could lead to potential safety problems for the company's clients. The company supplies the water purification chemical sodium hypochlorite to a number of entities, including Sydney Water.

Brisbane brewery workers strike again

About 100 workers at the XXXX brewery in Milton, an inner-city suburb of Brisbane, walked out on Wednesday and protested at the plant gates. They temporarily prevented delivery trucks from entering the facility. The short strike was the eighth at the plant in the past two months.

Brewing company Lion is seeking to introduce an enterprise agreement that would allow it to cover the leave of permanent employees with casual and contract labour. Workers suspect the move could be a first step in plans for a broader casualisation of the workforce and are concerned that Lion may shut the plant altogether and locate production elsewhere.

The United Voice union, which covers the workers, has limited the campaign to short sporadic stoppages. It is calling for a meagre pay rise of just three percent per year, well below the rapidly rising cost of living.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) secretary Sally McManus appeared at the protest to bolster its “Change the Rules” campaign. The real purpose of the ACTU campaign, however, is to harness the widespread working class anger over the decades-long assault on jobs, wages and working conditions behind the election of yet another pro-big business Labor government.

Fast Food workers strike at Wendy’s in New Zealand

Workers at the Wendy’s fast food restaurant chain took nationwide strike action from 6 a.m. last Saturday until midnight Sunday. The strike was called after months of negotiations broke down between the Unite Union and Wendco, the company behind the chain.

Workers were given individual contracts after the collective contract expired on May 21. Employees have had up to 20 percent of their hours cut. They also want a 15-minute break after the first three hours’ work. Last November, the Employment Relations Authority ordered Wendco to compensate workers for days-in-lieu that were not given to them after working public holidays, as far back as 2012.

The union limited the strike to intermittent walkouts during peak times. Unite Christchurch organiser Moniqua Reid told Fairfax Media that the strikes were kept to only one hour because the workers went unpaid during that time.

New Zealand cinema workers continue strike

After striking on May 23, workers at New Zealand’s largest cinema chain Event continued to strike over the weekend, from Friday night until Sunday night. The strike was timed to coincide with the release of *Solo*, the latest instalment of the multi-billion dollar *Star Wars* film franchise.

The strike was called after months of negotiations for higher wages broke down between the Unite Union and the company. Many Event workers are only on minimum wage or slightly above. They rejected a 4 percent pay increase.

Event is now threatening to cut wages by 10 percent in retaliation for the strike, which they described as “unlawful.” The union has not opposed this action, so long as the company complies with employment law.



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