

Chinese truck drivers protest in several provinces, thousands of Sri Lankan postal workers resume national strike

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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Asia

## Chinese truck drivers protest in nine provinces and municipalities

Mass protests by truck drivers have erupted in nine Chinese provinces and municipalities against decreasing wages, high fuel prices and police harassment.

Strike action began on June 8 in Jiangxi province's Xiushui county and rapidly spread to Shandong province. Trucks filled national highways and parking lots, rendering some impassable.

Protests and strikes are reportedly continuing in the provinces of Anhui, Guizhou, Hubei, Sichuan and Zhejiang, and the municipalities of Chongqing and Shanghai.

One of the targets of the industrial action is Manbang, a truck hire logistics platform, which strikers claim has reduced their income. Manbang is a subsidiary of Alphabet Inc., the owner of Google.

## Taiwan: Migrant caregivers protest at labour ministry

Scores of migrant caregivers took strike action and rallied outside the Ministry of Labor in Taipei last Sunday to demand the right to a full-day off every working week. The action was organised by the Taoyuan Domestic Caretakers Union.

Most of Taiwan's 230,000 foreign caregivers are forced to work every day of the year, without leave or weekend breaks.

## South Korean software workers strike

Employees at Oracle Korea, a software company, have been on strike for a month to demand higher pay and improved working conditions.

Dozens of union members have been protesting outside Assem Tower in southern Seoul to demand the resignation of the company's CEO. The protests began after negotiations with management failed.

Oracle Korea employees have received no pay rise in a decade. They are forced to work up to 80 to 100 hours a week, and do not receive compensation for overtime.

## Hong Kong domestic workers rally

Around 30 domestic workers and their supporters marched in Hong Kong last Thursday to demand improved living and working conditions.

Domestic employees are often forced to work 12- to 16-hour shifts and are frequently on call 24 hours a day. Many struggle to find rest periods in the time left available to them.

The protestors called for 11 hours of uninterrupted rest between two working days and for meal breaks and sleeping quarters. Domestic staff are often forced to sleep in toilets, kitchens and store rooms.

## Philippines police attack picket line at NutriAsia factory

Philippines police broke up a picket line outside the NutriAsia condiment factory in Marilao, Bulacan province on Thursday. At least 10 workers were injured and four were arrested.

The police served a court issued 20-day restraining order on the workers. The company wanted to move products produced before the strike began on June 2. Fifty armed police began camping inside the factory compound on the second day of the strike.

The walkout began when 50 workers were sacked after protesting the dismissal of five union leaders and members. The company, which sells condiments under various brand names internationally and has assets of \$US320 million, employs all but 100 of its 1,400 workforce through body hire companies.

Workers are paid \$7.13 for an eight-hour day and \$1.12 for each hour of overtime. In 2016 and 2017 the company coerced employees to work 16–20 hours straight. Strikers told the media that the company hides the number of industrial accidents from government agencies. It is the first strike in the area since 2005.

## India: Maharashtra road transport workers strike for higher wages

Hundreds of Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) drivers walked out on strike June 8 for a wage increase. The spontaneous walkout came two days after the MSRTC management announced an 18 percent fare hike. Drivers have been demanding a pay rise for the past two

years.

The industrial action impacted intercity express buses in Mumbai, Pune and Nasik and other key bus routes. Workers told the media that their salaries were “minuscule” and impossible to “survive on.” Drivers are only paid 11,000 rupees (\$US160) per month. Over 100,000 MSRTC employees struck work last October demanding that their salaries be increased in line with the 7th Pay Commission recommendations.

### **India, electronics workers rally for union rights**

Luminous Power Technologies workers rallied on June 9 at Gagret in Himachal Pradesh state to demand union rights and in protest against poor working conditions and problems with occupational health and safety. The company is owned by Schneider Electric, a leading European multinational company.

The workers carried placards condemning transfer of Luminous Power Technologies Workers Union office bearers and demanding the right to freedom of association. The union was established in March this year.

### **Pakistan: Punjab bus drivers demand two months' outstanding pay**

Rawalpindi-Islamabad metro bus drivers struck for more than four hours on June 6 to demand the Punjab provincial government pay two months overdue salaries. Bus services were halted for more than four hours.

Drivers demonstrated in Islamabad main terminal carrying banners and placards denouncing the Punjab government and warned of a complete shutdown of the services if salaries are not paid before the Eid religious holiday. The strike was called off after authorities agreed to resolve the issue.

### **Bangladesh non-government teachers demonstrate**

Non-government teachers have been demonstrating in Dhaka since Sunday demanding their inclusion in the Monthly Pay Order (MPO).

Under the MPO system, the government is supposed to pay the salaries and benefits of teachers at non-government schools, colleges and technical institutions. The protesting teachers claim that they are not included in the Bangladesh government's 2018–2019 budget.

While the teachers have agitated over this for several years, they were assured last January by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the government would grant their demands. The teachers are members of Non-MPO Educational Institutions' Teachers and Employees Federation, which covers about 80,000 teachers at 5,000 non-government schools, colleges and technical institutions.

### **Bangladesh garment workers demand festival allowances and outstanding pay**

Police fired teargas and baton-charged protesting workers from Paradise Group and Westeria Textile garment factories blocking the

Dhaka–Mymensingh highway in Dhaka on Tuesday. Workers were demanding payment of several months' outstanding wages and the Eid religious festival allowance.

Demonstrators called off their blockade after factory owners told them that the wage arrears would be paid.

A similar demonstration was held the same day by Positive Fashionwear workers in Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital. Police violently attacked the protestors, injuring at least five workers who were hospitalised.

### **Sri Lankan postal workers resume strike action**

Sri Lankan postal workers walked out on strike June 11, paralysing the postal services throughout the country. The walkout followed strike action by 4,000 employees on June 4.

The United Postal Trade Unions' Front, which launched the strike is demanding improvements in the recruitment services and higher wages. The processing of over 700,000 items has been delayed by the strike action.

### **Australia and the Pacific**

#### **Australian hospital staff demand pay rise and vote for industrial action**

More than 300 workers at Canberra Hospital in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action, as part of a dispute over a new enterprise agreement.

The employees, including ward staff and food service personal, are members of the Health Services Union. The union is calling for a 3 percent annual pay increase over four years. Management has only offered 2.5 percent.

The base wage for most ward staff, whose duties include performing CPR, responding to code blacks (deceased on arrival persons) and attending to violent and drug-affected patients, is less than \$50,000 a year.

Workers endorsed different forms of industrial action, including limited work stoppages, indefinite strikes and public campaigns. Underscoring the role of the union in suppressing widespread opposition to deteriorating conditions, there has not been a strike at the hospital for 17 years.

#### **New Zealand teachers to vote on industrial action**

Primary and intermediate school teachers will be balloted on the government's last pay offer. Voting will begin next week and continue until June 29. The Ministry of Education has offered 2.2 to 2.6 percent over two years to most of its workforce.

Teachers have demanded at least a 16 percent increase over two years to address the country's desperate teacher shortage. The Post Primary Teachers' Association says there could be as many as 700 vacancies, leaving up to 17,500 students without a teacher.

While the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), which represents around 30,000 teachers, criticised the pay offer, it promoted Labour during their 2017 election campaign and agrees with its austerity agenda.

### **Negotiations break down again in New Zealand tug boat dispute**

Workers operating tug boats owned by Port Nelson Limited (PNL) notified the company they would strike from 6 p.m. yesterday until 6 a.m., Monday, and again from June 22 to 29, after negotiations over a collective agreement failed again.

The Merchant Service Guild (MSG) handed the company a strike notice for last weekend but then withdrew it and agreed to meet with the company on June 11. The dispute is over wages and rostering. Port Nelson tug operators are on call 24 hours a day for 14 days at a time.

### **New Zealand fast food workers continue protests against Wendy's**

Around 30 workers from fast food chain Wendy's protested for two hours at the Dominion Road branch in Auckland last Saturday. The protest took place in spite of an Employment Court ruling in favour of the company, which argued that if workers protested at their workplace, they would be trespassing.

Workers have been taking industrial action since April after a year of failed negotiations between Unite Union and Wendco. The company owes workers compensation for unpaid days-in-lieu, entitled to workers for working public holidays. The strikes have also been over low wages, and a 96-page manual that instructed workers on what they need to do to get a pay rise.

### **Fiji: Police called on protesting mine workers**

Police were deployed to Vatukoula Gold Mine (VGM) on June 13 following protests by some workers over pay and safety issues at two mine shafts. A police spokesperson told the *Fiji Times* they were called to mediate between management and workers "because of some internal matters that happened." Police made no further comment and no details about the protest have been released.

There have been two deaths at the mine site over the past 12 months. Felix Anthony from the Trade Union Congress said "We have been trying to negotiate a collective agreement with the company for the past year and a half and things have not been successful."

He said working conditions were "atrocious" and said there were "numerous" unreported accidents. Miners are often forced to work in temperatures up to 60 degrees Celsius. Anthony said the National Union of Workers was negotiating with management in an attempt to resolve the dispute without industrial action.

VGM employs about 500 workers, who have not received a significant pay increase in years. The company, Fiji's largest gold producer, is listed on the London Stock Exchange and the mine has been a source of profit for investors from Australia, Canada, the UK and China for over 75 years.



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