

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

Police attack striking workers in India and Bangladesh

20 October 2018

Tens of thousands of South Korean taxi drivers protest ride-sharing app

Tens of thousands of taxi drivers demonstrated in Seoul last Thursday against a planned ride-sharing service developed by the country's top chat app. Similar protests have been held in the past against the attempted market penetration of transport services such as Uber Technologies and other domestic startups. Drivers fear that the apps will decimate the taxi industry.

Protesters wearing red headbands chanted slogans, waved flags and held up placards with slogans such as, "Let's crush the carpooling industry which ignores the taxi industry," and "Illegal business carpool app out."

Chat app operator Kakao Corp has created a division called Kakao Mobility for carpooling during "commuting hours." It began recruiting drivers on Tuesday. The company plans to launch the service before the end of the year.

Transport laws in South Korea prohibit the use of personal vehicles for commercial purposes, but allow carpooling during "commuting hours."

South Korea: Thousands to protest possible dismantling of car company unit

Almost 8,000 union members at General Motors (GM) Korea voted last week in favour of striking against the company's plans to spin off its Research & Development unit from the company's manufacturing facilities.

If the plan goes ahead, some 3,000 workers would be forced to move to a new site. They would no longer be covered by existing collective agreements.

The strike is set to take place on October 22 unless the company scraps the plan. The union also called on the state-run Korea Development Bank, a major stakeholder, to vote against the spinoff plan at a GM shareholders' meeting.

Striking Burmese workers attacked at garment factory in Yangon

On Monday, dozens of workers were injured when they were attacked outside the Fu Yuen garment factory in Yangon, Burma's largest city.

The workers were set upon by assailants wielding iron bars. Hospital

authorities at Thingangyun said 24 of the workers were treated for injuries. Six were admitted for further treatment.

Between 20 and 30 attackers in civilian clothing attacked the workers, mainly young women, after surrounding them in the early hours of the morning.

The workers have been on strike since August, protesting the dismissal of 30 colleagues who were members of a factory committee demanding improved conditions.

Police tried to blame workers for the violence, claiming that it was a clash between employees. No arrests were made despite the deployment of police to the area.

India: Haryana roadway employees strike against privatization

Roadway workers in Haryana, organized in the Haryana Roadways Employees Union, engaged in a two-day strike on October 16 and 17 to protest the state government's decision to hire around 700 private buses.

Thousands of commuters, including those in neighbouring states, were impacted by the lack of buses during the stoppage. There are around 4,100 public roadway buses transporting more than 1.2 million passengers in Haryana each day. According to union leaders, more than 4,000 buses were off the roads during the strike, despite attempts to ban it under the Essential Services Maintenance Act.

The day before the stoppage, the Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the Haryana government to enforce the draconian anti-strike laws. Police reportedly rounded up some striking employees and union leaders and were deployed to restore services.

India: Vijayawada sanitation workers' strike continues

Sanitation workers in Vijayawada, a major city in the state of Andhra Pradesh, remain on strike after walking out indefinitely against the privatisation of sanitation services. They are also demanding higher pay and permanent jobs.

The action, which was called by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, has seen hundreds of workers stage sit-down protests in the city. Strikers want a minimum monthly salary of 18,000 rupees (\$US246).

The government has invited representatives of the Municipal Workers' Joint Action Committee to participate in another round of talks, after previous negotiations failed to resolve workers' demands.

Indian health workers strike in Madhya Pradesh

Around 3,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Urban Social Health Activists (USHA), employed by the Madhya Pradesh government, gathered in Bhopal's Polytechnic Chowk last week to demand a fixed minimum salary.

The workers had travelled to Bhopal from 16 districts across the state. When they were 200 metres from the official residence of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, they were set upon by police officers, who beat them with lathis. More than 100 workers were bundled into police vans and driven to the Central Jail. The five-year-old child of one of the strikers was also detained.

These health workers are demanding 10,000 rupees per month for ASHA-USHA workers and 25,000 rupees per month for ASHA sahayoginis, who monitor and coordinate services. Accredited Social Health Activists provide frontline medical care in villages throughout the state. The average ASHA employee in India is responsible for 900 patients.

Pakistan: Hyderabad municipal workers demonstrate over unpaid wages

Employees of the Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) and its subsidiary Water and Sanitation Agency continued protests last week over unpaid wages that they are owed for the past four months. Retired workers who are receiving a pension have also been affected.

The protests, called by the HDA Employees Union, have taken place over the past two weeks. Workers have boycotted their duties between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. and engaged in other work bans.

The unpaid wages are tied to major government spending cuts.

Pakistan: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa engineers demand pay increases

Engineers working for government departments in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are continuing a stoppage they began on October 9, to demand the payment of a technical allowance and pay increases.

The allowance has been approved by the government, but has not been paid. Engineers are calling for a pay scale upgrade, granted to other sections of government workers, to be extended to their sector.

Around 700 engineers have taken part in the strike. They held a protest march to the Civil Secretariat and a sit-in demonstration in Peshawar on October 11.

Bangladeshi police shoot at workers demanding unpaid wages

Police shot 31 rounds of shotgun fire and 22 tear gas canisters at protesting garment workers. At least 17 workers were injured.

The employees of the Intramex factory in the Laxmipura area of Gazipur were demanding payment of salaries and allowances which are in

arrears. They have stated that at least five months of staff salaries and workers' September wages have not been paid.

The owners previously committed to remunerate the workers on October 14. They failed to meet the deadline and claimed that they would pay the wages on October 24, provoking anger among the workers.

Sri Lankan plantation workers protest over wages

Workers at several tea plantation estates in Sri Lanka have held a series of protests to demand higher wages.

On October 17 and 18, more than 500 workers from the Panmure estate in Hatton and the Balmoral estate in Agarapathana took strike action and participated in morning pickets. Earlier this month, more than 1,000 workers from the Brunswick, Mocha, Gartmore and Murray estates in Maskeliya staged demonstrations.

The workers are demanding that their miserly daily wage of 500 Rupees (\$US2.92) be doubled. Workers have denounced the two-year collective agreement that covers them as a "slave pact."

The agreement is set to expire this month. The main plantation unions—the Ceylon Workers Congress, the Lanka Eksath Jathika Kamkaru Sangamaya and the Joint Committee of Plantation Trade Union—have held negotiations with the plantation companies for a new deal. The plantation companies are proposing a pay rise of just 50 Rupees.

Australian crane operators strike over pay and conditions

More than 100 mobile crane workers at Boom Logistics and WGC Cranes depots in the Hunter Valley and Illawarra regions of New South Wales began an indefinite strike this week in an ongoing dispute for a new enterprise agreements (EA).

Workers at Singleton and Wollongong depots have not had a pay rise in five years. Boom is offering pay increases of just 2.1 percent, barely meeting the current rate of inflation. WGC has rejected any serious pay rise, claiming that it would make the company uncompetitive against its rivals.

Both companies had unsuccessfully appealed last month to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) industrial tribunal to prevent the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) that covers the workers from engaging in so called "pattern bargaining," i.e., bargaining for a single agreement across both companies.

Pattern bargaining is illegal under draconian Fair Work industrial laws that were introduced by the previous Labor government with the full support of the unions. The CFMEU is attempting to harness growing anger among workers behind the Australian Council of Trade Unions' bogus "change the rules" campaign, aimed at the election of another pro-business Labor government.

New Zealand truck drivers demonstrate over high petrol prices

On Monday, a convoy of around 60 trucks slowly made their way to the Auckland city centre, flashing their lights as a sign of protest against high petrol costs and government fuel taxes. The demonstration began with truck drivers from the RNB Transport company.

Petrol prices have reached record highs after a government imposed tax increase of 3.5c and a regional tax introduced by the Auckland Council of 11.5c.

Striking public servants on Wallis and Futuna take French prefect to court

Officials in the remote French Pacific territory of Wallis and Futuna, who have been on strike for five weeks, have taken French prefect Jean Francis Treffel to court. The workers went on strike because they wanted to be reclassified as French public servants.

The strike continued because the workers claimed their integration into the French public service was mismanaged. Treffel announced on October 3 that the striking employees will need to pass a language exam in order to qualify for reclassification.

Firefighters have also been on strike since September 18.



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