

Mumbai hospital workers demand outstanding wages; South Korean car workers strike; Australian tram drivers vote to walk out

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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India: Mumbai hospital workers and retirees protest non-payment of wages and pensions

Current and retired workers from Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital and Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital for Children in Mumbai began a three-day protest on January 13 against hospital management, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation and the Maharashtra state in southwest India. Workers and retirees have not been paid for the past month.

Mumbai General Kamgar Union, which is affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, the trade union wing of the Communist Party of India, demonstrated on hospital premises chanting slogans against the authorities.

The hospitals, which operate as a joint venture between the Wadia family, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation and state government, face a major financial crisis and have not received funds for the last two years. Doctors, nurses and other supporting staff participated in the protests.

Finance sector workers continue protests in Kerala

Workers from Kerala-based Muthoot Finances are continuing a hunger protest they began on January 1, following the sudden termination of 166 workers. Workers say that the sackings were directed against employees that led a 52-day strike from August 20 last year. The protest is being organised by the Non-Banking and Private Finance Association.

Management bogusly insists that the industrial action is “violent activity” and shut 43 branches across the state, claiming they cannot function because of the protests.

According to the workers, management selectively targeted workers in branches where the union secretary and workers are active members of the union.

Anganwadi workers continue their protests

Anganwadi (childcare) workers are maintaining a month-long protest in Dehradun, capital of India’s Uttarakhand state. As well looking after the children, the low-paid, mainly women workers have to clean the centres, collect health data statistics and other tasks. They are only paid 3,500-rupees (\$US49) per month.

Uttarakhand has over 20,000 anganwadi centres across 13 districts. The workers have been protesting at Dehradun since the first week of December demanding a pay rise and improved benefits. Similar protests were held in Haridwar during December.

Powercom contract workers protest in Punjab

Powercom Contractual Employees’ Union members demonstrated outside the chief engineer’s west zone office in Bathinda, in India’s Punjab state, on January 10. They were demanding payment of all outstanding salaries and benefits, job permanency and regular training.

The workers, who have not been paid their December wages, want ongoing training for contract workers in order to reduce the number of electrocution incidents and other health and safety injuries. After demonstrating outside the west zone office they moved to the chief engineer’s office in Bathinda’s Thermal Colony.

Pakistan transit workers strike over unpaid salaries

Metro Bus transit workers shut down services in Islamabad and Rawalpindi on January 9 to demand immediate payment of three months’ outstanding wages. The four-hour strike—between 6 and 10 in the morning—impacted on some 110,000 daily commuters.

The Metro Bus Authority, which is responsible for transit services, blamed the outsourced companies for their failure to pay the workers. Services resumed after the workers were told that their wages would be paid before January 22.

Renault Samsung Motors autoworkers strike in South Korea

Renault Samsung Motors partially shut down its Busan factory last week in response to an ongoing strike by unionised workers. The workers want an eight percent salary increase and improved benefits. The company had previously conducted a partial lockout targeting industrial action last June.

The factory suspended its night shifts to reduce losses after 30 percent of the workforce joined the stoppage. Renault Samsung Motors claims the strike has cost it \$100 million by disrupting the production of more than 6,000 vehicles over the past two weeks.

Kia autoworkers hold one-day strike for higher wages

Kia autoworkers in South Korea held an eight-hour strike Monday, the latest in a series of partial walkouts that began last month, to demand improved wages. Kia employees have called for a narrowing of the gap between their pay and wages at larger affiliates, such as Hyundai. An offer was rejected in December, leading to three rounds of partial strikes. Workers were set to vote on the new offer accepted by the union on Friday.

Taiwanese couriers protest pay cut

Foodpanda delivery drivers protested across Taiwan on Thursday against a planned pay cut. One demonstrating worker in Taichung City claimed commission payments would drop from \$NT70 per delivery to \$NT57. The changes are due to come into effect on Thursday. The labor affairs bureau, however, has stated that Foodpanda does not have the legal right to unilaterally change the terms of its contracts.

Indonesian workers and students protest labour laws

Hundreds of workers and students marched on Monday to the lower house of the Indonesian parliament in Jakarta against plans by President Joko Widodo to legislate an Omnibus Bill. In the name of “job creation,” the bill, which will be brought before parliament next week, attacks workers’ conditions.

Demonstrations were also held on the same day in South Sumatra, East Java and Central Java. It followed various protests and a strike in the capital last week. More actions are planned leading up to the resumption of parliament on January 20.

The demonstrations were called by Indonesia’s three major trade union confederations and various student groups. While details of the law are not officially public the unions have pointed to the

minimum wage and severance pay as Omnibus bill targets. They have also warned that it will facilitate outsourcing and uncontracted work.

Union officials have complained that they were not consulted in the drafting of the laws. Their primary concern is that Widodo’s pro-investor program threatens their own privileged positions.

Cambodia: Strike ends at Phnom Penh’s NagaWorld

Three thousand workers at the NagaWorld hotel and casino complex ended a two-day strike late last week after management agreed to reinstate union president Chhim Sithar, who was suspended last September.

The Hong Kong-based firm, which reported a revenue of \$US1.8 billion in 2019, also agreed to wage increases of between 18 and 30 per cent. The deal, brokered by the union and government labour officials, fell far short of the 100 percent pay rise demanded by workers.

Nothing was agreed on workers’ demands for greater organising rights, improved conditions and an end to company harassment. Management had obtained a court injunction declaring the stoppage illegal and threatened to sack the striking workers.

Australian tram drivers vote for industrial action

Some 1,500 Melbourne tram drivers and customer-support workers have voted in favour of industrial action on January 28 and 29 as part of their dispute with Yarra Trams over a new enterprise agreement.

The company, which is contracted by the state Labor government to operate tram services, is offering wage increases of just 3 percent annually over four years. It wants to increase the proportion of part-time employees from 4 percent to 15 percent and introduce more flexible rosters. Workers say the changes will reduce take-home pay, job security and quality of life.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union has restricted industrial action to limited strikes. It has sought to prevent a unified struggle of the tram drivers with train staff, who are also locked in an enterprise agreement dispute. At the same time, the union has made clear its willingness to negotiate further sell-out deals in the transport sector, which has been hit by decades of cuts.



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