

Bangladesh garment workers strike against COVID-19 job and wage cuts; Australian maritime union ends strike over COVID-19 at Hutchison Ports

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

18 April 2020

Bangladeshi garment workers protest over factory closures and unpaid wages

Thousands of garment workers from industrial estates in Gazipur, Ashulia, Savar Narayanganj, Dhaka, Uttara, Tongi, Mirpur, Pallabi, and Chattogram are continuing protests begun on April 4 after finding their factories closed when they attempted to return to work following the lifting of the coronavirus lockdown. They are demanding unpaid wages and the reopening of the factories.

On Tuesday, in Ashulia and Savar, thousands of garment workers of four factories, including those of World One Denim and Washing Ltd, protested, demanding several months of unpaid wages. The factories closed on February 20. In Gazipur around 20,000 garment workers from shuttered factories demonstrated on Sunday and Monday demanding unpaid wages.

India: Migrant workers caught up in COVID-lockdown demand outstanding wages

Hundreds of migrant workers impacted by India's nationwide COVID-19 lockdown demonstrated in Surat, Gujarat state, on April 10 to demand their wages be paid so they can return home. Some workers were arrested by police.

On Tuesday migrant workers demonstrated at the Bandra bus stand in Mumbai, India's largest city. They were demanding transport and outstanding wages in order to return to their village homes. Lathi (cane) wielding police attacked some of the demonstrators. Workers ended their protest after the Maharashtra state government promised to

provide food and accommodation.

Thousands of garment workers in Cambodia and Burma lose jobs due to COVID-19

Hundreds of thousands of low paid garment workers in Cambodia and Burma face being laid off as hundreds of factories close in response to cancelled orders from large western retail outlets due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 110 factories employing about 96,000 workers have applied to the Cambodian government to suspend production because of the pandemic. The government said it would offer suspended workers \$US40 per month while factories would provide \$30, a smaller sum than promised earlier this year.

A spokesperson from the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said many workers had received their March wages but in April, "I think it's going to be complete chaos." Most of Cambodia's 800,000 garment workers earn a monthly minimum salary of just \$190 and are forced to work overtime to make ends meet.

In Burma, around 20,000 migrants returned home from Thailand last month after losing their jobs due to factory closures.

Taxi drivers in China protest

Tens of thousands of China's struggling 2.6 million taxi drivers are demonstrating in several cities across the country. They are demanding a reduction in the fees they have to pay

cab companies or the right to leave the business entirely without penalty.

Many drivers report that their income has dropped by 80 percent due to the coronavirus pandemic but many cab companies continue to demand the normal monthly rental fees. Drivers protested in Shenzhen and Guangzhou on April 13 and 14 respectively. Taxi drivers have held 25 nationwide protests since the start of the year to demand a reduction in rental or contract cancellations.

Electronics retail workers demand shutdown

Australia's largest consumer electronic retailer JB HI-FI is ignoring workers' concerns and is remaining open and potentially exposing more than 12,000 employees to the deadly COVID-19 infection. Almost 900 workers have so far signed a petition calling for the retailer to shut its doors and continue paying wages.

JB HI-FI's decision to keep operating is supported by the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA). The union is attempting to convince its members that retailers should keep their doors open "where and when it is safe" so workers in the battered retail sector, the country's largest private employer, can keep their jobs.

One worker told media, "I'm grateful to have a job, don't get me wrong, but it gets to a point where [you ask], is our safety being prioritised over sales? I don't think it is." Another worker said, "People are browsing, people are touching everything and we're supposed to be cleaning everything straight after they touch it."

Many JB HI-FI workers argue that the stores are not providing an essential service as many of the goods they sell can be bought online or even from supermarkets. More than 100,000 retail workers have been stood down since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, with many casual workers unable to access the federal government's JobKeeper wage subsidy.

Qantas workers ordered into isolation over COVID-19

Over 750 workers of Australia's largest airline company Qantas have been ordered into isolation by SA (South Australia) Health after Qantas staff at Adelaide Airport were directed to continue working after it was discovered they had been exposed to COVID-19. The quarantine order was an attempt to contain a cluster of cases linked to the airport,

including 18 baggage handlers, three other workers and 13 close contacts.

The Transport Workers' Union (TWU) says it is compiling evidence Qantas "knowingly exposed" workers to the virus after it was made aware of the first confirmed case. However, while the TWU accused Qantas of taking a "blasé" approach in managing the issue, the union had failed to shut down the infected work site, leaving it up to SA Health to take action.

The quarantine order applies to employees who worked in certain areas of the airport since March 17, and affects cabin crew, pilots, customer service staff, engineers and baggage handlers. Prior to this incident Qantas had refused to pay staff who went into self-isolation, compelling infected workers to remain on the job.

Maritime union ends Sydney strike over COVID-19 at Hutchison Ports

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), a division of the CFMMEU, announced on Wednesday that it has reached a deal with international stevedore company Hutchison Ports Australia. The agreement ends a 10-day shutdown following positive COVID-19 infections amongst workers at its Sydney terminal.

Hutchison took six days to notify workers of the positive COVID-19 infections. Despite this unnecessary and dangerous delay, the union's deal with the company introduces "workplace measures to combat workplace transmission of Covid-19."

Under the agreement, which the union claims is a victory, production will continue at the Sydney facility. The deal is supposed to include shift and physical distancing protocols, cleanliness measures across the entire terminal and machinery, a communication process prior to each shift informing members not to come to work if they are ill, and full provision and supply of PPE.

The union called the ten-day shutdown of Hutchinson's Sydney terminal only after an intervention by the NSW Department of Health.



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