

Social health workers demonstrate in Tamil Nadu; Vietnamese garment workers strike over pay; Qantas baggage handlers protest against job cuts

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

26 September 2020

India: Accredited Social Health Activist workers in Karnataka protest

Hundreds of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers in Karnataka state protested outside Freedom Park in Bangalore on Wednesday. They were demanding a fixed monthly honorarium of 12,000 rupees (\$US162), regular health checks for all ASHA workers, and the provision of face masks, hand sanitisers, gloves and PPE kits.

Around 42,000 ASHA workers withdrew a threatened 20-day state-wide strike in July after a false assurance from the health minister that their demands would be considered. They have not had any response. Workers said they were paid only 4,000 rupees monthly, despite their crucial work in the fight against COVID-19.

Around 600,000 ASHA workers held a two-day national strike on August 7 and 8 to demand better pay, full-time jobs and payment of government employee salary levels and associated benefits. The highly-exploited, low paid workers said that they had not been provided with PPE kits, despite regularly calling for this basic equipment since March.

Karnataka child care and village workers protest

Anganwadi (childcare) workers and Gram Panchayat (village council) workers in Karnataka demonstrated in Belagavi on September 2. Village council workers gathered outside the district council demanding payment of wage arrears of full-time and contract workers outstanding since 2017. They also want to be a paid pension, time-bound promotions and a 3,000-rupee (\$US40.8) financial assistance payment for all Anganwadi workers involved in COVID-19 related work.

Anganwadi workers protested outside the Deputy Commissioner's office calling for a wage increase and for kindergarten classes to be held in childcare centres. Under the government's New Education Policy, kindergarten classes will be held in schools, eliminating thousands of jobs at Anganwadi centres.

Punjab pensioners and workers demand pay and allowances

Punjab and UT Employees and Pensioners' Front members held a protest hunger strike outside the deputy commissioner's office in

Amritsar on September 16 to demand implementation of a Pay Commission report released three years ago.

They also called for the release of five outstanding instalments of the dearness allowance, a fixed 2,000-rupee (\$2US7.2) medical allowance, an 18,000-rupee salary for ASHA workers, midday meal and Anganwadi (childcare) workers.

Tamil Nadu: Magna International workers continue support for sacked unionists

Magna International auto-parts factory workers in Oragadam, Tamil Nadu, struck on September 17 and began ongoing protests to demand reinstatement of four workers suspended on March 19 for attempting to form a union.

The protesters also called on the company to reverse its decision to transfer 12 workers, allow formation of a union and begin wage increase negotiations. The strike followed a protest hunger strike by some workers on August 26 over the same issues.

Motherson Automotive Technologies and Engineering (MATE) workers showed their solidarity with the striking Magna workers and participated in a joint rally on September 22. Magna is a global automotive supplier of electronics with 348 manufacturing plants in 28 countries.

Swiggy online food delivery workers strike in Uttar Pradesh

Hundreds of delivery workers from the online food delivery platform Swiggy struck in Noida on September 17 in protest against company pay cuts. It was their third one-day strike in a week. Nearly 300 workers participated in the strike near delivery Sector 16 and said they intend to continue industrial action until they win their demands.

The company imposed a pay cut on August 9, slashing the base payment of a single order by over 50 percent—from 35 rupees (\$US0.47) to just 15 rupees.

The company has also eliminated a target-based fixed monthly incentive of roughly 3,000 rupees for a full-time delivery worker and 2,000 rupees for a part-timer.

Swiggy delivery workers in Chennai, Tamil Nadu and Hyderabad, Telangana state held strikes in August over the brutal pay cuts to demand the company restore the previous wage package and implement a daily

base pay rate.

Pakistan: College educators in Rawalpindi demand service structure

More than 150 lecturers and professors from government-run colleges demonstrated in Rawalpindi, Punjab province, on September 19. They were demanding the immediate implementation of a service structure, a five-tier promotion formula and timely promotions as previously promised by the government. The rally blocked traffic on a key city road for more than an hour.

According to protesters more than 6,000 educators in Punjab are impacted by the absence of a service structure and are not entitled to any pay protection. The protest was called by the Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand outstanding pay and reopening of their factory

More than 700 Bangladeshi garment workers from the A-One BD garment factory in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone staged a two-day sit-down demonstration on Monday and Tuesday outside the National Press Club. They were demanding reopening of the factory, which closed in April, and distribution of eight months of unpaid arrears.

On Tuesday workers marched and held a rally and then submitted a memorandum to the prime minister's office. They suspended the demonstration after the state minister for labour affairs and the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) offered a worthless promise that workers' issues would be addressed within 25 days.

BEPZA authorities previously claimed that the workers' arrears would be paid within three months of the factory being sold. The factory previously employed 1,100 workers. The Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity organised the demonstration.

Vietnamese garment workers strike over pay and conditions

Hundreds of workers went on strike and protested outside the Mai Lan Anh garment factory in Vietnam's south central Khanh Hoa province on September 17. They were demanding the company pay them correctly for August and also pay their health insurance because workers who had sought hospital treatment were told that their health insurance cards were not valid.

The garment workers had been on contracts and only paid \$US150 per month. In August, management slashed workers' wages and told employees that they would be paid according to their productivity. Workers have alleged that they were forced to work extra overtime and threatened with being sacked or locked in the factory if they tried to leave.

Australia: Maritime union ends industrial action at Port Botany

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) suddenly called an end to industrial action by its 580 members at the Port Botany container terminal of DP World Australia (DPWA) on September 19 after agreeing to restart negotiations with the company over its proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

The action against DPWA involved rolling stoppages and work bans which were part of similar industrial action by MUA members at terminals owned by Patrick Stevedores and Hutchinson Australia in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Fremantle. Around 2,400 waterside workers are involved in the dispute.

The MUA says it has reached a national "in principle" agreement with DP World but claims there are outstanding local issues at several ports. These include company demands for roster and idle time changes in exchange for increased productivity, as well as long outstanding job security issues related to automation and outsourcing.

The union claimed that Patrick wants to scrap about 50 pages of conditions in its proposed EA. The company ended negotiations over its proposed EA in April with the union demanding the rollover of the current agreement and a 12-month ban on outsourcing and automation. Hutchison is docking the pay of its workers by 30 percent, claiming that this reflects the value of lost productivity due to work bans.

Qantas baggage handlers protest against job cuts

Baggage handlers from Qantas held two days of protests on Thursday and Friday to oppose a plan by Qantas to outsource their jobs. The Transport Workers Union organised demonstrations in Adelaide, Darwin, Perth, Brisbane and outside the Qantas head office at Mascot airport, Sydney, making useless appeals to politicians and Qantas CEO Alan Joyce to reverse the decision.

The airline says its decision to outsource baggage handling will save it almost \$100 million, with the jobs set to go from ten major airports across Australia. At least 2,500 workers stand to lose their jobs on top of 6,000 who have already been targeted for redundancy.

The low-cost airline Jetstar, which is wholly owned by Qantas, has announced it will also outsource ground handling at the six Australian airports where the work is done in-house, impacting 370 jobs.



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