

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

China: Huolala parcel delivery drivers strike against exploitation

Parcel delivery drivers contracted with the gig platform company Huolala have been holding nationwide ad hoc strikes since 2022 to protest poverty remuneration along with high commission and registration charges. According to the China Labor Bulletin (CLB), Huolala drivers across China have held 14 strikes in 15 months. Huolala wants to be listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

In frustration with Huolala's new pricing gouging model that makes drivers bid against each other for customer orders, one driver in December posted on social media saying he was quitting Huolala. "I've wasted a full six years of my life. Nothing has changed; I'm still struggling. Doing this work only solves immediate needs, but doesn't address any of my debts, and offers no prospects for the future," he said.

On October 16, drivers in three cities struck against the new order model. Drivers in Guangzhou submitted a list of sixteen concrete demands related to corporate changes that reduced drivers' pay by as much as 20 percent. Another wave of strikes broke out in 2023 with drivers protesting a drop in unit prices.

India: Andhra Pradesh outsourced municipal workers demand equal pay and permanent jobs

Around 30,000 outsourced municipal workers from 123 municipalities across Andhra Pradesh have been on strike since December 26 to demand equal pay and permanent jobs. The strike was called by the Andhra Pradesh Municipal Workers and Employees Union, but other unions said they would join the strike by Wednesday, bringing the total number of strikers to 45,000.

Municipality authorities have hired strikebreakers to drive the garbage collection vehicles. Municipal workers and drivers were removed by police on December 31, after they obstructed garbage-collection vehicles driven by scabs.

Workers announced on Tuesday that their indefinite strike would continue, after a second round of talks with the Andhra Pradesh government failed to resolve the issues. A union spokesperson said the government failed to give a clear response on their major demands for equal pay for equal work and job permanency.

Transport unions call off India-wide strike after talks with government

The three-day national strike called by the All-India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) and unions opposing the Modi government's transport driving new laws was called off after two days on Wednesday following emergency talks with the government. The strike involved bus, van, truck and tanker drivers and caused long queues at fuel stations.

The new laws impose heavy fines and even imprisonment on drivers who leave an accident scene without giving details. Punishments include up to 10 years' imprisonment or a maximum of 700,000 rupees (\$US8,405) fines. The government gave an assurance that the law would not be implemented until after talks between the unions, AIMTC and government.

Punjab water utility workers demand permanent jobs

Contract workers from the Punjab Water Supply and Sanitation Department demonstrated in Tarn Taran on December 30 to demand permanent jobs. They burnt an effigy of the state government then marched in the town raising slogans against the government. The protest, called by the Jal Supply and Sanitation Contract Workers' Union-Punjab, was joined by workers from different parts of Punjab.

Andhra Pradesh childcare workers continue indefinite strike

Around 100,000 Anganwadi (childcare) workers and helpers in Andhra Pradesh have been on a state-wide strike since December 11 to demand a pay rise. Strikers defied police restrictions on Wednesday and held a protest at the Vijayawada Collectorate. Police detained many workers who continued their protest at the police station.

More demonstrations are planned at collectorate offices across the state after the government served notices warning strikers that they would be punished if they did not resume duties by January 5. Anganwadi workers and helpers burned copies of the notices served on them.

Anganwadi workers' monthly pay is currently 11,500 rupees (\$US138) and helpers just 7,000 rupees. They are demanding 26,000 rupees for all workers, provision of gratuity, retirement age raised to 62 and one million rupees group insurance.

The government claimed it had accepted demands related to relaxing the pension age and would increase retirement benefits by 100,000 rupees. Workers said they would not stop protesting until all demands were met.

Tea plantation workers in Salam, Tamil Nadu protest low pay

More than 250 plantation workers from the Neelamalai Plantation

Workers Union protested at Fort Maidan, near the Salem Corporation office, on December 28, demanding a salary hike, bonus, and other facilities as per labour laws and in accordance with court orders. Plantation workers called on the district administration to intervene in the dispute and resolve the issues.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand outstanding wages

Garment workers from the Denim Processing Plant at Chandini on the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway in eastern Bangladesh demonstrated on Tuesday to demand three months of outstanding wages and other payments. They blocked the highway at Chandina, causing kilometre-long lines of traffic.

A worker told media, "We were compelled to take to the streets after our attempts to persuade the authorities regarding the overdue payments proved futile." Workers ended the blockade when police intervened and assured them that their demands would be discussed with factory management.

According to the company's website, 2,100 workers are employed at 19 production units at Chandina.

On December 28, about 700 garment workers from the Crossline Knit Fabrics factory in Dhaka blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway demanding outstanding salaries of two months. After talks with the police and factory management workers ended the protest.

Port workers in Geelong strike for a pay rise

Members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and Electrical Trades Union walked off the job for 24 hours at the Geelong Port, Victoria, on January 2. The unions said they are planning to impose work bans and four-hour rolling stoppages on January 16.

The MUA claimed that port management have refused to offer a decent pay rise since their enterprise agreement expired in October. MUA members voted unanimously in November to approve taking industrial action after rejecting management's proposal to end the four-day week, in which they work 10.5 hour days, and increase it to a 9-day fortnight.

Geelong Port is the sixth largest in Australia by tonnage. Major commodities handled include crude oil and petroleum products, export grain and woodchips, alumina imports, and fertiliser. The port is privately owned and last year recorded an after-tax profit of \$8.4 million.

Victorian mobile-speed camera workers strike for improved pay and safety

About 200 roadside mobile speed camera workers employed by facilities services contractor Serco in Tullamarine struck for two days on December 31 for a higher pay rise and improved safety in their new enterprise agreement. The strike was sparked after a roadside-speed camera operator was attacked by a group of people three days before Christmas.

The workers are covered by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and the Australian Services Union. According to the CPSU, at an urgent meeting called by Serco prior to the strike, management said they

were offering no concessions to any of the unions claims for improving safety. Workers rejected Serco's pay increase offer of \$1.70 per hour.

As a part of industrial action, union members have been warning drivers of speed camera locations, placing signs on the side of the road that read: "Camera car ahead, slow down for safety".

Western Australian nurses' union protest poor pay deal

A dissident group of about 40 nurses who are members of the Australian Nursing Federation-WA (ANFWA) rallied outside the Royal Perth Hospital on Thursday to protest the union's latest pay deal with the state Labor government.

During 18 months of ongoing negotiations the union has stepped back from its original demand for a 5 percent pay rise. It has endorsed two low-pay rise offers by the government. The offers include a 3 percent pay increase and nurse-to-patient ratios, which are already in place at Perth Children's Hospital. Additionally, the offers propose a new professional development allowance, ranging from \$700 to \$1400 annually.

The breakaway nurses are encouraging their peers to abstain from voting for either deal, saying they are "insufficient." The CPI (consumer price index) for Perth is currently 5.8 percent meaning the proposed pay offers are a real pay cut.

In November 2022, the ANFWA was forced to call a state-wide strike in response to members' anger over the union leadership accepting a 3 percent pay increase offer and nurse to patient ratio plan that would do nothing to resolve the major staffing and patient safety crisis. The strike was not sanctioned by the WA Industrial Relations Commission and declared illegal. The union is now facing an \$80,000 fine.

In October 2022, nurses and midwives demanded a 10 percent per annum pay rise at a stop-work meeting, while the ANF was seeking an increase of just 5 percent, far short of the official 7.3 percent inflation rate.

Tasmanian paramedics protest chronic underfunding of public health

On December 21, the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) announced its ambulance emergency paramedic members would be commencing an indefinite industrial campaign to protest the Tasmanian government's chronic under-funding of health services.

The industrial action is occurring alongside a Tasmanian parliamentary inquiry into chronic ambulance ramping at hospital emergency departments.

Paramedics have told the inquiry a lack of public hospital bed capacity was forcing ambulances to remain ramped at hospitals, leaving paramedics to provide extended care for patients tying up ambulance resources. Tasmania's ambulance response times already are the worst in Australia.

A Royal Hobart Hospital physician reported that every month more than 2,000 patients and ambulance crews are impacted by ramping delays. Ambulance ramping, he said, was contributing to a 10 percent increase in deaths and to added trauma for patients.

Union officials told the inquiry the government's failure to end ambulance services understaffing had resulted in the state's northern region unable to provide full cover to the region in the previous week.

The Australian federal Labor government and Tasmania's state Liberal administration have been reducing health funding for more than a decade. In 2022, the federal government reduced public hospital funding in all

states and territories by a total of \$2.4 billion over four years. According to Tasmanian government information, the Rockliff government is planning further cuts to the state's health services including \$2.433 million to Ambulance Services.

HACSU has isolated the paramedics' dispute and limited industrial action to wearing union-branded clothing, displaying campaign materials and making public appeals on social media.



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