

Workers march and protest across Asia on May Day

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

4 May 2019

Pakistan: Balochistan copper and gold mine workers demand pay rise

Saindak copper-gold workers in Chagai, Balochistan launched a protest campaign this week to demand higher wages, medical allowances and paid holidays on Sundays. The joint China-Pakistan mine project employs 1,600 workers who are only paid 15,000 rupees (\$US105.90) a month. Protesting workers have threatened to expand their protests if management fails to meet their demands.

India: Punjab childcare workers protest against the state government

Anganwadi (childcare) workers demonstrated against the Punjab state government outside the Mini-Secretariat on April 27. Protesters said India's central government had promised the workers a 1,500-rupee (\$US22) monthly allowance with the state government providing 40 percent of the amount. The state government, however, has said it is not prepared to pay this amount.

Workers burnt copies of an official state government notification and said that if Punjab failed to contribute its part, protest action would be intensified.

Chennai rail workers oppose dismissals

More than 100 Chennai Metro Rail workers protested outside the managing director's office in Koyambedu over the dismissal of eight permanent employees on April 29. The rail company dismissed the eight workers for allegedly supporting a letter in November from the state president of Centre of Indian Trade Unions calling on management to increase wages.

Permanent employees are reportedly being paid less than 30,000 rupees (\$US430) a month whereas outsourced and contract workers receive 60,000 rupees a month. The suspended workers have filed a case in the Madras High Court, which is still ongoing. Protesters demanded to know why the company was allowed to sack the workers before the court had made a final judgement.

Indian garment workers rally for better conditions

About 2,000 garment workers in Bangalore, capital of Karnataka marched on May 1 to demand better working conditions. The city is the largest producer of readymade apparel with over 1,200 factories and employing around 450,000 workers.

Demonstrators chanted slogans against poor wages and long working hours. Workers said they were only paid an average monthly salary of 8,000 rupees (\$US11.5). The mainly female workers want a minimum salary of 11,587 rupees and the payment arrears for 2018–19.

Punjab roadways workers oppose outsourcing

Outsourced transport workers employed by Punjab state's transport service rallied against the employee outsourcing system at the Patiala bus station, the state's largest city on April 29.

The workers denounced the contractors and said they imposed harsh conditions on outsourced employees. They called authorities to withdraw the outsource recruitment system and that all outsourced workers be converted into contractual employees. The transport workers declared the state's 4,400 roadways buses would not move after May 1 if the government did not agree to workers' demands.

Bangladesh transport workers strike

Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation (BRTWF) members from Sylhet division held a one-day strike on Monday in protest against the newly-proposed Road Transport Act 2018. The union members want road fines reduced, bail for those arrested over some road offences and an end to police harassment.

The BRTWF Sylhet division president threatened a hunger strike and other protest activities after the Eid-ul-Fitr festival if authorities did not meet transport workers' demands.

Bangladesh garment workers demand reinstatement

Donglian Fashion BD workers in Jamgora area, Ashulia protested for a few hours outside the factory on April 27. They were demanding reinstatement of two terminated employees. The protest was called off when Ashulia Police Station and Dhaka Industrial Police assured them that they would speak to the factory authorities and resolve the issue.

The two terminated workers, aged 18 and 16, witnessed the sexual harassment of a female employee by a factory official on March 18. When workers protested, management closed the plant factory on April 9 and after reopening it on April 15 terminated the two workers.

Hundreds of Migrant Workers in Taiwan protest brokerage system

On April 28, over 200 migrant workers demanded an end to the brokerage system between private employers and foreign labourers, and its replacement with a government direct hiring system.

The protest was dubbed the “Migrant Workers International Workers Day.” Due to a lack of public holidays for overseas workers, the overwhelming majority could not attend the official May Day protest.

Hundreds marched in front of the Ministry of Labor shouting the slogan “Government-to-government direct hiring.” Many migrant workers carried signs at the rally which read, “brokers are the devil,” and “Don’t let your children be brokers. They will be cursed by migrant workers.”

The Migrant Empowerment Network in Taiwan, which organised the rally, said that the public service the government should be managing has been “privatised” as a source of profit for brokers.

Foreign workers in Japan demand better labour conditions

Hundreds of workers rallied in Tokyo on April 27 to demand better conditions for foreign labourers. The rally was organised by Rengo, the Japanese Trade Union Confederation.

Speakers told the demonstration that Burmese migrant workers endured ongoing human rights violations. Migrant workers have reportedly been compelled to labour without pay and deprived of their entitlements.

Indonesian police attack May Day marchers and journalists

On Wednesday, Indonesian police attacked May Day marchers in the cities of Bandung and Yogyakarta on the country’s heavily populated island of Java. Police in Bandung detained 400 young protesters, most of whom were high school students. They were strip searched at Bandung police headquarters.

A journalist and *Tempo* photographer were accosted by police and had their cameras seized. The photographer was ordered to delete images of police beating the protesters.

In Yogyakarta, police clashed with Papuan and other students, attempting to prevent them from leaving student dormitories to hold a May Day march. The march was to commemorate 56 years since the UN handed over western Papua to Indonesian control.

May Day rallies in Indonesia were some of the many held in South-East Asia, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan, Cambodia and Burma, and other parts of Asia, where workers called for better pay, working conditions and labour rights.

Up to 37,000 workers celebrate May Day in Japan

An estimated 37,000 people participated in the May Day celebrations at Yoyogi Park in Tokyo. It was the 90th May Day event held in the capital. Rallies were also held at over 350 places throughout the country.

Taiwan workers march on May Day

Thousands of workers and labour rights advocates marched in Taipei marking International Workers’ Day and demanding better conditions. Event organisers estimated that more than 6,000 people joined the demonstration, despite the rain.

The march, which began after a rally on Ketagalan Boulevard was organised by a coalition of unions and labour rights groups. Demonstrators marched to the Ministry of Labor and the Legislative Yuan before returning to the boulevard. They demanded more rest days and improved labour insurance coverage for occupational injuries and illnesses.

Event organisers also called for the government to extend maternity leave from 56 to 90 days and abolish Article 84-1 of the Labor Standards Act which exempts certain industries from work-hour restrictions.

May Day in Korea

Tens of thousands of workers marched in Korea on May Day denouncing deteriorating working conditions and demanding equal treatment and pay for non-regular workers. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions said more than 25,000 workers marched in Seoul on Wednesday. May Day rallies were also held in 12 other cities, including in Busan, Gwangju and Daejeon.

Many protesters called for the government to rein in chaebols, the huge family-owned conglomerates that dominate South Korea’s economy and are often accused of corruption and monopolistic behaviour.

Hong Kong May Day

Thousands of Hong Kong workers took to the streets on Wednesday marking the city’s annual Labour Day march. They demanded a living wage and a limit on weekly working hours to 44. The march was organised by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions. Organisers estimated around 2,200 people attended, whilst the police put the figure at a 1,400.

An earlier march led by the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions was attended by 4,500 people according to organisers.

Australia and the Pacific

Australian telecommunications union ends all industrial action

After a month of limited industrial action for a pay rise, the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (CEPU), which covers over 3,000 Telstra technicians, called off all action this week. Telstra management has not made a new pay offer but only agreed to re-enter stalled talks.

After one year of negotiations for a new enterprise agreement, CEPU members rejected the company's proposed pay rise of 4.5 percent over the next three years, which is below the official inflation rate.

The decision to end industrial action, which included a 24-hour strike in March, followed by work bans and half hour rolling strikes, comes three weeks prior to a federal election in which the union is heavily supporting the big business Labor Party. Telstra agreed to meet with the union on May 7.

government has accused those arrested of an alleged breach of "public order" for planning the protests, which were part of May Day actions around the world. They were timed to coincide with a major conference of the Asian Development Bank in Nadi. A FTUC spokesman subsequently announced that the union would respond by postponing the events.

Friday's protest was cancelled after the police refused to allow people to gather at any one place, including in private properties. The Fiji Transport Authority rejected the application for a permit for Saturday's march, saying it would impede the safe movement of traffic.



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New Zealand doctors strike for five days

New Zealand's 3,000 junior doctors in public hospitals, held a 5-day strike this week over a dispute with the country's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs). It was the fifth strike by the doctors this year.

On Monday, two dozen doctors and supporters picketed the Dunedin office of David Clark, the minister of health. They demanded that he "control his DHBs." Pickets were set up outside Auckland Hospital on Tuesday.

The DHBs, which manage hospitals, are attempting to impose major attacks on working conditions, including an end to the current limit on 10 consecutive working days. Employers also want the ability to force doctors to work shifts longer than 16 hours and to relocate to any hospital in the country.

The strike went ahead despite the Resident Doctors' Association (RDA) committing to enter talks facilitated by the Employment Relations Authority on May 9. The RDA has accepted the DHBs' pay offer of 7.5 percent over three years, barely above the official rate of inflation. The union is not demanding any improvements to current working conditions, but is asking for the status quo to be maintained.

The RDA is seeking to negotiate a settlement and shut down any further strike action.

Thirty arrested ahead of nationwide Fiji labour stoppage

More than 30 people were arrested in Fiji on Wednesday amid a crackdown on protesters and workers. The arrests came ahead of a planned nationwide demonstration on Friday over labour issues, and a march in Nadi on Saturday, amid protests by hundreds of workers laid-off by the Water Authority of Fiji.

Many of those arrested had earlier been locked out by the government agency after their temporary contracts were cut short. The total number detained and whether they will be charged is unknown. Those arrested include secretary general of the Fiji Trades Union Congress (FTUC), Felix Anthony, an officer from the National Union of Workers, the general secretary of the Fiji Teachers' Association, and a representative of the Fiji Nurses Association. Several union leaders were released on Thursday but about two dozen people are still being held.

The FTUC offices were also raided by police on Thursday. The