Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

26 July 2008

Asia

Transport strike paralyses Philippine cities

An estimated 10,000 jeepney and tricycles drivers struck on July 24 paralysing public transport in five major cities and towns in the Calabarzon region, south of Manila. The strike began at midnight, forcing commuters in Cavit, Laguna, Batanga, Rizal and Quezon to walk long distances to get to work. Some cities reported that 90 percent of public transport was affected.

The strike was called by two major transport unions—Pinagkaisang Samahan ng Tsuper Operator Nationwide (Piston) and Southern Tagalog Region Transport Sector Organisation (Starter)—to protest escalating fuel prices. The strikers demanded the immediate removal of the 12 percent value added tax on oil, the repeal of the oil deregulation law and the ouster of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The latest strike follows a one-day stoppage by jeepney drivers on June 30 in Cebu, Mandaue, Lapu-Lapu and Talisay over the same issues. A union official said the strikes are part of a series of protests that will culminate on July 28 when Arroyo is due to deliver her state of the nation address.

Pay cut sparks strike at Indonesian garment factory

Thousands of factory workers at garment manufacturer PT Mitra Garment Indoraya have been on strike for two weeks and are picketing the factory in Denpasar, Bali. The plant produces garments for French retailer Animale. The National Front of Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNBPI) members walked off the job over the introduction of a new wage system that will reduce pay by 50 percent.

Until this month, the workers received a piece-work payment of 7,000 rupiah (76 US cents) per garment enabling them to earn the equivalent of the Baly province's monthly minimum wage of 800,000 rupiah ($US87). The payment has been reduced to just 3,000 rupiah making it impossible to earn the minimum wage. The FNBPI is also calling for all contract workers to be made permanent. Only 400 workers at the factory are currently permanent.

More walkouts over pay at Hyundai Motor

Around 45,000 workers at three factories of Hyundai Motor Company, South Korea's largest automaker, went on strike for six hours on July 18 for higher pay and better working conditions. The strike was the fourth this month causing production losses estimated at 240 billion won ($US233 million).

The union is demanding a 9 percent pay rise but Hyundai is yet to make an offer. The union also is using the dispute to pressure management to allocate a position on the board of directors for a union representative. Hyundai's board includes nine outside directors who have been paid a total of 25 billion won over the past three years. Workers at Hyundai, the world's sixth largest auto manufacturer, have to strike annually to gain a wage increase.

Hong Kong water-delivery workers want better commissions

Around 200 transport workers at Watson Water in Hong Kong struck on July 21 for a 6 percent salary increase and improved commission. The strike has prevented the twice-weekly delivery of over 20,000 bottles of distilled drinking water to Hong Kong offices.

The workers gathered outside the factory at Tai Po Industrial Estate to protest changes made to commission arrangements and excessive workloads. One employee explained that since 2003 workers have been forced to share commission with new recruits reducing it by 30 percent. The picket was joined by 20 maintenance workers from the factory also demanding a pay rise.

The Department of Labour held talks with management and employees but no agreement was reached and workers are maintaining their strike. The company admitted that commissions, which make up two-thirds of workers' pay, have not been adjusted-up for 12 years. Whilst agreeing to review the payment, the company gave no firm commitments.

Indian hotel workers demand welfare scheme

Karnataka hotel workers staged a sit-down protest in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue in Bangalore on July 21 to demand the state government establish a welfare board for hotel employees. According to protesters, the Labor Department has failed to safeguard employees who were deprived of their benefits under various labor laws.

Hotel workers also complain that their conditions are "pathetic" with many not even receiving minimum wages and other benefits such as provident fund and insurance. The Hotel Employees' Federation of India, which organised the protest, submitted 20 demands to the chief minister's office.

Sri Lankan apparel workers demonstrate against factory closure

Around 300 apparel workers from Candy Garments picketed the factory in Kurunegala last week to oppose plans to close the plant. The workers reject owners' claims that the factory is a loss making venture and accuse management of not depositing employees' provident fund for the last four years. The factory is about 50-years-old and one of the oldest and most prominent garment manufacturing sites in the country producing garments for

© World Socialist Web Site

export and the local market.

Australia and the Pacific

Paramedics take action over staff shortages

About 200 ambulance paramedics stopped work and rallied outside the New South Wales (NSW) parliament in Sydney on July 22. They were protesting statewide staff shortages and want the state Labor government to hire 300 new ambulance workers and 60 drivers.

The Health Services Union (HSU) claims that the government has only been filling vacancies as they occur, rather than expanding the total number of paramedics. It says that staff numbers have not changed for six years. Workers have imposed paperwork bans, which are expected to cost the state government $1.5 million a week in lost venue.

The HSU is also calling for the sacking of the services' chief executive Greg Rochford. A union spokesperson said Rochford had "failed to stamp out a culture of bullying" and "did not know what frontline workers were experiencing daily". He claimed that ambulance officers want a uniformed officer to head the service.

New Zealand pilots strike

Pilots employed by the Air New Zealand regional airline Air Nelson walked off the job at midnight on July 17 for three days over pay and working conditions. The New Zealand Airline Pilots' Association (Alpa) said the strike followed lengthy negotiations with the company, which have not resulted in any progress on pilots' claims.

The pilots want a pay increase and changes to current rostering arrangements which only allow for one weekend off per month. The strike occurred during school holidays and affected an estimated 10,000 customers and 250 services.

New Zealand bus drivers' strike called off

A planned week-long strike by bus drivers in the South Island town of Timaru and due to begin on July 21 was called off at the last minute after the Amalgamated Workers Union reached an agreement with the Christchurch Bus Service. The strike, involving 10 drivers and coinciding with the beginning of school term, would have taken all of the company's Timaru buses off the road.

The settlement ends a protracted dispute for improved working conditions and a pay rise. Last year, the drivers refused a company offer to increase their $12 hourly rate by 50 cents. When the intention to strike was announced the company offered to increase the hourly rate to $13 but the drivers refused to accept this. The union has not publicly disclosed its terms of settlement.

General strike in French Polynesia

Four of Tahiti's five main unions held a general strike on July 20 to protest the high cost of living and deteriorating working conditions in French Polynesia. The strike was timed to coincide with the first official visit by French Overseas Junior Minister Yves Jégo and involved workers from private and public sectors.

The national walkout followed the presentation of 16 claims centring on the high cost of living, employment conditions, and a decline in health and education. The unions also want better employment opportunities for locals and have voiced concerns over the French government's proposal to shut down a military base in Tahiti's north coast Commune of Arue.

Paris has signalled retrenchments and reforms in the face of tightening economic conditions in France.

French Polynesia truck drivers demonstrate over fuel costs

Drivers of around 30 heavy-duty trucks drove at a snail's pace along Tahiti's main freeway and into downtown Papeete during morning rush-hour on July 17 over the high cost of diesel fuel. The drivers want the Tong Sang government to reduce its tax on diesel fuel for truck drivers involved in heavy construction and public works projects. Drivers held a similar protest in March.

The government increased the price of unleaded gasoline and diesel by 19 percent on July 1. Unleaded gasoline rose from 148 to 176 French Pacific francs ($US2 to $2.38) per litre while the price of diesel went up from 124 francs to 153. A drivers' spokesman said heavy duty trucks use 10 to 12 million litres of diesel annually. The truck drivers are demanding to be put in the same category as fishermen, taxi drivers, pearl farm operators and several other groups who have access to less expensive fuel.

Papua New Guinea aviation workers on indefinite strike

National strike action disrupted Papua New Guinea flights when more than 300 aviation workers walked off the job on July 18 to demand the immediate sacking of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) board and management. The strike reportedly caused "total chaos" in airports around the country, including Port Moresby's Jacksons International Airport where police were mobilised.

The workers unanimously voted to strike over the board's non-compliance with the 2007 Enterprise Agreement. They want the immediate implementation of agreement measures, including the payment of ex-gratia entitlements, salary increments, leave fare assistance and consumer price index increments. The workers, who are also owed three years' bonuses, oppose the sale or leasing of important CAA assets. The strike was declared illegal by PNG's industrial registrar.

Air traffic controllers, airport rescue, fire-fighters and civil aviation technical staff returned to work on July 21, after the government promised to "come up with amicable solutions" to meet unions claims.

Construction workers strike over management abuse

Construction work on a rugby stadium at Town Ground in the Solomon Islands' capital Honiara is being delayed after workers walked out on July 21. The workers are protesting poor working conditions and abuse of local workers by foreign supervisors. Nearly 100 local workers are employed by the overseas company building the stadium.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site