

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

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

## **Two steel Nepal workers shot dead**

Two workers were shot dead and over 50 workers injured when police brutally attacked a picket in Central South Nepal on August 29. The striking workers, who are members of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions, were picketing the iron-steel company Narayani Rolling Mills in the Bara district for a seven-point list of demands, including permanent employment status, a minimum wage and a Dashain (religious holiday) allowance.

Workers blocked highways along the Pathlaiya corridors and closed down industries in Bara, Parsa and Rautahat following the attack.

## **Indian mine employees strike following mine fatality**

On September 8, 13,000 workers at the Neyveli Lignite Corporation in Cuddalore, in the south Indian state of Tamilnadu, launched an indefinite strike demanding adequate compensation for the family of co-worker Kolanjiappan (44) who was killed in a mine accident four days earlier. Kolanjiappan died when a tractor-trailer he was riding on crashed in the mine. The strike was organised by the Jeeva Contract Labourers' Union.

## **Indian university lecturers on strike**

Guest lecturers at the Government Arts College in Udumalpet, Tamilnadu, launched an indefinite strike on September 5 to demand the immediate regularisation of all guest lecturers at government colleges across the state. The lecturers covered their mouths with black cloth during a protest at the college.

The strike was organised by the Guest Lecturers Association, which is also demanding immediate disbursement of salaries outstanding since April this year. The lecturers have vowed to continue their agitation until their demands are met.

## **Indian Hyundai workers demonstrate over safety**

Hyundai Motor India car workers demonstrated in Chennai on September 2, following the injury of two employees when the company's paint-shop caught fire. The workers are concerned that proper medical facilities, such as first-aid at the plant and at the city hospital, were not made available to workers injured in the blaze.

## **Jammu transport workers demonstrate for outstanding salaries**

Jammu and Kashmir State Road Transport Corporation (JKSRTC) employees and their families held a street demonstration on September 3. The protest caused a traffic-jam on busy Jammu roads for several hours. The workers want the immediate payment of salaries which the government agreed to pay from March 24 this year, plus 42 outstanding Cost of Living Allowance payments.

## **Indian houseboat workers demand higher wages**

Nearly 1,500 low paid houseboat industry workers in Alappuzha, Kerala, began strike action on September 5, following the refusal of

boat owners to meet employees' demands for a wage rise and a new labor contract. The previous agreement expired in August, 2008. The strike paralysed the houseboat industry and affected at least 400 house boats.

The current wage of a houseboat worker is a 2,500 rupees (\$US56) per month with a daily allowance of 100 rupees. The workers want 4,000 rupees base salary and a 200 rupee daily allowance.

## **Hyundai workers reject union pay deal**

On September 5, 61 percent of Hyundai Motor's more than 42,000 union members rejected a tentative pay offer negotiated by their union. The deal provided a 5.61 percent pay rise, an additional bonus equivalent to three months' pay and a lump-sum payment of three million won (\$US2,740). Management also agreed to workers' demands that the night shift be abolished, which employees said created serious health problems.

The majority of workers, however, are opposed to management's demand that they increase production on the remaining shifts and maintain the current vehicle output.

Meanwhile, workers at Kia Motors Corporation, Korea's No.2 auto maker have ended a series of rolling strikes begun in July after their union forged a tentative deal on a salary increase similar to Hyundai's. The Kia deal will be put to employees for approval this week.

## **Indonesian workers in Hong Kong demonstrate**

Around 60 Indonesian workers protested outside the Queen Elizabeth Hall in Hong Kong on September 7 during celebrations to mark the 63rd anniversary of Indonesian Independence Day. The gathering was attended by Hong Kong government officials and 3,000 local Indonesians.

Protesters waved banners demanding fair pay, the elimination of arrival terminals at Soekarno-Hatta airport specifically for overseas Indonesian workers, and enforcement of a black list of employers and agents who have violated the law. Three protesters were detained by the Indonesian Consulate-General's security staff after they entered the building and began protesting.

A spokesman from Hong Kong's Department of Foreign Affairs said it was not responsible for workers' grievances. He declared that the airport and agent issues were domestic responsibilities and said there would be no increase in the minimum wage for Indonesian workers, which was set by the government.

## **Philippines public hospital workers protest over wage rise**

Over 100 employees at the Philippines General Hospital (PGH) in Manila picketed the main lobby on September 9 calling for the national government to begin paying a 10 percent salary rise owing since July. Although nearly all other government departments and agencies have started paying the increase, PGH management claims it

is unable to do so because the Department of Budget and Management has not released the money.

The picketers said that if their action was unsuccessful they would demonstrate outside the Philippines president's official residence.

#### **NT teachers reject pay deal**

Northern Territory teachers this week overwhelmingly rejected a new pay offer negotiated between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the NT Labor government. While teachers in Katherine and Alice Springs voted for the deal, those in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Palmerston and remote settlements powerfully rejected it.

The government offered a 12 percent pay rise over three years plus a \$2,000 increment at the top of the pay scale to encourage senior teachers to remain in the Territory. While teachers have already accepted increased allowances for teachers in remote schools, AEU members want a 15 percent pay rise over three years and have consistently rejected any lesser offer during the year-long dispute.

Early this month AEU NT branch secretary Adam Lampe told the media that the union executive's decision to endorse the deal was based on "teachers' battle fatigue" and the latest offer's inclusion of extra salary levels for teachers who stay in the job longer. Commenting on this week's vote, Lampe denied there was a split between members and the executive and said it was a strong message to the leadership that it would keep in mind "at the negotiating table."

#### **South Australian teachers' union cancels strike action**

Planned industrial action by teachers in the ongoing industrial dispute between the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the South Australian (SA) Labor-government for a 21 percent pay rise over three years has been called off by the union. Rolling stoppages planned for September 11 and 12 were cancelled after the union agreed to enter into mediation with the government in the SA Industrial Relations Commission. The union claims that these talks will provide "the opportunity for both parties to move forward."

The government has repeatedly refused to increase its 9.75 percent pay offer over three years. Teachers are also in dispute with the government over workloads, class sizes, staff attraction and funding.

#### **Queensland public servants rally for pay and conditions**

Hundreds of public servants from three state government departments planned to rally outside Queensland parliament on September 11 to demand better wages and conditions. Maintenance workers from QBuild, Queensland Health and the Main Roads Department have called for a five percent annual pay rise.

Electrical Trades Union organiser Peter Ong said the state government's offer was less than five percent and included unacceptable trade-offs.

#### **Dairy workers plan strike over wage dispute**

At least 170 maintenance workers at Murray Goulburn's Victorian dairy factories are planning 24-hour strikes over a pay dispute. On September 11, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) rejected a company offer of a 12 percent pay increase over three years, stating that it failed to keep up with the inflation rate. Workers have already imposed work bans that will affect seven factories.

#### **New Zealand polytechnic staff stop work over pay**

Support staff at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT), the largest training institution in the upper South Island of New Zealand, stopped work on September 2 over an impasse in their collective agreement negotiations. The workers, members of the Tertiary Institutes Allied Staff Association (TIASA), crowded into the institute's council meeting holding placards and banners demanding

to be treated fairly, and to have their contribution acknowledged and valued by NMIT.

TIASA is demanding a 4 percent salary increase, which NMIT management has rejected as "not affordable". The institute itself has responded with a list of more than 80 counter claims. TIASA chief executive Peter Joseph said members would meet over the next few days to consider further action.

#### **Wellington City Council staff take action**

Some 43 Wellington City Council employees who issue building consents and ensure food safety at restaurants and cafes began a campaign of industrial action on September 4 with a one-hour lunchtime rally outside the council's main office in Wakefield Street, Wellington.

The Public Service Association (PSA) members are protesting over the council's pay system. Pay is determined by a system of council surveys that determine the "market rate". A PSA spokesman said that most of the workers taking industrial action have been paid below the market rate for the last three years.

Employees have also begun a campaign of rolling industrial bans refusing to handle public inquiries for an hour at a time. It is the first industrial action by PSA members at Wellington City Council in more than 10 years.

#### **Wellington bus drivers reject pay offer**

City bus drivers attending a stop-work meeting called by the Wellington Tramways Union on September 3 rejected the latest pay offer from their employer, Go Wellington, by 208 votes to 23. The drivers also voted to take limited industrial action.

The company is offering a 6.2 percent pay rise and wants to introduce a draconian complaints procedure for drivers. According to company figures, Wellington bus drivers had their annual income reduced by 19 percent in 2007 as a result of shift changes designed to restrict access to penalty rates.

#### **Papuan Manpower Agency workers protest over sackings**

Hundreds of agency workers at heavy-equipment maker PT Trakindo Utama, in Timika Papua, began a three-day protest on September 9 at the offices of the body-hire company Timika Transmigration and Manpower Agency. The workers are demanding the agency withdraw a letter sent to their employer stating that they have no right to strike.

PT Trakindo Union spokesman Jeremi Kumbubuy said because of the letter the company had fired 21 employees and issued final reprimand letters to 700 workers for going on strike in late April. He said if the agency failed to withdraw its letter to the company employees will strike indefinitely.



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