

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.

Police attack Bangladeshi garment workers

Over 100 workers were severely injured-18 critically and one hospitalised with a broken arm-after police charged a sit-down protest by 700 garment workers outside a factory in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) on September 24. Honor Way Textile and Apparels (Pvt) employees have been locked out since July 17 when the factory closed down.

The workers want payment of outstanding wage arrears and submitted a memorandum to the Labor Affairs Adviser and the DEPZ chairman demanding government intervention. Employees have vowed to escalate protests if their demands are not met.

Mass strike closes India's movie industry

Over 100,000 Bollywood and television workers began indefinite strike action on September 24 in protest over irregular pay and the hiring of non-union members. The strike is expected to delay major film releases during India's religious festival season.

Actors, dancers, writers and technicians from 22 associations heeded a call from the Federation of Western India Cine Employees-the umbrella union for Bollywood employees-for an indefinite "non-cooperation" protest in Mumbai, where Bollywood is located.

Federation general secretary Dinesh Chaturvedi said, "All shoots are off. The producers have not stuck to the terms of the agreement they signed with us one-and-a-half years back." Payments, he said, had been delayed up to 12 months and producers were hiring non-members to cut costs.

Indian doctors end strike action

Government doctors in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh struck on September 29 to demand equal pay scales with their central government colleagues. The strike action, which ended late that night after a deal was made with authorities, affected medical services in all government hospitals, including primary health centres, throughout the state.

Andhra Pradesh Government Doctors Association officials said that health authorities had agreed to provide an emergency health-care allowance of 3,000 rupees per month to all non-teaching doctors, a special payment of 1,500 rupees per month to doctors with postgraduate degrees and 1,000 rupees per month to postgraduate diploma holders.

Indian telecom workers demonstrate

Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) telecom workers demonstrated in Tuticorin, Tamilnadu on September 26 to demand

a minimum 10,000 rupee productivity-linked incentive for all non-executive employees. The payment was part of an agreement reached between the BSNL management and the union last year. The United Forum, which includes the BSNL Employees' Union, organised the demonstration.

Sri Lankan hospital staff on strike

Indefinite strike action by medical officers and staff at the Vauniya General Hospital in Sri Lanka's war-torn Northern Province entered its fifth day on September 29. Employees are protesting against management withdrawal of basic working conditions, including staff transport, at the hospital. Striking doctors claim that hospital administrators are autocratic towards staff.

Pakistani hospital workers strike for wages

Hundreds of doctors, nurses, paramedics and ancillary staff at Lahore General Hospital (LGH) struck for one hour and held a demonstration on September 29 over outstanding wage payments.

Strikers said that the hospital administration had not released salaries before the Eid festival. Most affected by the non-payment were Moslem employees who had to leave for their hometowns before the festival.

English teachers' strike in Japan enters ninth month

More than 100 teachers at Berlitz language schools in Japan are maintaining rolling strike action begun last December. The teachers, who are members of the Berlitz General Union Tokyo, have been holding weekly demonstrations outside most of Berlitz's 46 schools in the Kanto Plain. Union members have been driving through the streets of Tokyo in a sound truck making public announcements about the dispute.

The teachers want a 4.6 percent base pay rise and a one-off bonus of one month's salary. Berlitz Japan has not raised teachers' base pay for 16 years and three years ago it lowered starting pay by 10 percent. The teachers have rejected two pay offers from management since the protests began.

Vietnamese garment workers strike for back-pay

Over 200 garment workers at Korean-owned Takyung Vina Company in Ho Chi Minh City's Hoc Mon District struck on September 23 demanding payment of August salaries.

The company owes 500 million dong (\$US30,000) in August salaries but claimed that it could not pay until the last week of September. Workers have rejected a 200,000-dong offer from Takyung Vina management who claim it would carry them through till the end of the month.

Korean auto workers accept pay deals

Workers at Korea's two largest car manufacturers have voted this past week to accept new wage deals.

In a close vote, 54 percent of the 45,000 union members at Hyundai Motor accepted the company's latest pay offer, ending months of rolling strikes.

Hyundai workers previously rejected a basic salary rise of 5.61 percent, a bonus equivalent to three months' salary, and a lump sum payment of three million won (\$US2,597). This offer was accepted on September 26, after the company added a one million won cash payment to every employee. Hyundai has also agreed next year to abolish its all-night shift system.

On September 30, over 30,000 union members at Hyundai affiliate Kia Motors, South Korea's second-biggest auto maker, voted by a 76 percent majority to accept a 5.6 percent rise in base salary and other incentives.

Kia's wage agreement includes a one-off payment of 3.6 million won (\$2,968) and an annual bonus of 300 percent of monthly salary for each employee. The union also endorsed a separate agreement to reduce total working hours throughout the shift span to 17 hours a day from 20 hours from September 2009.

Kia unionists have staged eight partial strikes since July 2, resulting in lost output of over 16,000 vehicles worth 221.7 billion won, according to company estimates.

Seoul television reporters on hunger strike

A group of 55 junior reporters at cable news channel YTN in Seoul began a hunger strike on September 29 to demand withdrawal of punitive measures against 33 union members and the cancellation of lawsuits against 12 unionists and the job transfer of various employees.

They are also protesting the appointment of Koo Bon-hong as president of the news channel, accusing him of being politically biased toward the South Korean President Lee Myung-bak. The reporters claim that the channel's political neutrality will be significantly compromised.

Those involved in the protest joined the company after 2001. They will continue their hunger strike in October on a relay-basis if their demands are not met.

Queensland government workers continue protests

After weeks of rolling strikes and other protests by state public sector workers, Queensland Labor Premier Anna Bligh has directed her ministers to accelerate wage negotiations and resolve "outstanding issues as soon as possible". The directive was issued after a September 30 meeting with union officials.

Public sector unions are protesting over the state Labor government's 3.25 percent restriction on annual pay increases-1.25 percent below the official inflation rate. Any pay rise above this is subject to productivity improvements and other trade-offs. Industrial relations minister John Mickel told the media that he would keep pressuring the unions to accept the government offer.

Last week hospital administrative staff across the state walked off the job for two hours and 4,000 public sector workers marched in the Brisbane CBD denouncing the government's wage restrictions.

Gold Coast liquid waste disposal workers strike

Eight drivers from Transpacific Industries in Sippy Downs on Queensland's Gold Coast remain on strike this week after

negotiations between the company and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) stalled. The drivers, who are contracted to collect liquid waste and clean council septic tanks, walked out on September 28 after the company failed to grant a 4.2 percent pay claim demanded by the TWU.

Transpacific has been pressured by the Sunshine Coast Regional Council to use drivers from other areas to clear a backlog of waste.

Talks resume in New Zealand bus drivers dispute

Talks between the Wellington Tramways Union and bus company Go Wellington resumed this week after the company lifted a lockout of 300 drivers imposed on September 25 after they struck during peak demand the previous day in a pay dispute.

The strike followed three months of negotiations between Go Wellington and the Tramways Union, which wants a pay increase of 8.6 percent. The company's last offer was for a 7 percent pay increase for the first year, 3.25 percent for the next 10 months and a cash payment of \$250.

The union said Go Wellington's offer did not make up for the 19 percent pay cut the company forced on drivers last year when it imposed shift rosters designed to restrict their access to penalty rates. Starting drivers currently earn \$12.72 (\$US9.70) an hour, which is barely a dollar per hour more than the minimum wage.

New Zealand timber workers strike over pay

Eighteen workers at Lumbercorp, a wood treatment company in Waikato, New Zealand voted to extend their current strike action indefinitely on September 29. They walked out five days earlier after three months of failed negotiations for a 4 percent "cost of living" pay claim. The company's current offer is a 2.75 percent pay rise followed by a 3 percent increase in the second year. This is well below the current annual consumer inflation rate of 4 percent.

Lumbercorp and the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) have agreed to enter mediated talks later this week. An EPMU spokesman said that there was "a culture of low pay" among smaller timber sites in New Zealand.



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