

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

23 May 2009

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

South Korean police clash with truckers

At least 470 protesting truck drivers were arrested and over 50 injured when police tried to disperse a 7,000-strong march in Daejeon, South Korea on May 15.

The drivers and their supporters carried anti-government posters and streamers mourning the death of union official Park Jong-Tae, who committed suicide earlier this month in protest against Korea Express. The company had fired 78 parcel delivery workers demanding an increase in service fees.

The truckers voted for a national strike at the rally to demand reinstatement of the delivery workers and for better working conditions and a wage rise. A date for the strike which would involved 15,000 drivers has not been decided.

Korean machine parts workers locked out

S&T Mechatronics employees were locked out in Busan on May 18 after management attempted to dismantle a protest tent erected three days earlier outside the company headquarters. Seven workers and some company officials were injured in the clash. The company has called on local police to reinforce security during the lockout.

The locked out workers claim that their union has held 14 meetings with the company for wage adjustments and regularisation of 15 irregular employees but failed to reach any agreement.

Chinese internet workers end strike

Employees at Baidu Inc., China's biggest Internet search engine, ended a two-week strike this week after management agreed to consider their grievances. Several hundred workers walked out on May 4 over salary cuts and company job-cutting policies.

Baidu workers claim that the company has slashed base salaries by 30 percent and increased sales targets, threatening to withhold commissions if the targets are not met. Employees want these policies withdrawn and the company's regional manager fired.

Employee representatives met with management on May 18. Workers decided to give the company two to three days to respond to their demands and will consider further action if necessary after that.

Bangladesh river workers walk out

Some 3,000 dockworkers from Karnaphuli River ports in Chittagong walked out on May 18 to demand a pay rise. The manual labourers want their wage rates increased from 7.20 taka to 10 taka (14 US cents) for every 90-kilogram sack they unload.

Chittagong Ghat and Godown Sramik Union officials decided to end the strike on May 19, after contractors said they would respond to workers' claims within 10 days. The dockworkers have vowed to resume the strike if their demands are not met.

Pakistani university teachers demonstrate

Academic Staff Association of Quaid-i-Azam (QAU) members marched through the Quaid-i-Azam university in Islamabad on May 18 to demand permanency for contract employees and incentive payments for teachers. They also want teachers who have remained on the same grade for over two decades to be promoted.

The teachers began protesting on Monday, wearing black armbands, and have held two-hour protest meetings every second day. They have threatened to launch strike action if their demands are not met by the government.

Indian auto workers end strike

Mahindra and Mahindra (M&M) auto workers at the company's Igatpuri plant in Maharashtra ended a two-week strike on May 19 after the Bhartiya Kamgar Sena Union and management signed a new salary agreement.

The auto workers struck on May 4 over the suspension of union leader Madhav Dhatri and company delays in signing a salary agreement for the past 22 months.

M&M's Igatpuri plant has 4,450 employees and is in partnership with Renault. It produces the Xylo, Scorpio, Bolero and Logan.

Cochin dockers return to work

Over 3,500 marine and cargo-handling employees at Kerala's Cochin port ended their 22-day strike on May 18 after union and management reached an agreement on disputed manning issues. Workers struck on April 26, after the Cochin Port Trust (CPT) began implementing new manning scales that unionists claimed would cut jobs by up to 75 percent.

CPT management has agreed not to sack any staff identified as "surplus" under the new manning scale and that other award issues would be "sorted out" within a month. Management at other ports, however, have declared that they will implement the new manning scales. These ports employ 35,000 workers.

Cambodian construction workers protest wages

Around 600 Hanil Engineering and Construction employees at Phnom Penh's Camko City protested outside the company office on May 12 over unpaid wages. They have threatened to strike until their wages are fully paid. The construction workers threw bricks and timber at the office, protesting that they have not been paid their full wage since April.

Most employees returned to work the following day, after the company promised to pay the outstanding entitlements before the end of the week.

Vietnam garment workers on strike

About 500 garment workers at the Minh Phat Garment Factory in Ho Chi Minh City downed tools on May 11 to demand higher pay and better conditions. Striking employees are protesting long working hours, often until 10 pm each day, and a seven-month trial period during which they are paid just 1,284,000 dong (\$US72) per month. Workers have also called for a pay rise.

A government-appointed union official backed Minh Phat Garment management, claiming that the company was facing difficulties caused by the global financial crisis and could not meet workers' demands. The official told the local media that the company would sack the strikers unless they ended their walkout.

Queensland public school teachers strike

Over 37,000 teachers and administrative staff at public schools across Queensland struck for 24 hours on May 19 after refusing a state government pay rise offer of 12.5 percent over three years.

More than 3,000 teachers marched through Brisbane's CBD to rally outside the state parliament. The rally voted for more protests, further strike action, work bans and non-co-operation with departmental initiatives.

Teachers and administrative staff want pay parity with their colleagues in other states. Queensland Teachers Union president Steve Ryan said that the government's 12.5 percent offer still meant that union members would still earn between \$4,000 and \$7,000 less than their interstate counterparts.

Victorian university teaching staff strike

Around 1,000 university academics rallied in Melbourne on May 21, as part of a 24-hour statewide strike over wages and conditions. Lectures were cancelled at Deakin, Melbourne, Monash, RMIT and Swinburne universities and work on some campus construction sites was suspended after union members walked off the job.

The strike by 10,000 National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members in Victoria follows 12 months of fruitless bargaining for a 20 percent pay rise and demands for a reduction in the casualisation of the workforce and better conditions for contract researchers.

NTEU branches have been campaigning for the restoration of conditions lost under the Howard government. In 2005, individual agreements were imposed on all university employees, limits removed on the number of casual staff and union access to members restricted. The union claimed at the time that if these conditions were not accepted the federal government would deny \$450 million funding to the universities.

Earlier this month, The University of Sydney and the NTEU agreed on a 15 percent wage rise over three years. The deal included a limitation on

the use of casuals.

Air New Zealand pay dispute continues

Some 240 flight crew employed by Zeal 320, an Air NZ subsidiary, returned to work last week after being locked out for four days. Zeal employees want pay parity with their counterparts in Air NZ who do the same job and earn around \$30,000 a year more. Air NZ locked the workers out when they began strike action on May 7.

Just prior to the strike, Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union negotiators indicated that they were willing to settle below members' expectations. The union issued the company with a much reduced "revised offer", saying that it was "trying to meet Air NZ halfway". The company rejected the settlement offer. Union officials are currently meeting with members "to determine the next steps".



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