

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 July 2009

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

This week the KTU ignored education authorities' warnings and issued another petition against the government. It is collecting signatures from teachers and will publish a list in its magazine later this month. The union has about 76,000 members.

Indonesia: Toshiba strike in third month

More than 700 members of the Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal Indonesia (FSPMI) at PT Toshiba Consumer Products Indonesia are maintaining strike action, which began on April 16, after the company refused to recognise a collective labour agreement signed by the union and management.

FSPMI workers are demanding that the company honours the agreement and registers it with the Indonesian government, and that 15 sacked elected trade union leaders at the plant be reinstated. Toshiba has locked out workers from East Jakarta Industrial Park factory, insisting that all demands are dropped before they are allowed back in.

The International Metalworkers' Federation has a strike fund for the workers but has not organised industrial action at other Toshiba plants where it has affiliates.

South Korean police raid teachers' union headquarters

On July 3, 50 Seoul police raided the Korean Teachers Education Workers Union (KTU) headquarters in Yeongdeungpo-dong, and its chapter office in Sadang-dong, seizing documents and computer servers. Around 17,000 unionised teachers are accused of violating the Civil Servants' Law last month by signing a KTU petition criticising the Lee government's education policies and its attacks on civil liberties.

The Seoul Prosecutors' Office has launched an investigation into 88 teacher unionists who organised the petition. Ten union executive officials face dismissal and 78 provincial leaders could be suspended. Thousands of teachers who signed the petition are also facing disciplinary sanctions. Last week Seoul police arrested 16 KTU members who had been leading a march to the presidential office in Cheong Wa Dae (The Blue House) to denounce the government's decision to punish the teachers.

Kia workers strike for pay

Union members at Kia Motors Corporation, South Korea's second-largest carmaker, downed tools for four hours at three plants on June 30, after seven sessions of talks with the company failed to establish a new work agreement. Union demands include an 87,709 won (\$US69) increase in the monthly basic salary and a 200 percent bonus.

In the first three months of this year, Kia posted a net profit of 97.4 billion won, compared with a loss of 25 billion won for the same period last year.

Chinese bus drivers return to work

Eighty-six contract bus drivers at the privately-owned Wuding Transportation Company in Yunnan Province returned to work on July 6, after a three-day strike against company moves to purchase its own buses and replace the contracted drivers' vehicles.

The drivers struck following repeated refusals by the company to negotiate compensation. County government officials have met with the drivers and agreed to mediate talks with the bus company.

Vietnamese factory workers walk out

Over 300 workers at a Taiwanese company, Hwata Vina, in Ho Chi Minh City walked off the job for several hours on July 3 complaining about management's "draconian rules". They said that the company,

which produces water tanks and kitchen appliances, had imposed unreasonable conditions such as restricting toilet breaks and cutting pay during electricity supply failures.

They were also asked to be at the factory 20 minutes before work officially commenced. Failure to do so resulted in a 100,000 dong (\$US5.60) wage cut for each "late" arrival. Strikers also complained of bullying and abusive language from managers. Workers returned to their jobs after a company director apologised and pledged to correct the situation.

Meanwhile, HCMC authorities have announced that top executives from two foreign companies recently fled the country owing 1,246 workers 2.2 billion dong (US\$129 million) in salaries.

Philippines lampshade workers resume picket

Some 150 workers of lampshade manufacturer Paul Yu, in the Mactan Export Processing Zone II in Lapu-Lapu City, resumed their picket-protest at the factory gates after more than a week of "fruitless negotiations" with management. Paul Yu suspended over 300 employees on June 22 for striking to demand reinstatement of seven colleagues sacked for instigating previous walkouts for improved wages and conditions.

Paul Yu Workers Association members want management to lift the suspensions and negotiate other outstanding grievances. These include, outsourcing (which has halved their work-week), permanency for irregular employees (who are forced to sign new contracts every two months), and the non-payment of holiday pay, paternity leave and break time. Management wants to retrench the suspended workers and offered a separation rate of 3,000 pesos (\$US62) for each year of service.

Hearings on the suspensions have begun in the National Conciliation and Mediation Board and the Department of Labor and Employment.

Indian sanitary workers strike

Nearly 4,000 sanitation and transport employees at the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), Andhra Pradesh, struck on July 6 opposing a municipal plan to integrate them into a private company Ramky Enviro Engineers. Bhagyanagar Municipal Employees Union (BMEU) members in the sweeping and transportation division claim that this will result in retrenchments and a hike in garbage collection charges.

Several striking union members and officials have been arrested on charges of restricting non-striking workers deployed to remove garbage collecting in the streets.

While GHMC commissioners have agreed to meet BMEU officials in a second round of talks on the workers' 15 demands, the strikers have vowed to continue their action until the state government scraps its

integration plan.

Air India employees walk out

Thousands of Air India workers walked out for two hours on July 3 over company plans to delay June salary payments. Demonstrations were held at Mumbai airport and Air India offices in Mumbai and New Delhi. The strike began after the airline told its 31,000 employees that it would defer June wages, worth \$US73 million, until July 15.

Air India management revised the plan slightly this week, offering to pay June salaries and productivity-linked incentives to permanent employees by July 14 and contract staff wages on July 10.

Aviation commentators have accused the National Aviation Company of India Ltd, which has been running Air India since last year when it merged with the domestic carrier Indian Airlines, of mismanagement. The company needs a cash injection of nearly 150 billion rupees (\$US3.1 billion) to remain operational.

Tamil Nadu fisherman strike after Sri Lankan navy detentions

Fishermen from Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu began indefinite strike action on July 6 to demand release of 20 colleagues allegedly "detained" by the Sri Lankan Navy for entering its waters. Fishermen said that Sri Lankan naval craft surrounded five Rameswaram boats between Katchatheevu and Talaimannar, confiscated their vessels and took the crews into custody.

Yagappa Mechanised Boat Fishermen Association members met on July 7 and voted to remain on strike until their colleagues were released. They complained that the repeated arrest of members fishing in and around Katchatheevu, where they enjoyed traditional rights, had threatened their livelihood.

Tamil Nadu telecom workers protest

Employees of telecom giant Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited held a one-day hunger strike outside the general manager's office in Cuddalore on July 6 against "victimisation transfers". Up to 70 technicians, including local union officials were recently transferred to other divisions without any valid reason.

BSNL Workers' Alliance members have also demanded that a wage review due on January 1, 2007 be implemented.

Bihar university teachers protest

Teachers in the postgraduate department of Vinoba Bhave University (VBU) in Hazaribagh wore black ribbons on July 4 to demand salary arrears and implementation of Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. Teachers later gathered at the VBU headquarters and vowed to continue their protests until they win their demands.

Postgraduate Teachers' Association president S.B. Choudhary said talks with the VDU governor on June 27 had failed to reach an agreement.

Queensland workers protest against privatisation

Union members, led by the Queensland Council of Unions, marched through Brisbane to state parliament on July 3 against the state Labor government's plan to sell \$15 billion of assets to shore up its ailing budget. Assets to be sold include the ports of Brisbane and Bundaberg, Forest Plantations Queensland, Queensland Rail's coal freight business, Queensland Motorways Limited and the Abbott Point Coal Terminal.

The recent Australian Labor Party state conference gave Queensland Premier Anna Bligh a green light to go ahead with the sale and a bill allowing the sell-off passed through parliament last month.

The rally was part of a five-week state-wide anti-privatisation campaign which began with a demonstration in Rockhampton last month. The Electrical Trades Union has threatened to withdraw financial support for the Bligh government at the next state election if it goes ahead with the sales.

NSW hospital workers threaten strike action

Health Services Union (HSU) members are threatening to strike at hospitals across New South Wales from July 27 over planned job cuts in Sydney's west. HSU organiser Adam Hall said the action could include walkouts and workplace bans and limitations.

Hall claimed hundreds of jobs will be slashed in a Sydney West Area Health Service plan to offer voluntary redundancies to all staff, including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and social workers. A spokesman for health minister John Della Bosca claimed the job cuts "will ensure the health services run more efficiently".

Meanwhile, the NSW Nurses' Association has called on Della Bosca to provide urgent funding to employ additional staff at the Calvary Mater hospital in Newcastle. Six new emergency department beds cannot be put in service and the new 12-bed emergency medical unit remain closed for lack of staff.

New Zealand communications technicians protest restructuring

On July 3, technicians employed by Visionstream, a major contractor to Telecom New Zealand Limited, rejected a planned restructure that would force around 900 technicians in the Auckland and Northland regions to become owner/operators, or lose their jobs. Following the vote, around 300 workers drove their vans in a convoy through Auckland and protested outside Telecom's corporate headquarters.

The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) said the technicians could be forced to spend up to \$60,000 (\$US38,700) to buy their own vehicles and tools. They would also lose job security and be forced to pay their own insurance and vehicle repair costs. EPMU delegates will meet next week to plan a campaign against the restructure.

Air NZ pay dispute goes to facilitator

The EPMU is set to enter facilitation talks with the Employment Relations Authority and the Air New Zealand subsidiary, Zeal 320, to resolve a long-running pay dispute. In May, Zeal 320 flight attendants walked off the job for four days, rejecting a pay increase of 4 percent, an allowance increase of 8 percent and a one-off payment of \$150 per person.

Zeal attendants work on Air NZ's short-haul international routes and are paid thousands of dollars less than attendants directly employed by Air NZ to do the same work. The union claimed Zeal's pay offer fell well short of pay parity with Air NZ employees.

New Zealand metal union accepts pay settlement

The EPMU has agreed to a pay deal with New Zealand's metal industry employers. The settlement includes a 2 percent pay rise with four weeks' notice and four weeks' compensation for workers made redundant. Metal workers are currently voting on the settlement.

A previous 1 percent pay rise offer was rejected by union delegates last month with the union claiming that it was equivalent to a pay cut. The current proposal is still well below the annual increase in the cost of living, which stands at 3 percent, while food prices have risen by 8.8 percent.

The Metals & Manufacturing MECA (multi-employer collective agreement) is the EPMU's largest and considered a national trend-setter for wages and conditions.



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