

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.

Bangladeshi police attacks apparel workers

Over 100 Auto Textile Knitwear employees in Fatullah, Narayanganj were injured when police attempted to break up a demonstration on August 25. Workers walked out after learning that the owner would not pay three months' outstanding salaries. Demonstrations spread to Battala, Lalpur, Lamapara and Razarbag. Police baton-charged the workers after the protests spilled onto a local train track.

On the same day police forcibly removed 800 employees from the Washing and Design BD Limited factory at Jamgara crossing in Savar after they downed tools over an 11-point charter of demands. The claims include payment of annual leave and monthly salaries within seven days of each month and the provision of improved work-break meals. The protest ended several hours later, after management agreed to some of the workers' demands.

Korean tyre workers locked out

Kumho Tires, Korea's second largest tyre manufacturer, suspended production on August 25 and locked out nearly 4,000 workers at its three factories in Gwangju, Gokseong and Pyeongtaek. Employees had begun rolling strike action on August 23, after extensive negotiations over pay and jobs failed. The union has been in dispute with the company for over two months over an extended pay freeze and the planned sacking of 18 percent of its workforce.

Kumho Tires has rejected the union's demand for a 7.8 percent pay increase in addition to bonuses. It also wants to maintain a wage freeze and introduce job-sharing through cuts in working hours and other plans, including retrenchment. Workers say they have accepted a wage freeze over the past two years and that job-sharing will cut their wages by 20-30 percent.

The company has reported its restructuring plan to the Ministry of Labor and provided the union with a list of over 730 employees it wants retrenched. The union has told the company it is willing to negotiate on the pay rise.

Air India workers on hunger strike

Over 20,000 Air India employees began a three-day hunger strike in several major airports, including New Delhi and Chennai on August 25, and held a protest at the Indira Gandhi International Airport. The workers are protesting salary payment delays and a 50 percent cut in a productivity-linked incentive scheme and other allowances.

The Aviation Industry Employees Guild and Air Corporation Employees Union called off a proposed strike on June 30, after Air India agreed to pay the salaries of 70 percent of its workforce. Minister for Civil Aviation Praful Patel, however, refused to provide the finance, declaring that the Indian government would not keep bailing out the airline. The unions have accused the government of withholding funds and cutting allowances in preparation for privatisation.

Air India's borrowings have risen from 65.5 billion rupees in November 2007 to 152.4 billion rupees (\$US3.1 billion) in June this year.

Jet Airways India pilots to strike over sackings

The National Aviators Guild (NAG)—a newly formed pilots union at Jet Airways—has served a 14-day notice on the airline of strike action from September 7. The guild claims that 680 Jet Airways pilots would strike in protest against the sacking of two senior pilots over alleged anti-company activities.

The sacked pilots—D. Balaraman and Sam Thomas—are general secretary and joint secretary respectively of the NAG. The guild was registered in July but shortly after the pilots received dismissal letters stating that their services were no longer required.

Jet Airways has 84 aircraft, 750 pilots and operates 365 daily domestic and international flights. Mumbai's regional labour commissioner has initiated "conciliation proceedings" between pilots and the airline management.

Indian mine workers strike for wages and conditions

About 400 sandstone miners from the Dabi and Budhpura areas of Rajasthan walked off the job to demand higher wages and better working conditions on August 22. According to the Rajasthan State Mine Labor Union, the workers are paid below the minimum wage, are not provided identity cards and no official attendance records are kept. If miners are injured or die at work there is no way to prove their employment and difficult to claim compensation.

Most of the mines are allegedly illegal and the workers paid only 1 rupee per foot of area mined per day. The miners have vowed to continue strike action until their demands are met.

Indian health workers walk out

Daily wage employees, including nursing assistants and cleaners, from the Regional Cancer Centre in Thiruvananthapuram walked off the job on August 24 to demand a pay rise, bonus and employment regularisation. The strike ended after the centre director agreed to their demands later that day. Employees have announced, however, that they will take indefinite strike action on September 21 if the authorities fail to keep their promises.

Mumbai university teachers end strike

Maharashtra Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations members ended a 45-day strike this week after the government agreed to some of their demands. The teachers walked out on July 14 to demand implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations, full payment of the UGC (University Grants Commission) salary package and pay parity for 10,000 teachers appointed between 1991 and 1999 without NET/SLET qualification. The qualification was made mandatory in 1999.

The government agreed to implement the Sixth Pay Commission salaries, dearness allowances as per UGC scales as well as other allowances received by state government employees. It refused, however, to grant teachers' demands that the NET/SLET qualification requirement be waived and offered to establish a four-member union/government committee to investigate individual cases.

Resident doctors strike in Pakistan

Over 300 resident doctors at the Civil Hospital Karachi began indefinite strike action on August 24 for the immediate payment of three months' outstanding salaries. All departments, including intensive care and emergency units, were affected. Doctors told the local media that they had "no faith in hospital officials" and would continue their strike until their salaries were paid.

Sri Lankan transport workers demonstrate

Transport workers from the Nittambuwa Bus Depot, about 50 kilometres from Colombo, demonstrated outside their depot on August 25 over wages and conditions. Employed by the state-owned Sri Lanka Transport Board, the workers' basic monthly salary is just 8,530 rupees (\$US74). They want salary equity with other state employees. Other demands include increasing the retirement age to 60 years.

Queensland sugar mill workers locked out

Bundaberg Sugar—Queensland's largest cane grower—shut its crushing mills for six days on August 26, locking out 250 workers. The lockout came a few days after members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), Electrical Trades Union and Australian Metal Workers Union imposed four-hour stoppages at the beginning of each shift as part of their campaign for a new work agreement. The unions and the company have been deadlocked in negotiations since April.

Bundaberg Sugar had previously offered a 3.5 percent annual pay increase for two years, conditional on workers buying out one week of annual leave. Last week union members rejected a revised management offer allowing employees to keep their annual leave but work extra hours during the non-crush season and forgo some rostered days off.

AWU senior industrial advocate Chris Simpson told the media: "The workers are resolute they are not going to trade this condition off, whether it be all at once or gradually over time."

Queensland council workers strike

Hundreds of Gold Coast City Council staff in southeast Queensland struck for 24 hours on August 25 and rallied at the Evandale Council Chambers over stalled negotiations for a pay rise. Most customer services were affected, including libraries and garbage collection. Australian Workers Union and Queensland Services Union members want a 4.5 percent pay rise but the council has said it will not go above 3.5 percent. The council has taken the issue to the Industrial Relations Commission.

New Zealand telecommunications engineers maintain campaign

More than 700 lines engineers employed by Telecom NZ subsidiaries Transfield Services and Downer EDi struck for 24 hours on August 24 and rallied outside Telecom NZ buildings in Auckland and Wellington demanding the company abandon its plan to contract their work out to Visionstream. They were joined by Maritime Union members, who voted to provide \$10,000 to the strikers.

The next day 100 engineers walked out in the Northland region. Engineers have also implemented a work ban on Telecom NZ's broadband internet network in Auckland and Northland.

The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union members struck on July 24, beginning an industrial campaign against Visionstream's proposed sub-contracting model, which the union claimed would lower their income by 50 and 66 percent. Under the plan 900 engineers in the Auckland and Northland regions will have to become owner-operators or lose their jobs. As owner-operators, engineers will pay up to \$60,000 to buy their own vans and tools, plus cover vehicle operating costs.

New Zealand: Victoria University staff protest planned cuts

Staff, students and supporters rallied at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) on Tuesday to protest the university's plan to cut its Social Science Research programme, and to make its two full-time

academic staff redundant. The plan to cut the programme is one of several budget reduction measures at the university since the onset of the recession, including teaching staff cuts in many departments.

The Association of University Staff claimed the university is planning to cut over 15 percent of its staff.

Solomon Islands public service union ends strike

The Solomon Islands Public Employees Union (SIPEU) called its 13,000 members back to work on August 25, ending a 12-hour nationwide strike. The union agreed to end the strike after the government forced their dispute into the Trades Dispute Panel, which will mediate negotiations over the next three weeks.

SIPEU has presented a series of claims to the government, including a cost of living increase, improved accommodation allowances and compensation for property damage caused by the 2007 tsunami.

While the log of claims is a long-standing issue, SIPEU previously decided not to pursue its demands because of government budget restraints. The union decided to push for its claims after parliamentarians recently granted themselves substantial increases in their entitlements. Public sector workers in the Western province walked out in June over similar claims.



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