

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

17 July 2010

## China: Honda auto parts workers stage strike

About 180 workers from Atsumitec Auto Parts in the southern Chinese city of Foshan walked out on Monday after management cut overtime and increased workloads. The plant produces gear sticks for the Japanese auto giant Honda. The strikers want a 500-yuan increase in their current basic monthly salary of about 900 yuan.

Management threatened to fire 90 strikers on Wednesday if they refused to return to work. The workers responded by demanding that management apologise for its attacks on conditions and to promise not to lay off any employees in the next two years or they would resign en masse. The walkout is the latest in a series of industrial disputes that first erupted at Honda's transmission plant in the same city in May.

## India: Nokia union calls off strike

The Nokia India Employees Progressive Union (NIEPU) ordered its 1,500 members back to work at the mobile phone company's Sriperumbudur plant in Chennai after a 24-hour strike on July 13. The workers were demanding a pay rise and reinstatement of 63 colleagues suspended last year.

While no precise details on the Nokia-NIEPU return to work deal have been released the company has only "offered to revoke the suspension of all the [sacked] employees pending completion of remaining legal process of disciplinary proceedings" and claims that its wages are among the highest in the region.

A Nokia worker with four years' experience at the Chennai plant currently earns 8,600 rupees (\$US184) a month. The NIEPU wanted a monthly pay rise of between 500 and 1,000 rupees a month. Nokia employs around 8,000 workers at its Sriperumbudur factory, which produces more than six million handsets a month.

## Punjab sanitation workers demonstrate

Sanitation workers in Ludhiana, Punjab rallied on July 11 to protest the municipal corporation's failure to grant employees permanency. The demonstration was triggered after authorities said they had cancelled the lists of 3,400 workers seeking permanency because "they were not up to the mark".

The Balmiki Youth Federation and sanitation workers' committees claimed that Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal had publicly promised to make employees permanent. The sanitation workers have vowed to hold further protests if their demand for permanency is not implemented.

## Tamil Nadu nutritious meal employees on hunger strike

Tamil Nadu Nutritious Meal Employees Association members in Erode held a fast on July 9 to demand the government implement Sixth Pay Commission recommendations. Their other demands include regularisation of all nutritious meal employees as full-time government workers, pension benefits and the filling of all vacant posts in government social welfare departments. Demonstrators submitted a petition to city officials.

## Protesting Andhra Pradesh health workers arrested

On July 9, at least 60 health workers were arrested during a protest at the Collectorate office in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. The health workers' demands included immediate payment of wage arrears, payment of the minimum wage, and reinstatement of illegally terminated colleagues. The Voluntary Health Workers Union organised the demonstration.

## Kerala plantation workers on strike

Nilackal Estate plantation workers in Kerala are continuing an indefinite strike that began on July 8 over the denial of pension benefits to eight retired employees. All development works at the Nilackal base camp have ceased since the strike began. The eight plantation workers retired from service in June 2005.

## Bangladeshi garment workers strike

Several hundred employees of two garment factories in Gazipur demonstrated on Tuesday over poor pay, blocking Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway. Their demands included a wage rise, salaries to be paid on time

and for bonuses.

Meanwhile, talks are continuing between the government, garment factory owners and workers representatives over a new minimum wage due to be implemented on July 28. Workers representatives want the minimum wage increased from its current 1,660 taka per month to 5,000 taka (\$US70) and for the review period to be reduced from five years to three years.

### **Cambodian garment union calls off strike**

Free Trade Union of Workers (FTUW) leader Chea Mony called off a planned three-day strike this week and accepted government and garment employers' demand that a minimum wage increase for Cambodian garment workers be restricted to \$US5 per month. Last week Mony and other trade unions representing over 130,000 garment workers rejected the \$5 offer and threatened strike action if the minimum wage was not increased from \$50 per month to \$93.

The new minimum wage of \$61 per month (\$55 plus the existing \$6 cost of living supplement) is likely to be implemented from October and will remain in place until 2014. According to recent research by the Community Legal Education Centre, Cambodian workers need \$80 a month to cover basic needs such as food, shelter, medicine and clothes.

The Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union is planning to hold a public meeting on July 25 to gain support for strike action for a larger pay increase.

### **Australian port workers walk out after death**

Maritime workers at all 15 P&O Automotive and General Stevedoring wharves, across the nation walked off the job on July 14 following the death of another P&O employee at Appleton Dock in Melbourne. The 41-year-old worker was crushed by a 2.7-tonne steel beam while it was being lifted by a crane. His death is the third at Appleton in seven years, and the seventh death at Australian docks since 2003.

In April, five dock workers at Port Kembla in New South Wales narrowly missed death when a cable snapped while loading 28 tonnes of steel onto a ship. Two workers were injured in the accident.

"The industry is in crisis," said Paddy Crumlin, National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). "It's the third fatality on the wharves in five months—and we said last time we lost a worker in March we needed urgent action to overcome the lack of safety on the job."

The MUA's "urgent action", however, does not include industrial action to force improved safety standards, instead, the union has appealed to the government to direct Safe Work Australia and the Stevedoring Temporary Advisory Group to give the "highest priority" to include stevedoring specific regulations in national harmonised OHS regulations. The national OHS regulations will not be finalised until January 2012.

### **Xstrata miners' strike in second week**

Over 230 miners at Xstrata's Tahmoor colliery, in NSW's southern highlands, returned to work yesterday after a seven-day strike over a new work agreement. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union

(CFMEU) offered to suspend industrial action planned for next week if Xstrata resumed negotiations. Full-scale production at the mine has been at a standstill for over five months since miners began rolling stoppages after the Xstrata broke off talks.

Negotiations have been ongoing for 18 months but Xstrata has consistently rejected CFMEU demands for improved annual leave and an agreement to protect jobs and existing safety standards. A major sticking point is Xstrata's refusal to include a guarantee in the agreement that it will not replace permanent workers with contract labour.

In February, the company used the Fair Work Act to lock out Tahmoor employees after they rejected an average 25 percent base salary rise, that also included cuts to basic conditions and entitlements.

### **University of New South Wales staff stood down**

About 100 academic and administration staff at the University of NSW were stood down this week and their pay docked from July 2 after they implemented work bans. Although they performed other functions the university's director of human resources informed staff by email that they would not be paid "until you are prepared to perform all your duties."

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members had refused to enter student final exam results as part of long-running campaign for a new enterprise agreement. The NTEU wants a 20 percent pay rise over three years, the right of staff to choose when to take leave, a cap on working hours, and a reduction of staff on short contracts.

### **Victorian University academics stood down**

Up to ten academic staff members at the Victoria University (VU) in Melbourne were stood down this week after imposing work bans on the recording of student exam results. VU's enterprise agreement expired in January and the NTEU has requested numerous meetings with management to begin renegotiations. The union wants a 5.5 percent pay increase. The university agreed to a meeting on July 20, after staff voted to escalate industrial action.

### **Sydney airport fuel workers to strike**

Transport Workers Union (TWU) members employed by Airport Fuel Services (AFS) at Sydney airport plan to strike on July 21 over a new workplace agreement. AFS has told workers they will be locked out for seven days if they go ahead with the industrial action.

At the centre of the dispute is a proposal by AFS to pay labour-hire workers a lower rate than company employees. According to the TWU, the company wants to reduce labour hire workers' annual pay by up to \$16,000 while granting company employees doing the exact same work a 5 percent wage increase each year for the next four years.

The TWU wants a clause in the new enterprise agreement that forces the company to pay labour-hire and company employees the same rates. Australia's industrial tribunal Fair Work Australia ruled last month that inserting such a clause in the agreement is legal.

## **Sydney rail workers threaten to strike**

Rail, Train and Bus Union (RTBU) members at the state-owned Railcorp voted this week on whether to take industrial action over a new work agreement. While negotiations are continuing rail employees' enterprise bargaining agreement expired in April. While the ballot result is not yet known the union wants a 5 percent pay rise over three years, twice the state government's offer.

RTBU divisional secretary Alex Claassens said industrial action would start with work bans and could escalate to strike action, depending on how negotiations were progressing.

## **Queensland nurses want new pay system fixed**

Up to 200 Queensland health workers and nurses protested outside state parliament in Brisbane on July 14 over Queensland Health's (QH) new computer pay system. Since the system was introduced in March many of the health department's 22,000 employees have been underpaid, overpaid or not paid at all. The Queensland Nurses Union (QNU) state secretary Gay Hawsworth said some workers have not been paid for nine fortnights in a row.

According to a recent auditor-general's report, the new system "went live" without proper testing or contingency plans. The Bligh government is trying to blame IBM for the debacle and is withholding \$3.3 million of a final payment for installing the system.

## **New Zealand: Gold miners continue industrial action**

Fifty-five miners employed by contractor HWE Mining at Newmont Waihi Gold's Favona Decline are continuing industrial action, which began on July 2 after workers rejected a new collective agreement. Their action includes rolling strikes for two days every week and taking two half-hour breaks in shift instead of the usual single one-hour break that allows time for blasting.

A sticking point in negotiations is management's plan to pass on the union-negotiated increases to 20 non-union workers at the mine. This is opposed by the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union, which wants the contract to include additional annual bonus payments that will only apply to union members.

## **Northland laboratory Workers impose bans**

New Zealand Medical Laboratory Workers Union (NZMLWU) members at the Northland District Health Board (DHB) began a week of industrial action on July 13 for an improved pay offer. Action includes not answering phones or performing multi-resistant organism screenings.

While the Northland DHB is offering a 2 percent pay rise over two years, the NZMLWU wants a 4 percent pay rise and improved conditions for the 70 lab workers.

The NZMLWU began negotiations with 13 of the country's 21 District Health Boards (DHBs) and with the Blood Service in March for five collective agreements covering around 800 workers. The DHBs and NZ

Blood Service want government mediation on the matter.

## **Massey University cleaners protest**

A plan to cut nearly 34,000 hours from the cleaning contract at Massey University's three campuses has drawn angry protests from the 100 workers affected. The Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) collected 500 signatures from Massey staff opposing new measures that are being implemented after a cleaning contract was passed from Spotless to OSC on July 1. The period of guaranteed work has been reduced to the 31 weeks of university terms. Despite wide support from other university employees the SFWU has not planned an industrial campaign but called on Massey University to delay and review the changes.



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