

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 December 2010

Korea: Hyundai strike ends without resolution

A 25-day sit-in strike by contract workers at the Hyundai Motor factory in Ulsan, South Gyeongsang, ended on December 9 after management agreed to negotiate in “good-faith” on strikers’ demand to be made full-time Hyundai employees. The strike and factory occupation by 500 temporary workers was over the carmaker’s refusal to grant permanent work status in accord with a July Supreme Court ruling. The court directed Hyundai to transform in-house subcontractors who have worked at the plant for more than two years into official employees. Hyundai has rejected the ruling and had planned to appeal.

Hyundai has about 8,200 contract workers, or 22 percent of its total workforce, who are paid at least half the rate of regular workers with reduced entitlements. Over 1,900 contract workers have filed a suit demanding they be recognised as Hyundai employees.

The negotiating committee, made up of representatives from Hyundai’s regular and contract workers unions and the Korean Metal Workers Union, began negotiations with management on December 10. Demands include withdrawal of four criminal suits against 64 alleged to have organised the strike and three civil suits against 65 strikers. Each suit seeks 1 billion won compensation for lost production during the strike.

India: University teachers in Uttar Pradesh on strike

Teachers of self-financed courses at the Chhatrapati Shahuji Medical University (CSMU) in Lucknow have been on strike since November 30 to demand Sixth Pay Commission salary increases. Teachers have presented their demands to the Department of Higher Education, classes have been cancelled and the examination schedule affected.

The striking teachers, who have pledged to continue the strike until their demands are met, are being supported by the UP Madhmik Vitviheen Sikshak Sangh, a body of the self-financed colleges.

Tamil Nadu co-operative bank employees protest

On December 14, co-operative bank employees from various parts of the state protested at the Memorial Hall in Park Town over wages and conditions. The Tamil Nadu Co-operative Bank Employees’ Association said that 750 employees from the Co-operative Primary Agricultural and Rural Development Bank had not received a wage rise for the past 10 years.

The association has threatened that all the co-operative bank employees

will organise a 24-hour strike on December 29 if the banks fail to respond to their charter of demands.

Mumbai teachers end strike

St Xavier school teachers in Mumbai ended a one-week strike on Monday after management agreed to pay Sixth Pay Commission salary increases. The teachers had been on strike since December 7. School management agreed to pay the new salary scales from January 1, 2011, during a meeting with education department representatives.

Philippines president blocks airline workers’ walkout

Strike action by Philippine Airlines (PAL) ground crew has been put on hold after intervention by the Philippines President Benigno Aquino. PAL Employees’ Association (PALEA) members had planned to walk out during the December holiday period in a long-running dispute against airline’s efforts to outsource nearly 3,000 jobs as part of a cost-saving plan.

President Aquino assumed jurisdiction over the dispute on Wednesday and ordered PALEA to suspend strike action and for PAL to put on hold its outsourcing plan. Both parties have been directed to enter talks with the government.

Last year PAL announced a cost-cutting plan to outsource half its workforce, including in-flight catering services, airport services (ground, cargo and ramp handling), and call centre reservations. PALEA claims that workers will be rehired by contractors on reduced wages and conditions and barred from joining a union.

The union filed a notice of strike in February, but the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) declared the union action illegal. In October, DOLE ruled in favour of PAL’s restructure plan, on the condition that an improved retrenchment pay-out was agreed to by workers.

In PALEA’s latest strike notice, the union has alleged that PAL management has been directly bargaining with individual union members, instead of the union leaders as required by law. It also claims that union officers face mass termination.

Victoria: Salvation Army social workers vote for strike

Salvation Army Westcare workers in Sunshine, a Melbourne suburb, have voted to take industrial action following Westcare's continued refusal to negotiate an enterprise bargaining agreement. Westcare is a major provider of placement and support services for children and young people and employs more than 100 staff.

Australian Services Union organiser Leon Wiegard said staff had been trying to bargain for an EBA with Salvation Army management for more than two years. The union had been granted a "majority support order" from Fair Work Australia requiring the Salvation Army to enter talks, but since then management had cancelled three of the five scheduled meetings. Under Fair Work Australia requirements it could be three or four weeks before the industrial action occurs.

Queensland health unions suspend industrial action

The Queensland Public Sector Union and the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, representing ancillary health workers in the state's public hospitals have suspended industrial action while members consider the latest pay offer from Queensland Health (QH). Ancillary workers, including health professionals such as occupational therapists, pharmacists and social workers, have been implementing rolling stoppages and pickets for two months to support their claim for a 14.5 percent wage increase over three years.

The unions are putting a proposal to members that falls far short of workers' expectations. QH has offered a 9 percent pay increase over three years with a one-off contingent payment of \$500 at the end of the agreement, provided productivity trade-off targets are met. In a media release QH claimed that "important productivity measures will deliver to Government a saving at least equal to the increased wages offer." Workers will vote on the offer next week.

New South Wales teachers protest privatisation

Two hundred NSW Teachers Federation members rallied outside the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in Sydney on December 16 to protest moves to privatise the federal government's Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) at six Sydney Metropolitan regions. AMEP offers 500 hours of government-funded English classes to new migrants.

Teaching services for the program are currently provided by the state-funded Tertiary And Further Education (TAFE) NSW and consortium partner, the Adult Migrant English Service. According to the NSW Teachers Federation, 150 teaching jobs will be cut when the newly-appointed international education corporation Navitas provides the service from July next year.

Community service workers rally for equal pay

On Wednesday, hundreds of community service workers in Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Hobart and Lismore attended rallies organised by the Australian Services Union in support of its test case for equal pay under the federal Labor government's new workplace laws. The ASU is seeking a pay increase of up to 50 percent for the female-dominated social and community sectors. Threatened strike action was called off after the

Gillard government reversed its decision to oppose the increase, but has stated that additional funding for a pay rise will come from other budget allocations. The union has pinned its hopes on Fair Work Australia making a decision that will reflect equal pay cases won under NSW and Queensland workplace laws.

New Zealand medical laboratory workers suspend action

The Medical Laboratory Workers Union (MLWU), representing 400 employees in the public health system, has suspended industrial action while members vote on the latest pay offer from employers. According to a union spokesman, employers offered a 2.5 percent pay increase over 25 months. The offer is well below the original demand for a 5 percent increase. In October, lab workers overwhelmingly rejected the employers' offer of an immediate pay rise of 1 percent and another 1 percent next January.

The MLWU has been in dispute with 13 District Health Boards (DHBs) and the Blood Service for six months over a new collective agreement. Several DHBs had been standing down up to 30 laboratory workers for six hours each day from August 6 for taking minor industrial action, which includes not answering phones and a ban on some tests.

Public housing staff walk out

Housing New Zealand employees who are members of the Public Service Association (PSA) walked off the job on Monday in protest at the suspension of two employees for not answering phone calls or emails between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. as part of industrial action. The PSA has been in dispute with the state-owned Housing NZ Corporation since August 2009 for a new work agreement.

PSA members began industrial action in July that included four-hour rolling stoppages and work-to-rule at more than 40 centres across the country. The PSA wants a 2 percent annual pay increase over two years and more clearly defined pay scales.

The union claimed that members are forced to work unpaid overtime in an attempt to manage over 600 properties each. This compares with 250 in the private sector. PSA national secretary Richard Wagstaff said HNZN plans to cut its maintenance budget by 21 percent, which will increase the workload on overworked staff. He claimed job cuts had already begun in rural housing. According to some estimates, HNZN recently reported a rise in its profits, this year up to \$104 million, while many of its lowest-paid employees have not had a pay increase for two years.



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