

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.

Korea: Kumho ends eight-day lockout

The Kumho Tyre Company ended its lockout of 3,400 employees at its Gwangju and Gokseong plants on April 1 after the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) agreed to recognise the company's "fragile financial and market situation". In return, the company rescinded its demand that workers sign individual work agreements that included pledges not to engage in further work stoppages.

KMWU members were locked out following a 24-hour "warning" strike on March 25 over demands that included workplace union leaders' rights, revisions to severance packages and health and safety issues.

Bangladeshi garment workers locked out

Over 2,300 employees of Softex Sweater at the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) in Savar were locked out on April 3 after striking for a wage rise the previous day. Riot police were called in to disperse the workers after they demonstrated outside the factory.

On March 30, 25 garment workers were injured when police baton-charged several hundred demonstrating employees from the Micro Fibre Group in Fatullah, Dhaka. The workers had been locked out of the factories after complaining about working conditions.

Dunlop India withdraws mass lay-off notices

Dunlop India this week withdrew lay-off notices issued to 950 employees at its Sahagunj unit in Hooghly, Bengal on April 2. Management had offered workers half salary when the plant was temporarily closed for "new production planning." Workers demonstrated at the factory on Monday to demand their jobs back after hearing the factory would be closed for three months.

On Tuesday, Dunlop withdrew the lay-off notices after the state government—fearing a backlash from voters in Assembly elections later this month—threatened to declare the lay-offs illegal. The Sahagunj unit has been running below capacity since November because of reduced orders and high raw material costs. In return for keeping the factory open management has sought a commitment from the unions involved,

including those affiliated with the Centre of India Trade Unions, the India Trade Union Congress and the Indian National Trinamool Trade Union Congress, for their "cooperation" to implement a new business plan when it is developed.

Sri Lankan postal workers strike

Ceylon Postal Services Union members at the Central Mail Exchange struck on Monday while other Sri Lanka Postal Department employees banned overtime to demand the filling of vacancies. According to workers, at least 5,000 vacancies need to be filled.

Postal workers are also demanding the removal of the Post Master General because of alleged corruption and wastage in the sector. The union has threatened to launch a full-scale strike if the government does not resolve workers' demands.

Goa steel plant workers strike

Over 250 contract workers at a steel-making plant in Sanguem, Goa walked off the job on Monday and demonstrated outside the factory to demand a pay rise, better working conditions, regularisation and "fairer" labour practices.

One demonstrating worker told the press that they are only paid 135 rupees (\$US3) for a 12-hour day. "We were assured regularisation of services after working on a contract basis for a certain period, but even after toiling for over 10 years we have not been given any service benefits by the company," he said.

The strikers, who are affiliated with the Centre of India Trade Unions, have threatened to expand their protests to include Kalay villagers who have pledged their support.

Cambodian garment workers strike

Up to 300 employees at the Ever Glory garment factory in Phnom Penh refused to work on April 4 in protest over the sacking of two colleagues and other disputed issues. Ministry of Labour officials met representatives of workers and the factory owner that evening, which resulted in the resolution of 13 disputed issues but failed to reinstate the two workers.

Cambodian garment workers protest over compensation

Over 1,000 former employees of the bankrupt Tack Fat garment factory demonstrated at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court on March 28 to demand improved termination compensation. Although the court handed down an injunction prohibiting the company from selling or transferring factory equipment until compensation was paid it failed to improve on the payout, which workers claim is below the legal minimum.

Tack Fat has offered to pay seniority bonuses, one month's wages and a lump sum payment of \$US150 to each worker. Chhean Thida, a representative for the workers, said she had worked at the factory for nine years and calculated that according to the law she was owed \$2,000. If she accepted the company's offer, she would only receive about \$200, she said.

Philippines government orders aviation workers to suspend strike

Philippine Airlines Employees' Association (PALEA) members rallied at the Labor Department's main office in Manila on Monday to protest a state order banning the union from striking over a new work agreement. The government order that referred the dispute to the National Labor Relations Commission for compulsory arbitration makes industrial action illegal. The order was made on April 1 while 2,000 PALEA members protested at Manila airport and after the union announced indefinite strike action would commence on April 4.

The union and the airline are in dispute over two issues. In 2009, PAL announced a plan to outsource over 2,600 jobs, including in-flight catering services, airport services (ground, cargo and ramp handling), and call centre reservations. Although the court has ruled that the PAL plan can be implemented—blocking any legal industrial action over the outsourcing plan—PALEA was able to file for legal strike action last month because negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA) have reached deadlock. PAL management has refused to negotiate on the CBA until after it completes the outsourcing.

Indonesian domestic workers protest

For the second time this year hundreds of domestic workers rallied in Jakarta to demand government legislators legislate to protect domestic workers. In February hundreds of members of the Yogyakarta Domestic Worker Protection Network (JPPRT) rallied at the Hotel Indonesia traffic circle over the issue.

Domestic employees work an average 18 hours a day, seven days a week on low pay without the protection of any existing Indonesian labour laws. The JPPRT wants immediate enactment of the Domestic Workers' Law currently on the National Legislation Program 2011.

Port workers in Western Australia strike

At least 80 Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members in the port of Esperance, on the far south coast of Western Australia, held two 24-hour stoppages this week in a dispute with the Esperance Port Authority for a

new work agreement. The MUA has been negotiating with the employer for six months for a 6 to 7 percent annual pay increase over three years, along with an improved career path. The port authority has offered 4.5 percent annual pay increases and wants to wind back key conditions such as redundancy and leave entitlements. The port authority has turned down the MUA offer to re-enter talks.

Union calls off industrial action at Patrick docks

Planned industrial action by Patrick Stevedoring workers in Sydney, Melbourne Brisbane and Fremantle was called off following talks between the company and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) officials yesterday. The action, which was to commence today, would have included bans on overtime, transfers between worksites and a series of 24- and 48-hour stoppages. Waterside workers are demanding a 6 percent pay rise, an increase in superannuation contributions to 13 percent, an extra week of leave and a safety officer for all work sites.

Patrick's launched legal action in Fairwork Australia yesterday, and after five hours of talks the union dropped its plans to strike with both parties agreeing to talk again next week. MUA deputy national secretary Mick Doleman says Patrick's agreed to make a revised offer on their existing claims by next Tuesday.

Strike by Victorian paint workers in second week

Over 120 employees at the Melbourne plant of Australia's largest paint manufacturer PPG Industries have been on strike since March 28, after rejecting the company's proposal for a two-tiered wage system. According to the United Voice union's Victorian secretary Ben Redford, new recruits would be paid 43 percent below the current rate. PPG claimed the current pay rate is above its competitors and is unsustainable. The company reported a 129 percent rise in profits to \$769 million last year.

Although PPG has hired 100 contractors to replace its striking employees, business commentators predict that if the strike is prolonged, supplies of paint and coatings to Ford, Holden and Toyota will be affected. United Voice and PPG are holding ongoing talks.

Papua New Guinea government arrests striking doctors

On April 1, the National Doctors Association (NDA) ordered its members to end an eight-day national strike after the government agreed to honour previously promised salary and allowance increases and lift a court contempt order against NDA officials. However, the court order remained and the NDA officials have been arrested and forced to pay a security fee of 500 kina (\$US192) each before being released. The health minister has revealed that he could only source 25 million kina (\$US9.4 million) from the Health Department to finance half the doctors' salary package.

On March 25, government doctors in public hospitals defied a court order and struck over the government's failure to implement its 2009 agreement on salaries and remuneration. The national court has ordered the department of health, the prime minister's department and the NDA to

reach an agreement by April 8. NDA officials are still to appear in court.



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