

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

28 May 2011

Korean riot police smash auto parts strike

On May 24, 3,000 riot police, backed up by water cannons and helicopters, smashed a seven-day wildcat strike and factory occupation by 500 auto-parts workers at Yoosung Enterprise factory in Asan, about 90 kilometres southwest of Seoul. Most of the strikers were detained for several hours and the Yoosung Labor Union's office was raided and two union officials arrested. The Yoosung Labor Union is affiliated with the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

Korean President Lee Myung-bak personally ordered riot police to intervene after complaints from Hyundai, Kia, GM Korea, Renault Samsung and Ssangyong Motors, who claimed the strike had already cost them 150 billion won (\$US133 million) in lost revenue. Yoosung supplies 70 percent of the engine parts for South Korea's auto manufacturers.

Yoosung workers have been holding rolling stoppages since January after 11 rounds of negotiations for improved shift schedules and a salary increase reached deadlock. The KCTU issued a perfunctory statement condemning the police raid and threatening a national campaign to force Lee Myung-bak to step down. The KCTU, however, has no intention of mobilising its 500,000-strong membership to seriously challenge the government.

Pakistan: Karachi medical staff suspend strike

Doctors, paramedical staff and nurses at Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Center (JPMC) and the National Institute of Child Health (NICH) in Karachi suspended their four-day strike on May 20 after the Sindh provincial government agreed to "consult" on their demands.

The JPMC-NICH Joint Action Committee (JAC) is opposed to government moves to transfer administration of

the federally controlled hospitals to the provincial government. The Action Committee claims that the plan would degrade health services. The federal government has only agreed to suspend its proposals during consultations between the JAC and the implementation committee.

Karachi power workers' strike enters fourth week

Thousands of Karachi Electric Supply Company (KESC) workers are continuing strike action begun on April 30 against the plans to transfer regular workers onto contracts. Workers are also opposed to the placement of over 4,000 KESC reinstated employees into a "surplus pool". They fear that the reinstated workers could be retrenched again and then rehired through a sub-contracting company.

KESC Labour Union (CBA) members have established a protest camp outside the Karachi Press Club and are picketing KESC offices and depots. Supporters and workers from other industries have been holding street protests denouncing the government and the KESC for the frequent disruptions to the power supply and subsequent income losses.

Pakistan government officials met with KESC management on Monday and directed the company to reach a compromise with its workers and end the strike. KESC, however, has ignored previous requests from the government to transfer the 4,000 workers back on to full duties. KESC management attempted to force the government to ban the strike by falsely claiming that the power outages were caused by strikers sabotaging equipment.

Punjab teachers continue protests

For the third time in five weeks, hundreds of school and college teachers from across Punjab rallied outside government offices in Lahore on May 21. Their demands include time-scale promotions, regularisation of contract teachers, salary increases in line with the cost of living and for instruction manuals to use the Urdu language.

The protesters were supported by the Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association, Muttahida Mahaz-i-Asatza, Punjab Teachers Union and the Joint Action Committee of Teachers, Lahore, along with the All-Pakistan Clerks Association.

Protest leaders threatened to hold a hunger strike outside the Punjab Assembly and boycott intermediate examination duties if the government did not provide substantial salary increases.

India: Kerala public transport workers strike

Kerala public transport workers held a one-day strike on May 20 in protest over high petrol prices. Called by the Joint Action Council of Motor Transport Workers, which represents five unions, the strike involved public and private bus workers as well as taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers. Most retail shops throughout the state supported the strike by remaining closed for the day.

The government unsuccessfully attempted to stop the walkout by offering to cut petrol sales tax by 1.22 rupees per litre. Petrol prices have increased by 30 percent in the last 11 months.

Queensland construction workers strike again

Over 2,000 striking construction workers from Queensland's Gold Coast and Brisbane, the state capital, rallied outside Fair Work Ombudsman's office on Tuesday to demand government action against "sham" contractors in the building industry.

Builders Labourers Federation secretary David Hanna told the demonstration that he had over 2,500 complaints from individual workers over unpaid superannuation and other entitlements. According to the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), at least 50 percent of subcontractors are not paying correct rates. Shortly after the protest began the state Labor government claimed it would investigate construction industry contracting arrangements.

Sporadic industrial action and protests have been held this year, after CFMEU members at Bovis Land Lease and Multiplex sites walked off the job for 48 hours in February. The building workers accused both companies of hiring contractors who failed to pay superannuation, redundancy, site and travel entitlements.

Last week construction workers at the Gold Coast University Hospital's \$1.7 billion project voted to maintain a daily picket line at the site until the issues were resolved.

Canberra bus maintenance workers union does deal with ACTION

The Australian Capital Territory government and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) have reached an in-principle agreement on a new enterprise agreement for ACTION workshop staff. The territory government has been negotiating with the AMWU on the agreement for over 18 months. Work bans by the bus maintenance mechanics during April forced ACTION to cancel most weekend services.

While the maintenance workers have made limited gains in roster arrangements, the union has accepted a 2.5 percent pay rise and a \$650 sign-on bonus, which was previously rejected by ACTION employees.

Under the in-principle deal, ACTION agreed to change the weekend roster as demanded by workers, fill vacant positions and recruit two additional apprentices. The pay rise will be backdated to July 2010. Workers are yet to vote on the agreement.

Negotiations, however, are ongoing between ACTION and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) over a pay rise and roster changes for 600 bus drivers. ACTION has offered drivers the same pay deal as the mechanics but wants to introduce 24-hour shifts with no loading and remove a 40 percent cap on part-time workers.

ACTION management responded to a one-hour stop-work meeting by TWU members in June last year by locking out the drivers and shutting down its bus service for 24 hours. The union has not called any action since then.



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