

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 June 2011

## India: Maruti Suzuki auto workers strike

At least 2,000 workers at India's largest auto manufacturer Maruti Suzuki in Manesar remain on strike after walking off the job last Saturday over union recognition and job security for contract workers. Manesar employees want the contract workers retained for two new production units inside the complex.

On Monday, the company sacked 11 leaders of the newly-formed Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) and told workers it will only recognise the existing Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union, which is mainly dominated by those working at the company's Gurgaon facility.

All production at the Manesar plant, which produces about 1,200 units per day, has stopped. The company claimed that by Wednesday the strike had caused over 2,100 million rupees (\$US47 million) in lost revenue. The last major strike at the company was in 2000 when workers walked out for three months.

## Gorakhpur textile workers end factory occupation

VN Dyers yarn and textile mills in Gorakhpur agreed on June 3 to reopen their plants and reinstate 18 sacked workers, ending a four-day factory occupation by employees. The 500 VN Dyers workers were locked out after walking off the job on April 10 in a dispute over wages. The textile workers occupied the yarn mill on May 30 when the owners announced that they would restart it with new employees.

Twenty-five workers were severely injured and 73 arrested in May when police attempted to stop them

meeting the district magistrate over their dispute.

## Chinese police clash with immigrant workers in Chaozhou

Dozens of people were injured and nine arrested when police attempted to break up a demonstration of ceramics factory workers outside a local government building in Chaozhou, Guangdong province.

The workers, all immigrants from southwest China's Sichuan province, were protesting over unpaid wages and a vicious knife attack by factory managers on a colleague in a confrontation over a long-running pay arrears dispute. Several vehicles were damaged and the government building fence pulled down when several hundred additional workers joined the protest.

## Pakistan: Irrigation and hydro electricity employees protest

On June 2, tens of thousands of workers from the state-run Water Resource and Power Development Authority (Wapda) demonstrated in ten major Pakistan cities, including Quetta, Hyderabad, Karachi, Islamabad and Peshawar, in protest over price rises, load shedding and unemployment. Workers also called for a 40 percent wage rise, the minimum monthly wage increased to 10,000 rupees (\$US116) and new dams and coal power generation plants to meet electricity shortages and lower rates.

The protest was organised by the Pakistan Wapda

Hydro Electric Central Labour Union.

### **Punjab municipal administrative workers end strike**

A three-day strike by Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) workers in Gujrat was called off on Monday after the state government agreed to fulfill employees' demands. Workers had boycotted their offices, occupied the TMA Complex and banned maintenance work causing sewerage water to flood sections of the city.

Municipal workers' demands included cancellation of employee transfers, reinstatement of 36 workers and an end to the derogatory behaviour of the chief TMA administrator towards staff.

### **BHP workers at Queensland mines to strike**

About 3,500 BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) workers at six central Queensland coal mines announced this week they will strike for a new work agreement. Members of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) and the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) will walk out at all six mines for six hours on Saturday, Tuesday and Wednesday. The vote for strike action was supported by 92 percent of the work force.

The unions claim six months of negotiations ended in deadlock because of BHP's demands for radical work rule changes including replacement of the current five-day roster with a seven-day roster, unrestricted use of contract and part-time workers, and increased flexibility of operators' jobs. The unions want enhanced training opportunities and for contractors to receive the same pay and conditions as BHP workers.

The unions have not yet made a pay claim, insisting on resolution of other issues first. However, following the overwhelming vote for strike action the company offered a 15 percent pay rise over three years and a \$5,000 sign-on bonus. BHP threatened to withdraw the

bonus offer if workers go ahead with the strike.

BMA is a 10-year-old joint venture that mines 58 million tonnes yearly of coking coal from the Bowen Basin. It consists of seven mines—Blackwater, Broadmeadow, Goonyella Riverside, Peak Downs, Saraji, Norwich Park, and Gregory Crinum—as well as the Hay Point coal export terminal near Mackay on Australia's east coast. The CFMEU represents about 80 percent of union members.

Workers at the Broadmeadow underground mine in New South Wales have already accepted a separate work agreement and are not included in this dispute. The Broadmeadow union negotiated agreement included a \$10,000 sign on bonus in return for unrestricted use of contract and part-time workers.

### **Sydney private hospital nurses vote for strike**

Over 130 New South Wales Nurses Association (NSWNA) members employed by Macquarie Hospital Services (MHS) at four private hospitals in Sydney have voted for strike action in a dispute for a new work agreement. The vote, which was taken this week, was unanimous at three of the hospitals and 88 percent in favour at the fourth. Action being considered includes overtime bans, billing disruption and 10- or 24-hour strikes.

The NSWNA has been attempting to negotiate a new enterprise agreement with NHS since September 2009. MHS has offered a 6.5 percent pay rise over three years and cuts in current allowances. Nurses want a 15 percent pay rise over three years and the maintenance of all existing allowances. According to the NSWNA, MHS wage rates are 12 percent below public hospital pay rates and 8.5 percent below other private hospital rates. MHS registered nurses earn \$7,500 less than their counterparts in other private hospitals.



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