

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 June 2011

India: Strike at Maruti Suzuki in second week

At least 2,000 workers at India's largest auto manufacturer Maruti Suzuki in Manesar remain on strike after walking off the job on June 4 over union recognition and job security for contract workers. Strikers this week rejected a company offer to rehire 5 of 11 sacked leaders of the newly-formed Maruti Suzuki Employees Union (MSEU) and to recognise the union if it did not affiliate with any of the main peak union bodies.

The company previously refused to accept the new Manesar employees union, stating it would only recognise the Maruti Udyog Kamgar Union, which is mainly dominated by those working at the company's Gurgaon facility. Strikers have also demanded that contract workers be retained for two new production units inside the Manesar complex.

Street protests in Manesar and Gurgaon by hundreds of supporters were viciously attacked by company security guards and hired thugs on Wednesday. One demonstrator in Gurgaon said armed security guards attacked their protest of around 2,000, severely beating nine protesters.

All production at the Manesar plant, which produces about 1,200 units per day, has stopped. The company claims that the strike has 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.

While the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC-CPI affiliated) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU-CPM affiliated) claim to support the strikers, they called off a two-hour support stoppage by members of 40 local unions after demands from the state government.

Madhya Pradesh railway porters strike

About 200 porters from Bhopal and Habeebganj railway stations, along with officials of the West Central Railways Employees Union struck for 24 hours on Monday over a charter of six demands. Their claims include a rest house in the station premises, weather-proof uniforms and a facility for family members to be treated at the Railway Hospital. The porters have threatened indefinite strike action from June 27 if the government continues to ignore their demands.

Striking Pakistani doctors fired upon by police

Eight doctors were seriously injured—one is fighting for his life in hospital—and 50 were arrested when Balochistan province police used live ammunition, teargas and batons on the striking doctors on Tuesday. The doctors planned to march on the provincial chief minister's office in Quetta. The Young Doctors Association (YDA) and the Pakistan Medical Association have threatened to close all government and private hospitals in the province, including emergency wards, if the arrested doctors are not released and the attacking policemen held accountable.

At least 127 doctors were sacked last week and over 1,000 resigned in a two-month dispute with the Balochistan provincial government over wages and conditions. The YDA wants pay and allowance parity with colleagues in the federal capital. The doctors also want hospital security improved. A doctor was abducted from the Bolan Medical College and murdered in April.

Doctors began limited strike action on May 1, affecting services at most provincial hospitals. On June 6 the government ordered the health department to begin sacking striking doctors under the Essential Services Act 2000.

YDA President Abdul Samad Panezi told a rally last week outside government offices in Quetta, "We are not afraid of losing jobs, and our protest will continue till our demands are met."

Pakistan: Rawal municipal workers strike

Rawal municipal workers in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad, struck for four hours on Tuesday morning to protest non-payment of pensions to retired municipal employees and against a proposal to transfer gardening branch workers to the newly-formed Pakistan Horticulture Authority. The City District Government of Rawalpindi stopped paying pensions two months ago due to budget cuts.

Town Municipal Administration and Workers Union officials have threatened to escalate industrial action if workers' demands are not met.

Bangladeshi garment workers walk out

Several hundred workers from the SQ Sweater Factory in East Shewrapara, Dhaka walked out on June 9 and barricaded the street outside the factory to protest the sacking of 132 employees because they asked for a wage increase. Police used teargas and baton charged

the strikers in an attempt to force them back to work. Six protestors were arrested. SQ Sweater sacked 90 workers demanding wage rises in late May.

District authorities fearing an escalation of industrial unrest shut the factory on June 1 and called a meeting of SQ Sweater management, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association and workers. The meeting, which was held on June 5, ended without resolution.

Philippine Airlines ground crew protest

As part of a long-running dispute over outsourcing, Philippine Airlines (PAL) ground crew held a motorcade procession past PAL office buildings at Manila International Airport on Monday. PAL Employees' Association (PALEA) members were protesting the airline's move to fill 60 vacant ground crew positions using labour contractor MacroAsia, starting June 16.

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. The plan was approved by the Department of Labor and Employment and President Cojuangco Aquino, making strike action over the outsourcing illegal. PALEA is also in dispute over a new work agreement and threatened to call national strike action over both issues.

Korean shipbuilding workers' protest enters sixth month

Over 750 workers and supporters from Seoul and surrounding cities converged on the Hanjin Heavy Industries' Yeongdo shipyard in Busan on June 12 where workers are taking limited action to demand the company drop plans to lay off 400 workers. The protest centred around a shipyard crane that a Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) official has been occupying since January 6.

Several protesters were injured and one hospitalised after police and security guards tried to prevent the workers entering the shipyard. The protesters dispersed the next morning. The company claims it has not been able to meet construction deadlines and is suing the workers and the KCTU for compensation.

Korean auto workers walk out over death

Assembly workers at Hyundai Motor's plant in Asan, 100 km southwest of Seoul, walked off the job for 39 hours on June, to protest the suicide of one of their colleagues, who was also their union representative. The worker's suicide note blamed Hyundai management for preventing him from undertaking his union duties. Strikers resumed work after management agreed to pay compensation to the worker's family.

Production came to a standstill at Hyundai's Ulsan and Asan plants and other automakers in May after 500 workers at the Yoosung

Enterprise engine parts manufacturer struck. Korean President Lee Myung-bak personally ordered 5,000 riot police to violently end the strike. Strikers were detained for several hours by police, the Yoosung Labor Union's office raided and two union officials arrested.

BHP workers in Queensland on strike

Over 3,000 BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) workers at six Queensland coal mines began rolling stoppages this week to attend information meetings over a new work agreement. Members of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union stopped work on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

The unions claim that six months of negotiations were deadlocked because BHP wants 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 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. Following last week's 92 percent vote for strike action BHP offered a 15 percent pay rise over three years and a \$5,000 sign-on bonus. BHP and the unions are due to meet for further talks on June 20 and 21.

Tasmanian power workers maintain work bans

Over 600 members of the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union at the state-owned power utility Aurora Energy are maintaining bans on overtime and call-back imposed on June 2 in a dispute over wages in a new work agreement. According to the company, the bans are causing delays in restoring power during severe weather conditions.

The workers want a pay rise of up to 18 percent over three years to bring them in line with interstate workers and Aurora's contractors. Aurora has offered a 3 percent pay rise in the first year, followed by a base wage increase of 2.5 per cent in years two and three and a further pay increase averaging 1.3 per cent allocated for a competency-based payment in years two and three.



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