

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 July 2011

Korean shipyard workers ignore return to work order

At least 12 union members and a sub-branch union official have ignored a return-to-work order by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and are continuing to occupy of a 35-metre crane at the Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction's (HHIC) Yeongdo shipyard in Busan. The workers are protesting against KCTU officials who made secret deal with company management and the courts to end a 190-day strike by shipyard construction workers on June 27. The strike, which had been attracting mass support from workers in and around Seoul, began last December over the axing of more than 400 jobs.

Under the deal, 170 terminated workers will receive redundancy payouts, HHIC will "minimise" legal claims for damages incurred during the walkout, and all other charges and accusations against the strikers dropped. There will be no withdrawal of the layoffs. Around 80 workers are maintaining a 24-hour protest outside the shipyard.

maintaining cleaning services using full-time staff.

Karnataka provident fund employees protest

Provident Fund workers across the state wore black armbands and held lunch-hour demonstrations last week to demand central office work norms. The workers want additional staff to reduce the individual workloads, computer training for all data processing and improved facilities. They are also demanding better security and less pressure on employees to work overtime and on public holidays.

Workers have threatened a two-day protest on July 11, followed by a pen down strike on July 13, if their demands are not met.

India: Cochin port workers end 4-day strike

A sudden strike by 200 container truck drivers and other workers on Sunday at the Vallarpadam International Container Transshipment Terminal, a DP World facility in India's south-eastern port of Cochin, ended on Wednesday after the terminal administrators agreed to most of the workers' demands.

The walkout was called by the Trade Union Coordination Committee, representing all labour groups in the terminal, in protest against the Dubai-based company's decision to ban vehicle cleaners entering the terminal area. Drivers also want improved amenities, which they have been demanding since the terminal was opened in February.

Under the agreement, vehicle cleaners have been allowed entry to the terminal and have amenities provided. There will also be improved amenities for drivers.

Pakistani power workers' strike continues

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

KESC Labour Union members have established a protest camp outside the Karachi Press Club and the utility's head office in Gizri, as well as picketing depots and sub-station installations. Nearly 140 strikers have been sacked on management's accusations of sabotage.

The company has ignored requests from the government, which is under pressure from Karachi businesses and residents over electricity blackouts, to transfer the 4,000 workers in the surplus pool back to full duties so full services can be restored. KESC has attempted to force the government to ban the strike by dragging out negotiations and falsely claiming that power outages were caused by strikers sabotaging equipment.

Gujarat sanitary workers strike

Around 100 contract sanitary workers at the state-run SSG Hospital in Vadodra walked off the job on July 2 to demand a pay rise. According to the strikers, the government pays the contractor around 6,500 rupees (\$US146) per sanitary worker per month who are then paid only 3,000 rupees.

"We have demanded that the contractor should increase our salaries or else we will not do our duties," one worker said. The hospital is

Indonesian Freeport mine workers on strike

Over 10,000 workers at the US owned Freeport-McMoran Grasberg mine in the Indonesian province of West Irian Jaya (West Papua) walked off the job on July 4, after management refused to grant a 100 percent pay rise. Workers want their wage rates increased from \$US1.50 to \$3 an hour, pointing out that their demand was well below the \$15-\$30 an hour

paid to most other Freeport workers around the world.

Production at Grasberg, one of the world's largest open-cut gold and copper mines, has come to a standstill, forcing the global price of copper to a two-month high. At least 2,000 workers are picketing the mine's main gate and 300 blockading the road leading to the mining area.

An official of the Freeport Indonesia's Labor Union said workers intended to remain on strike for a week and threatened to extend the industrial action for another week if talks with Freeport yesterday were unsuccessful.

Freeport claims the strike is costing over \$23 million a day. In the first quarter of this year the mine made a \$1.5 billion profit.

Cambodian garment workers protest

Over 300 former employees of June Textile garment factory protested at Phnom Penh's Freedom Park on Sunday to demand their former employer carry out an arbitration council ruling to pay them severance pay. A government official met with a Cambodian Confederation of Unions official and ten workers representatives who presented a petition addressed to the premier.

After their factory burnt down in March the company offered each of its 4,000 employees a \$US36 redundancy payout and an additional \$20 for every year of employment. The workers rejected the offer saying it was not enough. In the court ruling the company is to pay workers for a "pre-notice" period ahead of their dismissal of three months' salary, as well as other entitlements that the company had offered.

Vietnamese worker killed at picket

On June 23, a female worker was killed and several others injured when a security guard at the Just Special Material Company in the Hanoi Industrial Park and Export Processing Zone drove through a picket in a 1.5 tonne truck. The lorry had arrived at the factory to pick up goods but was blocked by 200 strikers (mostly women) who were demanding a pay increase. The security guard forced the driver from the vehicle and drove it through the picket.

Seven seriously injured female workers were rushed to Hanoi's Chuong My Hospital. One of them, 26-year-old Nguyen Thi Lieu and a mother of two, died en route. Several other workers received minor injuries.

According to local media, the security guard, who does not have a driving license, told police that he had been directed by administration to get the lorry inside the plant "at any price."

Immediately after the incident, the company's union representative announced that workers' monthly salaries would rise by 480,000 to 1.68 million dong (\$70) and the lunch allowance increase by 30 percent to 13,000 dong. Workers have rejected the offer as insufficient.

Australian parliamentary service workers walkout

On July 7, hundreds Department of Parliamentary Services staff, including broadcasters, Hansard recorders, librarians, and food and drink services staff, walked off the job for four hours to protest against the federal Labor government's latest pay offer. Enterprise agreements for

thousands of commonwealth public servants expired on July 1.

Over 58,000 public servants, including staff from the Australian Tax Office, Defence, Customs and Immigration, have formally rejected an offer of 3 percent annual pay rises over the term of the enterprise agreement from the federal government. A Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) official claimed the offer was less than inflation. CPSU members want 4 percent annual increases over three years.

Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Customs, and Immigration staff have successfully applied to Fair Work Australia for the right to take industrial action.

More rolling stoppages at BHP mines in Queensland

Three thousand workers at BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) coal mines in the Bowen Basin, central Queensland, continue industrial action with rolling stoppages and overtime bans in a dispute for a new work agreement. The single bargaining unit (SBU), made up of delegates from the Construction Forestry Manufacturing and Energy Union (CFMEU), the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, and the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union, met with the employer on Monday and rejected the company's offer. Workers began three days of 12-hour stoppages on Wednesday.

The unions claim that six months of negotiations were deadlocked because BHP wants radical work changes, including "family unfriendly" rosters, unrestricted use of contract and part-time workers, increased flexibility of operators' jobs and an increase in fly-in-fly-out employees. The unions want enhanced training opportunities and contractors to receive the same pay and conditions as BHP workers.

While BHP's latest offer has not been made public, its previous offer contained 5 percent annual pay increases for three years. The unions who have not yet made a pay claim accuse the company of failing to listen to the workers' main concerns. The unions and BHP will not resume negotiations until July 10.

Adelaide commuter train workers strike

All train services in Adelaide, South Australia's capital, ceased for six hours on July 1 after workers walked off the job over a pay dispute. Rail, Tram and Bus Union members were protesting the state Labor government's latest pay offer of annual 2.5 percent increases over three years in a new work agreement. The union has rejected the offer, declaring it well below current 3.5 percent annual cost of living increases. Workers want an improved offer and reinstatement of long-service leave entitlements.

New South Wales teachers union protest

Around 200 members of the NSW Teachers Federation held a lunchtime rally in Sydney on July 5 to protest the state Liberal government's wages and industrial relations policies. Held during the first week of the mid-year term holidays, the union only gave its members 24 hours' notice of the rally, ensuring a low turnout.

Under legislation passed last month in the NSW parliament, wage rises

for 400,000 public servants will be capped at 2.5 percent and an additional 1.5 percent “productivity” increase only paid after 12 months if it is financed from “employee-related savings” such as job losses and increased workloads. The legislation will also allow the state government to impose wage cuts, along with reductions in core conditions, such as penalty rates, sick and long-service leave entitlements and holidays.

Papua New Guinea plantation workers strike

More than 1,000 workers are on strike at the multi-million kina Ramu Agri-Industries (RAI) palm oil project in Gusap Downs, on Papua New Guinea’s north coast, after management failed to respond to their demands. The strike erupted after the estate manager sent union representatives to talk to the workers over their grievances. The plantation workers are demanding to deal directly with estate management.

The strikers’ main grievances are low pay, lack of safety gear and inadequate housing allowances, death benefits and other entitlements. Their current hourly rate is 1.78 kina (\$US0.67) with a harvest target of 120 fruit bunches, paid at 0.12 kina per bunch. Workers claim that they usually harvest more than 120 bunches but are not paid any extra and are not provided with footwear or hand gloves to protect them from the palm oil and sharp stalks.

RAI produces sugar and palm oil. Since 2008 it has operated as a subsidiary of New Britain Palm Oil Limited, exporting its first shipment of crude palm oil to Europe that year.



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