

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 August 2011

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

## Korean bank workers end strike without resolution

After five weeks on strike, Standard Chartered (SC) First Bank-Korea employees have been ordered back to work by their union without a resolution to the dispute. The 2,800 bank employees walked off the job on June 22 in protest against company attempts to impose performance pay. The bank was forced to close 40 of its 400 branches during the strike.

The SC bank union has directed members to stage “slowdowns” when they return to work on Monday and hold rallies every Friday until their requests are accepted. The union has refused to join a combined union-management task force to examine a modified wage proposal.

SC First Bank, which has 6,500 employees, is the first lender in South Korea to attempt to replace the traditional seniority-based pay system with performance pay. In failed negotiations mediated by the government last week, bank management declared that it would not back away from its regressive pay system.

## India: Auto parts manufacturing workers’ strike enters third week

Nearly 400 workers at auto parts manufacturer Comstar Automotive Technologies in Maraimalai Nagar near Chennai, Tamil Nadu are maintaining a strike begun on August 11 to demand union recognition and a new three-year work agreement. The company suspended four employees and called police after falsely accusing some workers of assault.

Comstar Automotive Technologies Employees’ Union members want a pay rise, 10 days’ annual casual leave and social security. The company has offered three days’ annual leave. Comstar Automotive makes auto parts for Ford, Volvo,

Jaguar, Mazda, Aston Martin, Tata Motors, FIAT, Ashok Leyland-Nissan and General Motors. The company employs 410 permanent workers and 350 temporary workers, trainees and apprentices.

## Chennai Port truck drivers strike

Container movements through the Chennai Container Terminal stopped for three days on August 19 after truck drivers struck in protest against the assault of a colleague by several Chennai Port Trust (ChPT) employees over a parking infringement. The drivers returned to work after the port trust apologised for the incident. Port authorities estimated it would take a week to clear the backlog.

Complaints by drivers and workers over access to the port have been ongoing since its operator DB World opened a huge transshipment container terminal nearby in February adding to congestion.

## Mumbai public transport workers walk out

On August 18, more than 40,000 drivers, conductors, mechanics and other employees of Brihanmumbai Electricity Supply and Transport (BEST) stopped work to demand wages as per the Sixth Pay Commission and the payment of about 5,600 million rupees (\$US123,300) arrears. Over 80 percent of Mumbai’s buses were put off the road during the strike.

The strikers returned to work that evening, after BEST Workers’ Union officials accepted a promise from the government that their demands would be met by March 2012.

## Bangladeshi coal miners on strike

Contract workers at the state-owned Barapukuria Coal Mine Company Ltd (BCMCL) walked off the job on Tuesday to demand regularisation of their jobs. The BCMCL employs nearly 1,200 workers on contract basis from XMC, a contractor company. All production at the mine has stopped. Workers have been taking limited industrial action over the issue for the past three years. Tripartite negotiations between BCMCL, XMC and union representatives are continuing.

“Every time we agitated to realise our demands, the BCMCL authorities assured us of meeting those demands. But they never kept their promises,” said an official of the Barapukuria Miners’ and Workers’ Union. Contract employees are not entitled to insurance and pension packages. Workers are also concerned about safety issues. At least eight miners were killed and four others maimed in work accidents during the past six years.

### **Qantas engineers resume industrial action**

Qantas aviation engineers resumed industrial action on Thursday in a long-running dispute over wages and job security. The Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA), representing 1,600 engineers, said it planned to continue holding one-hour rolling stoppages until December.

While 80 percent of ALAEA members voted for industrial action, including overtime bans, work-to-rule campaigns and full stoppages, in mid-April, the ALEA refused to take any action.

Engineers are demanding 3 percent annual pay increases over three years and job security clauses in their new enterprise agreement. Qantas is opposed to any restriction on outsourcing and claims that the wage increase, along with new classification increments and travel, could cost an additional 28.6 percent over three years.

The Australian and International Pilots Association (AIPA) and the Transport Workers Union (TWU) are also demanding job security clauses be included in new enterprise agreements. All three have received approval from Fair Work Australia to take industrial action.

Last week, Qantas announced a sweeping five-year restructuring plan that will axe 1,000 jobs. The carrier plans to slash its Australian operations and expand into low-wage platforms throughout Asia. On Wednesday the airline announced a \$249 million after tax profit for the twelve months to June 30.

### **More walkouts by Australian government workers**

Civilian Defence (CD) staff at 70 defence bases and offices throughout the country, and Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) staff in Canberra walked off the job for one hour and four hours respectively this week in protest against the federal Labor government’s latest pay offer. This is the first time in 20 years that CD employees have taken industrial action.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), covering most government employees, including 13,000 CD staff and DPS broadcasters, Hansard recorders, librarians, and food and drink services staff, want annual pay increases above 4 percent over three years in new work agreements. The cost of living index currently is 4.5 percent.

Enterprise agreements for 60,000 commonwealth public servants expired on July 1. Workers in all departments have rejected the government’s offer of 3 percent annual pay rises over the term of the new agreements. Staff are also angered by the Gillard Labor government’s attempts to streamline employment conditions, which has seen some agencies attempting to cut leave, flexitime and overtime payments.

The latest walkouts follow stoppages in the last two weeks by 3,000 Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry customs officers at Australia’s international airports over the issue, and a stoppage by DPS staff last month.

### **Papua New Guinea LNG workers strike**

On Monday, 1,400 construction workers at the LNG Project plant, Portion 152 site, Port Moresby walked off the job and locked the main access gate to protest poor pay. The mostly unskilled workers from four nearby villages are demanding that LABA Holdings, the Portion 152 umbrella landowner company, review their service outline agreement (SOA) pay rate and increase it above the current 3.25 kina (\$US1.4).

LABA Holdings is the government recognised contractor and provided human resource funding to pay the unskilled labour force. The workers are also demanding that the recently established Portion 152 Facility Landowners Association be legally recognised to represent employees on all industrial matters.



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