

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

11 August 2012

South Korea auto workers resume strike action

About 45,000 workers at Hyundai Motor, South Korea's largest automaker, walked off the job for two hours on August 8, after talks for a new wage deal deadlocked. The Hyundai union, which is affiliated to the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU) said members would stop work for several hours each day until August 17 and refuse overtime on those days. Workers at factories in Ulsan, Asan and Jeonju joined the strike. In addition to a pay rise, the KMWU wants regularisation of non-regular workers and night work ended.

The action follows joint strike action by 75,000 Hyundai and Kia employees on July 13 and 20. Kia workers plan to join the strike later in the week. GM workers began limited industrial action on similar issues on July 11 and planned to join the current strike.

Striking Chinese ceramics workers attacked by police

On August 2, Shanghai police, using pepper spray, attacked 180 striking employees of a state-owned ceramics company in Shanghai while they protested outside the company's headquarters over compensation. Over 400 police were mobilised to cordon off the Shanghai CIMIC Architectural Ceramics Building, according to witnesses. Several workers were arrested and at least five injured, one with a broken leg.

Workers began protesting in late June when the company began mass layoffs. The latest strike followed employees' rejection of the company's latest termination pay offer.

India: Jammu & Kashmir transport workers on strike

Over 4,000 State Road Transport Corporation (SRTC) employees have been on strike since August 2 over transfers and asset sales. Over 1,200 vehicles, including buses, minibuses and trucks, have been made idle, bringing the SRTC network to a standstill.

Members of the J&K Transport Corporation Workers' Union are opposed to the transfer of the SRTC headquarters from corporation-owned premises in Srinagar and the immediate withdrawal of orders to construct a "community centre" on corporation land. A union official said that the government was selling out its assets and dislodging the buses and employees from the SRTC-owned

complexes. He said the strike would continue until their demands are addressed.

Bihar university non-teaching workers strike

More than 30,000 non-teaching staff from Magadh and Veer University in the north-east Indian state of Bihar held a three-day strike on August 6. Their demands included fixing of pay anomalies as per the Fifth Pay Commission and promotion as per the Sixth Pay Commission. The Bihar State University and College Employees' Federation also want the retirement age increased from 62 to 65, and equal pay for equal work for university and college staffs.

The latest action follows a four-day strike in June over the same issues. The June strike was called off after the government gave a false commitment to meet their demands. The federation claims that the government has ignored a court order in favour of workers by abrogating on agreements made in 2005, 2007 and 2010.

Bangalore municipal workers strike

Over 12,000 administrative employees and 4,000 garbage collectors of the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) walked off the job on August 8 to protest against an alleged witch-hunt by authorities. Workers complained that the Bangalore Metropolitan Task Force is interfering in their work and booking criminal cases against them based on unsubstantiated public complaints. A BBMP Employees' Association official claimed that over 150 engineers are facing charges. Authorities claimed they had the backing of the courts for carrying out the investigations.

Kingfisher Airlines workers resume strike action

Pilots and engineers of Kingfisher Airlines walked off the job on August 8 for the fifth time since April to protest salary non-payments. At least 30 flights from Mumbai and Delhi were cancelled.

Most of Kingfisher's 1,700 employees have not been paid, or only paid a portion of their dues, since February. A large number of flight engineers have reportedly quit because of the delayed payments.

The airline has not posted a profit since its inception in May 2005 and has a total debt of about 70 billion rupees (\$US1.4 billion) and accumulated losses of about 60 billion rupees. The media reported that the airlines' board was meeting at a five-star hotel in Delhi this week to discuss finances.

Demonstrating Tamil Nadu welfare workers arrested

On August 6, 60 public welfare workers, including 29 women, were arrested by police in Madurai while demanding reinstatement. According to the Makkal Nala Paniyalargal (public welfare workers) Association, more than 13,000 workers were removed by the incoming AIADMK government. Workers complained that it was no better under the previous regime, which dismissed them three times.

The association claimed the government was defying a court order to reinstate them. Workers have announced they will fast unto death from September 10 in Chennai, if the government fails to take any positive steps.

South Australian ship building workers strike

About 840 maintenance workers at two sites of shipbuilder ASC in Osborn, Adelaide struck for 48 hours on August 3 as part of a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Members of the Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union have also placed restrictions on working overtime, labour moving between sites and performing work away from either ASC North or ASC South.

After several months of negotiations workers rejected the company's latest offer on pay and conditions. Over 2,200 workers at ASC will be affected by the outcome of negotiations.

Victorian security guards strike

More than 200 guards employed by security firm MSS at hospitals, universities, industrial sites and tax offices across Victoria walked off the job on August 7 to begin three days of 12-hour rolling stoppages in a dispute over pay and conditions. The industrial action follows 14 months of failed negotiations for pay parity with colleagues at other firms. A United Voice union official said MSS guards were paid almost \$3,000 a year less than other guards doing similar work.

New South Wales steelworkers stop work

About 120 maintenance workers at BlueScope Steel's Springhill plant in Port Kembla, south of Sydney, walked off the job on August 9 to attend a two-hour stop work meeting in a dispute for a new

enterprise bargaining agreement. Negotiations involving the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) have been ongoing since February.

Port Kembla's biggest union, the Australian Workers Union with members at BlueScope, is still waiting for the outcome of its protected action ballots, but is expected to join with members of the AMWU and ETU members in any industrial action.

New South Wales municipal workers strike

More than 300 outdoor employees of Lake Macquarie Council, north of Sydney, stopped work on August 8 over job security as council moves to outsource services. It is the first stoppage of council staff in over a decade. A United Services Union official said members were concerned over the council's call for tenders from the private sector to provide services currently performed by council employees, such as cleaning, library services and waste collection.

Northern Territory construction workers protest

Construction workers at the new Holtz jail site on the outskirts of Darwin walked off the job for three hours on August 7 to protest over pay. A Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union delegate told the media that workers doing the same job at the \$500 million jail construction site were receiving different rates of pay. This is contrary to an agreement with the joint venture companies building the jail.

Police were called to remove protesters blocking the construction site's front gates. The protest ended peacefully after the builders, Baulderstone and Sitzler, agreed to meet with the union.



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