

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 September 2012

South Korean Hyundai workers end strike

After two months of rolling stoppages by its 40,000 auto assembly plant workers in Seoul, Hyundai Motor on August 29 reached a tentative wage deal with the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU). The deal, if accepted by workers on Monday, will end the second-costliest strike in the company's 45-year history.

Hyundai, Kia and General Motors (GM) workers have been holding rolling stoppages since July 11. The strikers wanted improved wages and conditions, including the regularisation of non-regular workers and night work ended. The Hyundai deal includes a 5.4 percent rise in basic salaries, a bonus equivalent to five months' salary and a 9.6 million-won (\$US8,500) payment for each worker. The company also agreed to scrap the overnight shift from March 2013.

Chinese autoworkers win small pay rise

Around 1,000 workers at the Youde Auto electrical components factory in the Wuhan Economic Development Zone in Hubei province, central China, ended their three-day strike on August 24 after management made a pay offer of an extra 200 yuan a month.

Workers originally demanded a 500-yuan increase but Youde, a joint venture between China's Dongfeng Motors and the US-based Lear Corporation, split the strikers by offering long-serving employees a better deal. Assembly line workers have now been promised a basic salary of 1,300 yuan per month (\$US206), as against the 1,100-yuan minimum wage in Wuhan.

Indonesian cable workers end strike

Close to 700 striking workers at a Malaysia-owned cable and wire manufacturer, PT Ho Wah Genting in Batam, Indonesia ended a two-week strike on August 29 after management agreed to most of their demands, including all those related to employee outsourcing.

Management agreed in talks with the Indonesian Metal Workers Federation and Electronic Workers Union to recruit outsourced employees when their contracts expire, sort out problematic contracts by the manpower office and pay the wages of striking workers. The company currently employs 1,200 workers, 700 of them on contract, the rest as permanents.

India: Delhi University teachers strike

After 12 months of having their demands ignored, Delhi University Teachers Association (DUTA) members held a 24-hour hunger strike and protest outside the vice chancellor's office on August 28. Their demands included promotions, the filling of 4,000 vacant teaching posts, which are mainly filled by teachers on an ad-hoc basis, and a say in the academic "reforms" being introduced by university management.

The vice chancellor claimed the strike was illegal and that participants would be demoted but over 900 teachers attended the protest and signed a petition. University authorities claimed that the strike was a failure and had little effect.

University students support sacked Maruti auto workers

On August 27, hundreds of students from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University and Indira Gandhi National Open University demonstrated outside the Delhi headquarters of car manufacturer Maruti Suzuki of India (MSI) over the victimisation of workers at its Manesar plant. Students demanded an end to all violence against the workers, secure jobs for temporary workers and implementation of labour laws.

The newly formed break-away union Maruti Suzuki Workers' Union (MSWU) had been negotiating since April with MSI on a raft of 20 demands.

On August 21, MSI lifted a month-long lockout at the Manesar plant, but only a few hundred workers were allowed to enter. The automaker had sacked more than a third of the plant's 1,500 permanent employees. MSI has further announced that it will screen the almost 1,900 contract workers starting September 2 and expects to purge the majority.

The government, at the company's instigation, has jailed over 130 workers. Hundreds more workers have fled to their home villages, fearing arrest. Those jailed include the entire leadership of the MSWU, which was formed last year in opposition to the Maruti Kamgar Union, a company union.

Cambodia's garment industry strikes continue

Cambodia's Labour Advisory Council awarded garment workers a \$US10 monthly pay rise on September 1 but union officials say this is not enough to stop further strike action, including ongoing walkouts at four plants.

More than 500 workers at King First Industrial in Kandal province have

been on strike since August 25, following the sacking of three union leaders after workers demanded better pay, including a \$10 transport or accommodation allowance, \$15 per month for lunches and a \$12 attendance bonus.

About 200 workers at the Calacam Investment factory in Kampong Speu also walked out when three unionists were sacked for demanding better pay. Similar strikes, involving about 100 workers, at Conpress Holdings (Cambodia) factory in Phnom Penh and Cosmo Textile factory in Kandal province, are also continuing.

Canberra dam construction workers strike

On August 28, workers at the Cotter Dam construction site on the outskirts of Australia's capital, Canberra walked off the job and blockaded the site for nine hours over several issues, including safety. Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members lifted the blockade after union officials and water utility ACTEW Corporation reached agreement on four main sticking points; the fate of crane drivers employed by a contractor which is expected to go into liquidation, the status of "day labourers" on the site and concerns over safety and insurance arrangements around the giant cranes at the site.

This is not the first time work at the site has stopped due to safety concerns with the cranes. In January and February, WorkSafe closed down operations following potentially fatal safety incidents. More than 20 serious safety issues have been reported since construction work began on the dam enlargement project in 2010. John Holland and the Abigroup construction companies are managing the project.

Queensland: Fire administrative staff strike

Staff who organise the rosters for 800 Queensland firefighters walked off the job for 24 hours on August 27 to oppose a 2.7 percent pay increase and proposed cuts to conditions in a new workplace agreement.

The United Firefighters' Union members are concerned that the state Liberal National Party (LNP) Premier Campbell Newman is attempting to remove clauses in their enterprise agreement requiring management to "consult" with firefighters about proposed operational changes.

The government also proposes to erode workplace health and safety conditions. Instead of directing safety concerns to their employer, firefighters will have to report to divisional workplace health and safety officers. The firefighters are also opposed to management's plan to use "lesser trained" people as casual firefighters in Queensland metropolitan areas.

Last week over 1,000 teachers, firefighters and paramedics protested outside the Queensland Parliament in Brisbane against proposed stripping of conditions and entitlements from workplace agreements and below cost of living pay offers. The LNP, which also plans to axe 20,000 public sector jobs, is slashing \$2.8 billion from the state budget in the next 12 months.

Queensland sugar mill workers to strike

Over 100 workers at the Bingera Mill and Cane Railway System of

Bundaberg Sugar, in south-east Queensland have again rejected the company's latest pay offer of 2 percent and voted to strike on September 3. The action follows two months of strikes and lockouts over a new work agreement. According to a union spokesman, the company has reverted to its original offer, which is worse than one made in early August.

In August, 160 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and Electrical Trades Union rejected an offer that included 2.7 percent wage increases each year for three years but removed all accrued days off and four rostered days off from annual leave.

The unions, which have prolonging the dispute with limited industrial action, have indicated that they could accept the company's offer and take the dispute to Fair Work Australia for mediation.

New South Wales public servants to strike

The Public Service Association (PSA), representing over 100,000 state public servants has called four-hour stop work meetings of members at over 40 venues for October 8 to decide on industrial action to oppose attacks on wages, jobs and conditions by the New South Wales (NSW) Liberal government. The O'Farrell government has applied to the state's Industrial Commission to change 98 awards, including leave loading, penalty payments for shift workers and allowances for living in remote areas.

The NSW Liberal government has maintained a 2.5 percent cap on wage rises originally imposed by the previous state Labor government.

Earlier this year, the NSW government announced a 1.2 percent annual labour expense cap in the budget, which according to the PSA, could result in more than 10,000 public-sector job cuts over the next four years. This is on top of 5,000 redundancies announced in September. The state police have been exempted from the award changes and job cuts. The state government will increase the police force by 550 this year.

Tip Top bread delivery drivers protest

On August 27, close to 100 contracted truck drivers for one of Australia's major bread producers Tip Top rallied at their respective depots in Wollongong, Canberra and at the company's headquarters in Sydney to protest plans to restructure delivery runs and cut pay by up to 30 percent. According to the owner/drivers, they will lose between \$500 and \$1,700 a week.

A Transport Workers Union official said the drivers' runs had been expanded or restructured resulting in more work, more hours and less pay. The protest was sparked when drivers were issued the new contracts and told they had five days to sign an expression of interest or they would lose their jobs. Tip Top and the TWU have arranged to meet over the issue.

Victorian bus assembly workers strike

Close to 100 workers at bus manufacturer Volgren walked off the job for 24 hours on August 27 and picketed the factory in Dandenong South, east of Melbourne, in a dispute for a new enterprise agreement. The strike follows two half-day stoppages over the issue.

An Australian Manufacturing Workers Union official said members

opposed the company's proposal to drop a \$770 tools allowance and to reduce their pay rise to pay for superannuation increases. Union officials resumed negotiations with the owner, Brazilian-based bus manufacturer Marcopolo, on Friday.

Solomon Island nurses strike

Nurses in the outpatient and emergency department at the National Referral Hospital (NRH) in Honiara held a sit-in on August 27 after hospital management and the ministry of health failed to address grievances put to them several weeks ago. Some of the issues related to the security of the nursing officers working at the department following the stoning of a nurse. Nurses claimed they are subjected to regular verbal abuse and occasional assault by members of the public.

According to nurses, the public are venting their anger over poor service at the hospital due to a lack of staff and medical equipment. The day before the nurses protested the emergency department further reduced its services. The nurses want better staffing and medical equipment and transport for nurses forced to travel at night.



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