

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 July 2013

Bangladeshi garment worker shot dead while protesting

A garment worker was killed and another injured on July 9 when 20 unidentified assailants fired bullets at workers in Dhaka. They were marching to join several hundred fellow workers protesting in Merul Badda for improved wages. The Fashion Iceland Garment and Resources Garment employees were locked out after they asked factory managers for leave to join the combined demonstration in Merul Badda.

Several striking workers in Malibagh city were also injured when Dhaka police used teargas to break up their street demonstration, which was sparked after factory managers refused a request for leave to join another rally in Aftab Najar for better pay.

About 3,000 garment workers at BEXIMCO Fashion Ltd in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone also walked out on July 9 to demand their wages be paid in the first week of each month and for increased allowances. Workers complained that BEXIMCO withholds their monthly dues until the third week of the month. Police were deployed to the factory.

India: Bajaj Auto workers in Pune maintain strike

Around 1,300 production workers at the Chakan plant of Bajaj Auto Limited (BAL) in Pune, Maharashtra have been on strike since June 25 over a new three-year work agreement. Workers are demanding a pay rise, improved working conditions and 500 company shares to each employee at one-rupee per share. Management has transferred some production to its sister plant in Aurangabad, and appealed to the labour court to declare the strike illegal.

The Maharashtra government, fearing mass industrial unrest following threats of solidarity strikes from workers at 120 companies in Chakan and Pimpri-Chinchwad industrial belt, ordered a July 10 meeting with BAL management and the strikers' union, Vishwa Kalyan Kamgar Sangathana.

Andhra Pradesh jute mill workers and municipal employees protest

On July 8, Kothavalasa Uma Jute Mill workers in Vizianagaram, Andhra Pradesh protested outside the Collector's Office to demand that management lift an "illegal" lockout imposed on May 20 and to withdraw bogus charges against employees. The Kothavalasa Uma Jute Mill Workers Union—affiliated with the Indian Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU)—also demanded revision of the current work agreement and payment of all wages during the lockout. The union called off the protest after the Collector's Office said it would "look into their problem."

Municipal Workers and Employees' Union (MWEU) members, as part of state-wide action, also demonstrated at the Collector's Office to demand regularisation of contract workers, a 12,500-rupee (\$US250) per month minimum wage, a dearness allowance and health cards. The municipal workers threatened to issue a strike notice if demands were not met by July 10.

Andhra Pradesh ambulance workers demonstrate

On July 8, Government Ambulance 108 Service employees demonstrated in Ongole over a charter of six demands. These included no privatisation of the ambulance service, working hours restricted to eight hours per day, and 15,000-rupees minimum monthly pay.

Sri Lanka railway workers strike

Sri Lanka Railways workers struck for 48 hours on midnight July 7 to demand an immediate salary rise. Most passenger trains and goods trains, including fuel transportation to the international airport, were stopped by the walkout. Workers

complained that the government has not implemented the MT 5 pay scale in its 2006/6 circular. Their action followed a picket last week in front of the Salaries and Cadre Commission over the issue.

The Railway Joint Trade Union Alliance called off the strike on Tuesday evening, after the government submitted a new salary scale to the Salaries and Cadre Commission for approval. The railway workers have threatened to resume the strike in two weeks if their demands are not met.

Chinese healthcare workers protest

Around 60 former healthcare workers have been protesting on the steps of the Guangzhou Chinese Medicine University Hospital since May 14 to demand proper compensation and payment of social insurance contributions that have not been made during their more than 10 years' employment at the facility. The workers complained that they had been laid off in March without any compensation.

While some hospital healthcare workers are directly employed, most are employed by labour agencies or are contractors. The Guangzhou Chinese Medicine University Hospital workers, however, did not have formal employment contracts with either the hospital or Kang Ning, its subsidiary health care supplier. Kang Ning paid the workers' salaries but failed to provide pay slips, which meant workers, had no solid evidence of their employment to present at an arbitration hearing.

New South Wales coal loaders continue rolling strikes

After six weeks of rolling stoppages, unions representing over 200 workers at Australia's largest coal export terminal at Port Waratah Coal Services (PWCS) in Newcastle have extended strike action to include four days of four-hour stoppages on each shift beginning on July 11. The action followed a breakdown in ongoing negotiations on Wednesday.

Talks between PWCS, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), the Transport Workers Union, the Australian Workers Union and the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union have dragged on for more than nine months.

The unions want a 5 percent wage rise. The company, as part of a wider restructuring within the Australian coal industry due to falling demand in Asia, has only offered 3.5 percent on the base rate. They also demanded greater productivity and "flexibility", including the abolition of current limitations on

the exploitation of contract labour, ending management consultation with the unions on changes to work hours and shifts, and the jettisoning of a longstanding disputes-settling procedure.

The MUA indicated in a media statement this week that the unions are intent on satisfying the demands of PWCS. The MUA bragged that "negotiations between unions and PWCS have produced over 50 agreed changes to the current enterprise agreement that will deliver further productivity and flexibility at the world's biggest coal export terminal."

Newcastle chemical workers strike

After 12 months of failed negotiations, 120 members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) at the Orica chemical plant on Kooragang Island, Newcastle walked off the job for four hours on July 10 in a dispute over a new work agreement. The company wants to impose new rosters which workers have already rejected. According to the AWU, members have not made any major new claims but want to maintain existing provisions, including "family friendly" rosters.

New Zealand waste recycling workers strike

Waste and recycling workers at Australian-owned Transpacific Industries in Gisborne, on New Zealand's North Island walked out for 48 hours on July 9 to protest the company's "poor" wage offer in a new pay deal. An official of the FIRST Union said that the company was only offering a 30 cents an hour increase, which means that the Gisborne employees will continue to receive lower wages than their Auckland and Wellington counterparts.



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