# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

**27 July 2013**

**India: Victimised Maruti Suzuki workers demonstrate**

Victimised workers at the Manesar plant of auto maker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) defied a police ban and held a protest this week in Gurgaon to mark the anniversary of the jailing of 147 colleagues in July last year.

The jailed workers, including the entire leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU), were detained by police after a management-provoked altercation at the plant. Police are still hunting 67 workers from a list supplied by MSI. The company also carried out a mass purge of its workforce, firing 546 permanent employees and nearly 2,000 contract workers.

Under the surveillance of a large number of riot police, around 500 people joined the Maruti workers' protest to demand the release of all arrested workers and reinstatement of all sacked workers. Police stopped protesters marching towards Manesar where they planned to begin an indefinite sit down protest.

**Andhra Pradesh pharmacy workers protest**

Around 1,000 employees of the pharmaceutical manufacturer Aurobindo Pharma in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh demonstrated outside the Collector's office on July 22 to demand recognition of their union and revocation of the transfer of 14 workers, who they alleged were victimised by management. The protest was organised by the Indian Federation of Trade Unions.

**Maharashtra power workers on strike**

SNDL employees in Nagpur, Maharashtra defied a court order and struck on July 22 to demand a pay rise and other claims. At least seven depots and offices of the power distribution company have been closed by the strike. Members of the Maharashtra State Electricity Workers Federation (MSEWF) are demanding the roll-back of outsourcing and disinvestment and are also opposing the proposed transfer of workers to Madhya Pradesh cities where Essel Utilities (SNDL's parent company) has taken over as franchisee.

**Karnataka shipyard workers walk out**

Immigrant contract workers at the privately owned Bharti Shipyard in Mangalore have been on strike since July 3 to demand outstanding back pay. The workers have not been paid wages since January. The contract companies claim that they have not been paid by the shipyard. Police have been deployed to the shipyard.

**Strikes continue in Bangladeshi garment factories**

Workers at RB Style and Fashion, Anmoy Garments and NV Knit Composite—three garment factories in the Ashulia industrial belt outside Dhaka—stopped work on July 22 to demand due for June. It is common practice for factory owners to default paying wages in time for the three-day Eid-ul-Fitr public holiday to ensure employees return to work on time. The police were deployed to the industrial area fearful that other workers would join the strike.

On July 13, 50 people were injured when police used batons, teargas and rubber bullets against striking garment workers in three locations in Gazipur district. At least 15 factories closed when 4,000 locked out employees of the Machhihata Sweater factory blocked the Kaliakoir-Nabinagar highway to demand a wage rise and reopening of the factory. Locked out workers from nearby factories joined the demonstration.

In another incident, some 400 workers from the Blue Seal Textile Mill in the Sreepur district blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for nearly two hours in protest over the closure of their mill.

**Pakistan: Power-loom workers demonstrate over death**

Employees of a family run power-loom factory in Faisalabad, Punjab province, stopped work and demonstrated on a nearby highway to protest the death of a colleague on July 23. Workers alleged that management had failed to provide medical treatment to the worker who was electrocuted from a defective fan.

The protesters demanded the immediate arrest of the factory owners, claiming that they had ignored workers' complaints for three months about the faulty fan. The protest ended when police forced workers off the road.

**Rawalpindi municipal workers protest privatisation**

More than 200 municipal employees demonstrated outside the Solid

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Waste Management Office in Rawalpindi on July 20 to oppose the privatisation plans of the Punjab government. Workers said the government wanted to abolish the sanitation department and had granted contracts to a private firm established to provide these services. In addition, the workers demanded regularisation of more than 500 daily wage workers. The Municipal Workers Union said it would organise more protests if the government failed to protect sanitary workers' jobs.

**Pakistani sanitary workers on strike**

About 250 sanitary workers in the city of Shahdadpur in the Sindh district have been on strike since July 14 to demand back pay. They have not received any salaries for over two months. Although garbage collection has stopped, leaving piles of garbage throughout the city, media reported that residents have supported the workers demand.

**National walkout by Sri Lankan government hospital nurses**

On July 17, thousands of nurses launched a national 24-hour strike over six demands. These included promotions, recruitment of graduate nurses into the government service, increments in several allowances including a 5,000-rupee ($US35) transport allowance, 4,000-rupee telephone allowance, and an inventory allowance. The Government Nursing Officers Association (GNOA) organised the strike and held a rally outside the National Hospital in Colombo.

**New South Wales public hospital nurses and midwives walk out**

Around 5,000 members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association (NSWNMA) walked off the job on July 24 and rallied in Sydney and 17 regional centres to demand improved nurse-to-patient ratios in a new work agreement. The state Liberal government has offered 2.5 percent annual pay increases over two years but will absorb it into the scheduled 0.25 percent rise in compulsory employer superannuation from July 1.

The nurses' association, representing over 35,000 public sector nurses and midwives, wants one nurse to four patients in general medical, surgical and mental health wards, one to three in general children's wards and one to three in emergency departments. Midwives want a maximum of four hours' per shift contact time with patients, leaving four hours to attend to associated duties.

The rallying nurses passed a motion to continue their action but the NSWNMA made no decision on whether to take further strike action and instead announced a public campaign to pressure the government. The association has indicated it would accept the 2.5 percent pay increase (excluding the superannuation component) if the government agreed to minimum nurse-patient ratios.

**Victorian refinery workers ordered to end action**

The Fair Work Commission (Australia's industrial tribunal) this week ordered striking contract employees at Shell's Geelong refinery in Victoria to return to work on July 25.

UGL Limited workers walked out on Monday in an ongoing dispute for a new enterprise bargaining agreement. UGL, originally a Western Australia-based resources construction business, employs about 80 maintenance and construction workers at the oil refinery. Shell announced in April that it would sell or close the 59-year-old refinery, threatening 600 jobs.

**Nurses at Victoria's prisons walk out**

In a dispute for a new work agreement, prison nurses at the Melbourne Assessment Prison held a two-hour stop work meeting on July 23 and voted to stop again for two hours on July 26. Meanwhile, nurses at Ararat Correctional Centre in country Victoria held a four-hour stop work meeting on July 26 and plan to stop again on July 30. The nurses, employed by GEO Care Australia in medical clinics in 11 Victorian jails, have been involved in enterprise bargaining negotiations for 19 months and have been imposing industrial bans since July 18. The Australian Nurses Federation-Victoria wants 2.5 percent annual pay increases, better penalty rates and improvements in annual leave and long service leave. The current agreement expired in July 2012 and prison nurses' last wage increase was in January 2011.

**Solomon Islands teachers' strike in second week**

Around 8,000 teachers of the Solomon Islands National Teachers Association (SINTA) have been on strike since July 16 over the government's failure to honour a pay agreement. The action, which came after a four-week strike in March/April over the issue, follows repeated broken promises to implement a new salary structure that the government agreed to in February 2012, after three years of negotiations.

While the government claims it had always accepted the teachers' wage and allowance demands, it has never budgeted for the $34 million required for the increase and to date has only paid the rise to about 2,000 teachers. SINTA ended the previous strike after the government said it would pay all teachers the new salary scale by the end of June.

The government promised last week to meet teachers' demands by July 25 but now appears to have missed its own deadline. Teachers have ignored government threats to deregister the union and cut striking teachers' pay, and said they would stay out until all teachers receive the increase.

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