

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 August 2013

Asia

China: Cooper Tire workers continue strike action

Over 5,000 Cooper Chengshan (Shandong) Tire Company workers remain on strike after walking out on July 13 over concerns about job security. The industrial action followed a takeover announcement in mid-June of US-based Cooper Tire by the Indian-owned Apollo Tyres. The Chengshan Group, a state-run company, has a 35 percent stake in the Chinese plant, with Cooper Tire holding a majority share.

While previous protests by Cooper Chengshan employees led to talks between the Chinese and American plant owners in late June and negotiations between the union and Cooper Tire and Apollo management in July, there has been no settlement of workers' concerns.

Liang Yiting, a Cooper Chengshan union leader, told the media that workers were worried about their jobs because of Apollo's high debts. "We will persevere in the end," he said. "Apollo has such a high-debt ratio. We are very concerned about our future."

India: Bajaj Auto workers in Pune remain on strike

On July 30, 900 striking employees from the Chakan plant of Bajaj Auto Limited (BAL) demonstrated outside the labour commission in Pune, Maharashtra after factory management failed to show up for tripartite negotiations in a wage dispute.

BAL's Chakan plant employees 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 for each employee at one-rupee per share. Management has transferred some production to its sister plant in Aurangabad.

Following threats of solidarity strikes from workers at 120 companies in Chakan and Pimpri-Chinchwad industrial estates, the Maharashtra government ordered BAL management and the strikers' union, Vishwa Kalyan Kamgar Sangathana, to enter tripartite talks on July 10. While Bajaj Auto has said it is ready to discuss wages revision it has rejected the demand to allot shares to employees.

Contract ambulance workers strike in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh

Over 2,000 contract employees, including drivers and paramedics, of the

Karnataka '108' Ambulance Service have been on strike since July 27 to demand regularisation and a wage increase. According to their union, the Karnataka Rajya Arogya Kavacha 108, their employer, contract company GVK-EMRI, has not been operating as per the government's Memorandum of Understanding.

Contract employees complained that they are forced to work for more than 12 hours a day. Most are posted outside their districts and paid a paltry salary of 7,000 rupees (\$US240) a month. "At times, we have to pay for the repair works done to the ambulances and there is no job security for us, we are getting sacked easily," one worker told the media. The union has demanded that the government's contract with GVK-EMRI be ended and workers absorbed back into the public service.

Meanwhile, Ambulance '108' contract drivers and paramedics employed by GVK-EMRI in Andhra Pradesh are maintaining strike action and street protests begun on July 21 over similar issues facing their colleagues in Karnataka. Over 250 strikers have been sacked and GVK-EMRI has begun recruiting replacements.

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions-led 108 Services Contract Employees Union wants monthly wages increased to 15,000 rupees and work restricted to eight hours per day. The union said that although workers regularly work a 12-hour day they are only paid for eight hours.

Andhra Pradesh contract lecturers continue strike

Contract lecturers at junior and degree colleges in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh have been on strike since June 24 to demand regularisation of their jobs. Striking members of the Government Colleges' Contract Lecturers' Association held demonstrations over the issue at various colleges on July 29.

Municipal workers walk out in Andhra Pradesh

On July 30, 80 contract and outsourced municipal workers in Machilipatnam, the administrative headquarters of the Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh, protested, along with their families, outside the municipal office to demand a wage increase and resolution of other issues. The three-day protest and relay hunger strike was organised by the Andhra Pradesh Workers and Employees Union.

Haryana Agricultural University teachers demonstrate

On July 30, teachers at the Haryana Agricultural University (HAU) in Hisar, in India's far northern state of Haryana, walked off the job and protested outside the university's administration building to demand promotions under the Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) of the Sixth Pay Commission.

Haryana Agricultural University Teachers Association (HAUTA) officials said that no promotions of teachers and scientists had been granted at the university since the CAS was introduced in December 2008. According to HAUTA, the CAS has already been implemented in all other universities of Haryana, including other agricultural universities.

Jharkhand communications workers strike for three days

More than 300 daily wage telephone linesmen of India's state run communications company BSNL in Jharkhand walked off the job on July 26 to protest over non-payment of wages for the past six months and retrenchment of several casual workers.

Broadband and ATM services in five districts—Hazaribag, Ramgarh, Giridih, Koderma and Chatra—were affected. BSNL began releasing funds for the worker's dues on July 29, ending the strike.

Pakistan university employees protest

About 500 contract employees of Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad demonstrated on July 26 to demand regularisation of 800 workers, filling of vacancies with properly qualified people, and an end to victimisation by management. The action, which was called by the Employees Welfare Association, followed several protests in previous years over the same issues.

Indonesian electronics workers rally

Hundreds of workers at a Japanese electronics company, PT Sun Creation Indonesia (SCI), in the free trade zone city of Batam in Riau Island, rallied outside Batam City Council on Monday to demand that their salaries and Idul Fitri bonuses be paid before the religious holiday break. Workers claimed that the three Japanese managers at the factory fled in early July, leaving the 732 workers in limbo. According to the Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers Unions, workers had not received their base salaries or other allowances when the three managers left without notice.

Australia and the Pacific

Queensland nurses protest

Several dozen Queensland Nurses Union (QNU) members rallied at Kawana, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, to oppose the state Liberal-National government's plan to outsource major medical services at the

newly-built Sunshine Coast University Hospital. The demonstration followed several months of protests by government medical staff in regional Queensland centres to oppose privatisation of local medical and aged-care services.

The \$1.8 billion 900-bed Sunshine Coast hospital is due to open in 2016. The state government is seeking "expressions of interest" for clinical and non-clinical services, which would make it Australia's largest publicly-owned teaching hospital to be managed by a commercial operator. Queensland treasurer Lawrence Springborg has told the media that outsourcing would reduce costs by "hundreds of millions of dollars."

Victorian dock workers blockade port

Up to 70 workers from stevedore Qube Bulk and Freight have been protesting at the Station Pier in Melbourne since July 26, preventing the unloading of agricultural products and other perishable cargo from the Melbourne-Devonport ferry, the Spirit of Tasmania.

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members have ignored a Supreme Court order to end the blockade, which is in protest against the unfair dismissal of two work colleagues at the port. The MUA and Qube were ordered to appear in the Supreme Court on August 1 over the issue.

Solomon Islands teachers end strike following court order

The Solomon Islands Teachers Association (SINTA) ended two-week strike action by its 8,000 members on July 29, following a Supreme Court directive three days earlier. The walkout was over the government's failure to honour a pay agreement. It followed a four-week strike in March/April and walkout in February. The Solomon Islands government had pledged in early February, after three years of negotiations, to implement a new salary structure.

The July 26 High Court decision also directed the government not to deduct teachers' pay for the duration of the strike and to "put right" by August 22 outstanding issues affecting SINTA members.

New Zealand cleaners protest

On July 24, 70 cleaners and supporters rallied outside New Zealand's parliament buildings in Wellington to protest government plans to amend clause 6a of the Employment Relations Act. The clause stipulates that employers must retain contracts for cleaners and caterers if a business is restructured or sold. The government is planning to exempt the many small businesses employing fewer than 20 staff.

Fiji sugar workers vote to strike

Fiji sugar workers have voted to strike over pay amid claims of intimidation. Ignoring the presence of police and military personnel at the ballot, and an order from the Fiji Sugar Corporation (FSC) for employees not to participate in the ballot, 67 percent of workers decided to participate

with 90 percent voting for industrial action. The sugar workers rejected a 5.3 percent pay rise and a health and welfare insurance scheme. A Fiji Sugar and General Workers Union official told the media that wages have fallen by 40 percent in real terms over the last seven years and that the 2,000 sugar workers, who earn just \$7.10 (\$US4.03) a week, could not afford to pay for the health and welfare premiums.

The military government of Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama indicated that the military might be used as scabs, declaring, “One way or another, the mills will need to continue to operate even if some people abandon their jobs.” No talks have been scheduled between the union and the FSC.



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