

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

14 September 2013

Hyundai workers accept wage deal

Over 46,000 union members at South Korea's largest carmaker Hyundai Motor Corp have ended a three-week strike over wages and benefits. The union announced on September 10 that 55.1 percent of union members who voted had endorsed a management wage offer for a 5.1 percent (\$89) base salary increase, a one-time bonus equivalent to three-and-a-half months' wages, plus 5 million won and other benefits.

Around 35,000 workers at Hyundai's affiliate Kia Motors in the Ulsan Industrial District are maintaining rolling strike action while negotiations continue.

The Korean Metal Workers Union, which covers in-house unions at both companies, had demanded a 130,498-won (\$US117) increase in the monthly base salary and the retirement age increased to 61. Other demands included 10 million won (\$8,900) to help the children of union members find jobs and medical expenses for workers diagnosed with cancer.

India: Hero motorcycle plant workers resume strike

Up to 5,000 workers at the Hero MotoCorp motorcycle plant in Haridwar district, Uttarakhand have resumed industrial action after ending a two-day strike last week over the termination of a permanent employee. Workers walked out again after 16 union leaders were suspended and 700 permanent employees asked to pledge that they would not be involved in any future demonstrations. Production at the plant, which produces 9,000 units a day, has been cut by 60 percent.

Meanwhile, workers at Hero's Gurgaon plant in Haryana struck on September 7 to protest the suspension of nine Hero MotoCorp Workers Union officials. One worker said the union representatives were suspended for protesting over the

company's failure to pay employees a 20 percent pay increase promised in an April wage deal.

Meghalaya teachers walk out

Tens of thousands of teachers at government aided schools and colleges in India's eastern state of Meghalaya walked out for three days on September 11 following repeated refusals of the state government to negotiate on long outstanding claims. The main issues are the regular payment of salaries and provincialisation of schools.

Called by the Joint Action Committee of All Teachers' Associations of Meghalaya, the strike followed four days of protests that closed 4,000 schools and included a 10,000-strong demonstration of teachers in the state's capital Shillong. The Meghalayan government refused to meet the teachers declaring it had nothing to offer them.

Karnataka nurses protest

About 100 members of the Karnataka State Trained Nurses Association demonstrated in Karnataka's northern city of Bidar on September 7 demanding a 6,000-rupee (\$US94.2) minimum monthly wage and other claims. The teachers also want all vacant positions in government and private hospitals filled, equal pay for male and female nurses, health insurance, employee state insurance and provident fund facilities.

Bangladesh: Jute mill workers strike over dues

Thousands of workers from about 12 Bangladesh Jute Mill Corporation plants demonstrated in Chittagong, Khulna and Jessore on September 8 with a charter of 11 demands, including the immediate payment of outstanding dues. The demonstrations ended after police dispersed protesters blocking several city roads. A union organiser told media that although a tripartite agreement had been made for the payment of arrears in four instalments the jute mills had only paid two instalments.

Chittagong garment workers strike

Workers at the Millennium Sweater factory and the Singapore-owned Super Fine Knitting plant in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone struck on September 10 to demand a piece-rate increase. The walkout allegedly erupted two days after workers heard that a nearby China-based company had increased its sweater piece-rate.

Power workers in Pakistan protest against privatisation

On September 7 hundreds of Multan Electric Power Company workers in central Pakistan protested, along with workers in other cities, against government plans to privatise the country's power sector. Under the International Monetary Fund's directive, the newly elected Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government has made privatisation of its public sector utilities a priority in this year's budget.

The protests are part of a long-running national campaign and were called by the Pakistan Workers Federation, which includes thousands of Water and Power Development Authority employees. Privatisation of the Karachi Electric Supply Company has resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs and regular power cuts due to poorly maintained infrastructure and lack of staff.

Cambodia: SL garment workers walk out again

Within days after ending an 18-day strike, over 5,000 employees at SL Garment Processing, Asia's largest garment manufacturer, walked out on September 5 and marched through Phnom Penh to protest the sacking of over

700 colleagues for striking. They returned to work the following day after management agreed to reinstate the sacked employees and lift a temporary suspension of the protesters.

The garment workers first struck on August 12 over eight claims, including an increase in the minimum wage to \$US150 a month and the removal of military police patrolling inside the company's factories. The industrial action ended on August 30 after municipal authorities ordered that military police be removed from the plants. It is not clear if other issues were resolved.

New South Wales: Coal ship crew in Port Kembla end strike

Eleven crew members of the Egyptian-owned coal carrier Wadi Alkarm occupied the vessel in Port Kembla, 70 km south of Sydney, on September 5 after complaining of mistreatment.

The Egyptian workers refused to sail with the company and told media that they had been denied access to food and water daily between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m., and that their wage of about \$530 per month had been halved whilst at sea. The strikers refused the company's offer to fly them back home, declaring that they would continue to occupy the ship until they received back pay and entitlements.

On September 6 the company paid all entitlements and provided tickets for the crew's flight back to Egypt. The company was involved in a similar industrial dispute earlier this year in Gladstone, Queensland.

While a Maritime Union of Australia official who negotiated with the ship owners claimed victory, the union failed to resolve the ongoing poor conditions and mistreatment of crew by the company. One of the strikers told the media he was concerned about the welfare of the next crew.



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