

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

24 May 2014

Journalists strike at South Korean state broadcaster

At least 200 journalists and 100 cameramen at the state-run KBS, South Korea's largest broadcaster, walked off the job in Seoul on May 19 to demand the resignation of Gil Hwan, the company president. Gil was accused of interfering in news reportage, biasing it in favour of the government. Talks between journalists and Gil were cancelled on Monday afternoon when striking journalists refused to let him enter KBS premises.

The National Association of KBS Journalists and the KBS Journalist Association, with 2,500 and 1,200 members respectively, said they would hold a ballot, to be counted next week, to extend the strike nationally. Gil claimed that if KBS workers struck it would be illegal.

In 2012, over 4,000 journalists and production staff at South Korea's major public TV and cable broadcasters, KBS, MBC, YTN and Yonhap News Agency walked off the job at various times during a six-month strike period. They were protesting alleged political bias by management. The media companies sacked striking union members, claiming their action was illegal.

Cambodian petrol station workers' union ends strike at Caltex

Around 300 striking Caltex station employees in Phnom Penh returned to work on May 22, ending a ten-day strike. Employees at 18 Caltex petrol stations walked out on May 12 to demand a minimum monthly wage of \$160 (\$6 a day) and an annual \$160 bonus. Cashiers were paid \$US130 a month, service staff and drivers \$110 and cleaners \$100. Outdoor workers had also demanded that Caltex increase the annual health care allowance from \$100 to be on par with indoor workers who receive between \$200 and \$300.

The Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation agreed to drop all demands after Caltex agreed to increase wages by \$20 a month.

Sacked Philippines electronics manufacturing workers protest

Twenty-four sacked union leaders from electronics manufacturer NXP (formerly Philips) in Cabuyao city, and other employees, protested in front of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) office in Manila on May 19 to demand their jobs back and resolution of a dispute for a new work agreement. The NXP Semiconductors Company Workers Union leaders were sacked after plant employees refused to work during DOLE approved holidays on April 9, 17, 18 and May 1.

Around 1,700 NXP employees have been protesting on factory premises and outside the factory gate for several months in a dispute over a new collective agreement. The company has refused to negotiate or change its original offer of a 3.5 percent wage increase.

On April 16, the DOLE took over the dispute and ordered the company and union delegates into negotiations in Manila. Workers have been picketing the DOLE building while the issue remains unresolved.

Pakistan: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government hospital doctors strike

Young resident doctors at government hospitals in Pakistan's northern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa have been on strike since May 15 to demand promised changes to their service structure affecting over 7,500 doctors. They have also called for improved medical facilities at public hospitals. Several doctors in Peshawar have been on a hunger strike since the strike began.

An official of the Young Doctors Association (YDA) told media that three months ago the government falsely promised it would resolve their long-standing issues. The protesting doctors held documents listing all the promises made to them by the provincial government in the last few years. A YDA official said the strike would continue until all the doctors' demands

were met.

Pakistan sanitary workers protest over reduced pay

On May 14 and 15, hundreds of employees of the recently privatised Lahore Waste Management Company protested outside the Lahore Press Club over new working conditions that cut their wages and new rules requiring all employees to be photographed before and after work.

Workers complained that they were deducted a full day's pay if they were only a few minutes late. They also cannot leave work until a company officer arrives to take their photograph. Overtime pay rates for holidays and working back have also been ended. According to some workers, time taken for meals is also deducted from their wages. The majority of employees are not regularised.

Since privatisation, monthly wages have been cut from 20,000 rupees to about 12,000 rupees (\$US121). Company management denounced the protesting workers as "uneducated" and "miscreants" and said their demands would not be met. The company has also filed a number of frame-up charges against the protesting workers.

Indian public sector bank unions strike against privatisation

Five bank associations—the All India Bank Employees' Association, All India Bank Officers' Association, Bank Employees' Federation of India, Indian National Bank Employees' Federation and the Indian National Bank Officers' Congress—representing around 100,000 bank employees, planned to hold demonstrations across the country yesterday in opposition to a government report calling for partial privatisation of public sector banks.

A Reserve Bank of India committee has recommended that the government reduce its holdings in public sector banks below 50 percent. It has also called for a merger of public sector banks and transfer of ownership of public sector banks to a bank investment company.

Banking services across India came to a standstill on December 18 when bank employees and officers from 27 public sector, 12 private sector and eight foreign banks, walked out for 24 hours to demand a wage review. They were also protesting against banking sector reform measures to merge several nationalised banks and allow foreign institutions to compete with the State Bank of India.

Oil rig service vessel workers in Western Australia to strike

Around 100 employees of the international marine services company Tidewater, operating out of Oslo, 1,300 km north of Western Australia's capital Perth, plan to strike for 48 hours on May 27 in a dispute for a pay increase. Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members are demanding pay increases of 16.5 percent over four years and reduction to their five-week-on, five-week-off roster by a week.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA) has applied to the Fair Work Commission to withdraw approval for a stoppage, claiming the union's alleged failure to negotiate in good faith should render the strike unlawful. Tidewater provides vital supplies to oil and gas projects in waters off Australia's north-west coast.

New Zealand hospital workers to strike

Close to 50 store and maintenance workers at six government hospitals in the Canterbury district, on New Zealand's South Island, planned to strike for 24 hours on May 22 in a dispute over a pay increase. Members of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union want a 5 percent pay increase in a new collective agreement but the Canterbury District Health Board has offered just 0.85 percent, well below the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 1.5 percent.

New Zealand environment protection workers strike

Around 120 employees at the Ministry for the Environment in Wellington struck for two hours on May 16 in a dispute for a wage increase. According to the Public Service Association, after six months of collective bargaining the government has offered a pay increase of just 0.5 percent.



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