

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

31 May 2014

Journalists' strike at South Korean public broadcaster in second week

At least 300 news production staff at the state-run KBS, South Korea's largest broadcaster, have been on strike in Seoul since 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. Other TV and radio production workers, including administrative staff, walked out for 24 hours on May 23 in support of the striking news workers.

The National Association of KBS Journalists and the KBS Journalists Association, with 2,500 and 1,200 members respectively, have held a ballot, to be counted this week, to extend the strike nationally. The result has not been reported.

Cambodian garment workers strike

Close to 3,000 employees of the South Korean-owned garment factory Cambo Handsome, in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district, walked off the job on May 23 in a dispute over contracts and severance pay. Other demands include a \$US20 bonus and the removal of representatives of the Khmer Union Federation (KUF), which workers claim is not serving their interests.

Striking workers foiled an attempt by police, supported by factory security guards, to remove two leaders of the Workers Friendship Union Federation from outside the factory. Their arrest was prevented by workers who surrounded the union leaders to protect them. The factory has banned registration of unions other than the government approved KUF. Workers said they would remain on strike until their demands are met.

Indonesian bus drivers strike

Hundreds of inter-city and inter-province bus drivers of PT Arimbi Jaya Agung, in Tangerang city, 25 km west of Indonesia's capital Jakarta, refused to begin work on May 23 to protest against a company policy that threatened drivers with dismissal if they caused road accidents.

The drivers are also financially responsible for any damage caused, including victim compensation. A protesting driver said the strike was

in solidarity with many drivers and drivers' assistants who have been dismissed and asked to pay for accident damage.

Pakistan public sector workers protest

On May 22, thousands of public sector workers demonstrated in major Pakistan cities to demand the government increase the minimum wage to 30,000 rupees (\$US304), the minimum pension to 10,000 rupees and for an across-the-board pay rise of 30 percent for government, semi-government and private sector employees. The current minimum monthly wage is 10,000 rupees, and even lower in rural areas.

The Pakistan Workers Confederation called the rallies, but limited them to appeals to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to impose taxes on landlords and elites. The World Bank and IMF have demanded the government privatise public utilities, including electricity, railways, ports, oil and gas.

Meanwhile, on May 22, Public Works Department (PWD) employees in Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province held a street procession to demand wage increases, grade restructure and provision of other facilities. Workers protested again on May 27, when hundreds of government employees rallied outside the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on the same issues. The protest was called by the All Technical and Non-technical Government Employees' Coordination Council, which was attended sub-engineers, computer operators, mechanics, drivers, class-IV workers, draftsmen and court employees.

India: Andhra Pradesh power distribution workers strike

Around 3,000 employees of power distribution companies—AP Transco, AP Genco, EPDCL, SPDCL, CPDCL and NPDCL—in Andhra Pradesh, walked off the job on May 25 to demand pay revisions effective from May 21. According to the workers' Joint Action Committee, the state government has approved the pay increase but the power companies have not passed it on to workers.

Bangladeshi police use firearms against garment workers

Industrial police in the Narayangani Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in Dhaka division fired guns and baton charged protesting garment workers on May 25, injuring at least five protesters. Employees of Ananta, Supreme and Sinha were protesting the sacking of 40 fellow workers. Their demonstration spilled onto the Narayangani-Demra highway.

Protesting workers told media that the 40 colleagues were sacked and forcefully removed from the factory premises by industrial police after they pressed presented an 11-point charter of demands, including pay for overtime and wages as per the law. The garment workers said authorities had forced them to work overtime without payment.

Philippines university general services staff strike

At least 16 general services workers at the University of San Carlos-Talamban, a private Catholic university in Cebu City, protested at the university gate on May 21 preventing students entering the campus. They were protesting the sudden closure of the General Services office, causing the termination of 150 colleagues. University management claimed the closure was in preparation for an expected drop in future student enrolments.

Officials of the Associated Labor Unions-Trade Union Congress of the Philippines have organised a sell-out deal with the university. Management agreed to reinstate the 16 protesting employees, who had refused to take a redundancy package, as long as they can acquire a certificate as plumbers or electricians from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority. Workers have been given just six months to achieve certification.

A further conciliation conference was scheduled for May 28 at the National Conciliation and Mediation Board.

Industrial court suspends maritime strike in Western Australia

A planned strike by supply ship workers in the Pilbara oil and gas industry operating out of Oslow, 1,300 km north of Western Australia's capital Perth, has been suspended by the Fair Work Commission (FWC). Around 100 cooks, seafarers and stewards working for the international marine services company Tidewater had planned to strike for 48 hours on May 27 in a dispute for a pay increase. The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has presented a raft of 40 demands including a pay increase of 16.5 percent over four years and reduction to their five-week-on, five-week-off roster by a week.

Following 130 meetings between Tidewater and the MUA, the FWC ruled in favour of the employer representative—the Australian Mines and Metals Association—which claimed that the union was not negotiating in good faith. The commission has called a hearing for June 9 and 10 to assess the evidence.

One sticking point in the negotiations appears to be the work roster, with employees working 12–15 hour shifts and spending considerable time away from their families.

Teachers at Victorian private school walk out

Teaching staff at Latrobe Melbourne, the trading name of the private provider Navitas Bundoora Pty Ltd, at Latrobe University campus in Melbourne, struck for 24 hours on May 28, after two years of failed negotiations over an enterprise agreement. Management called a Sports Day for students to coincide with the planned strike action in an attempt to minimise its effect. The walkout involved members of the National Tertiary Education Union.

Navitas runs a college in partnership with Latrobe University to provide English and foundation courses for international students. It employs 120 casual and 70 permanent staff. NTEU members are concerned that the company continues to deny job security to the majority of teachers.

Many staff members had foregone wages for 17 percent superannuation contributions but had been told superannuation payments would be cut back to 9 percent without compensation. Teachers also fear that Navitas plans to reduce long-service leave and cut redundancy payments. Job conditions are also an issue with staff denied space to store personal belongings at work.

New Zealand petrol tanker drivers end strike

Six truck drivers employed by Toll Carriers, which is owned by the Australian Toll Group and contracted to deliver petrol to BP service stations in Northland, ended a 27-day strike on May 28 in a dispute for a new collective agreement, after the First Union and Toll reached an agreement. The drivers wanted pay parity with other drivers in the industry.

Toll Carrier drivers were paid between \$20 and \$25 an hour compared to the industry average of \$30 an hour and not paid overtime. FIRST Union, however, was not seeking full pay parity but demanded a 2 percent pay rise, to an average of \$26 an hour. Toll offered the \$26 an hour rate but only if workers moved to individual contracts. The union has not revealed details of the deal stitched up with Toll.



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