

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 July 2014

South Korea: KTU teachers strike

Around 1,000 members of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers' Union (KTU) demonstrated in central Seoul on June 27 after a court ruling stripped the union of its legal status. Teachers and other education workers left schools early to join the demonstration, giving it the nickname "early leave struggle."

The protest came eight days after the Seoul Administrative Court denied the 60,000-strong union its legal status because the organisation refused to expel union members dismissed from schools. Under Korean labour law union members who have retired or been dismissed cannot retain their union membership. Nine people, who the KTU maintains were wrongfully dismissed, are still union members. The KTU no longer has the right to represent members in collective bargaining.

Anxious to block any opposition from teachers to its industrial laws or policies, the government has ordered city and provincial education offices to identify the rally participants and submit a list of names for disciplinary action. In 2006, a total of 2,300 teachers received corrective measures for participating in a rally opposing a teacher-evaluation system.

Samsung workers end strike

Over 80 percent of 1,500 union members employed by Samsung Electronics Service subcontractors have endorsed a wage and conditions agreement with employers and ended a year-long industrial dispute. The dispute came to a head on May 19 when over 1,000 contract workers walked out following the suicide of union leader Yeom Ho-seok. Yeom's suicide was in protest against company suppression of the union and in support of demands for a living wage. The agreement ends a 41-day workers' sit-in outside Samsung's Seoul office.

In the deal negotiated by the Korean Metal Workers Union, Samsung's service subcontractors agreed to pay 1.2 million won (\$US1,183) per month with performance bonuses, grant up to six unionists paid time for union duties for up to 9,000 hours per year and allow three union executives to take unpaid leave.

Hyundai workers threaten to strike

Hyundai's union members have threatened to strike following "no progress" in talks with Korea's largest automaker. Union representatives walked out of the last two rounds of wage talks when Hyundai officials insisted on negotiating the company's demands before considering the workers' claims.

Workers' demands include a 7 percent or 159,614 won (\$157) increase in the average monthly wage, 30 percent of the firm's net income distributed in bonuses, work hours limited 52 per week, and for some existing bonuses to be included as regular wages.

India: New Delhi steel workers' strike enters fifth week

More than 1,500 workers at 26 steel-utensil plants at the Wazirpur Industrial Estate have been on strike since June 5 to demand better wages, safe working conditions and other entitlements. The workers are maintaining a protest in Raja Park.

Hot Steel Workers Unity Front representatives and factory owners met at the District Labour Court in Wazirpur on Wednesday, following 20 days of fruitless talks.

The steel workers are currently paid 8,000 rupees (\$US135) per month and forced to work 12 hours a day. They want a Provident Fund (PF), Employee State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) health benefits cards, a minimum monthly wage of 10,375 rupees and overtime pay, and occupational safety equipment, as mandated under Indian law.

One worker told the media that the only safety equipment he had was a pair of "home-stitched gloves made from scraps of jeans."

A union spokesman said that safety inspectors sent to Wazirpur estate factories during the strike discovered that most plants lacked registration numbers and were not following the factories or minimum wages acts. There are over 600 steel rolling plants in the estate.

New Delhi hospital contract workers to strike

Around 350 multipurpose contract workers at the Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan (LNJP) Hospital in New Delhi have threatened to strike next Tuesday after their contract employer, Scientific Security Management Systems, demanded 7,000 rupees (\$US117.6) from all employees to renew their contracts. The workers, including Group D employees, ward boys and sanitation workers, have appealed to the hospital's superintendent to resolve the issue. The hospital

employs over 4,000 people.

Kerala milk delivery workers threaten to strike

Sixty-six contract workers at the Milma (Kerala Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation) dairy unit at Punnapra, in Alappuzha district of India's southern state of Kerala, have threatened to strike over job cuts. If unresolved, the dispute could disrupt the distribution of milk to 11 towns in the district.

Contract employees are being paid between 375 and 750 rupees per day and work up to 14 hours per day 15 days a month. The planned job cuts would halve the number of workers attached to the 11 distribution trucks.

Workers rejected a manager proposal to retain all employees if they agree to not receive a scheduled pay increase. More talks are scheduled for this week.

Cardboard workers in Cambodia end dispute

A six-month dispute that eventually halted production at the Por Sen Chey district cardboard manufacturing factory of Harta Packaging Industries ended on June 27 after the company paid seniority bonuses to sacked employees. The bonuses of between \$500 and \$4,000, however, were only paid to 145 of the over 200 former workers.

Workers struck in February to demand seniority wages, retroactive to 2004, which they said should have been paid as per the labour law, when the factory changed ownership in 2012. That strike was ended after six days following a court injunction. When workers returned, the company sacked 285 senior employees.

Cambodian garment workers protest

On June 28, 400 employees from the Hongkong Yufeng garment factory, who lost their jobs when their factory abruptly closed on June 9, blocked access to the Canadia Industrial Park in Phnom Penh to demand full severance pay. The factory owner has disappeared owing around \$500 in severance pay to each worker.

After blocking access to the industrial park for about two hours management agreed to meet with employees but no resolution was reached. Canadia Park has already paid about \$100,000 to cover outstanding factory workers' wages in the last two months.

Indonesia: Jakarta sanitation workers strike

On June 27 temporary workers employed by the Jakarta Sanitation Agency in Indonesia's capital went on strike and protested outside the agency's office to demand three months' unpaid salaries. The

sanitation workers are paid just 80,000 rupiah (\$US6.96) per day. The agency claimed it was waiting for the Jakarta Financial Management Body to release the wages budget.

There are over 10,500 temporary workers hired on a daily basis throughout the city.

Catholic school teachers in Tasmania and New South Wales strike

Over 750 Catholic teachers and support staff from schools across Tasmania and New South Wales walked off the job for four hours this week in a dispute for a new work agreement with the Catholic Education Office (CEO). Protests were held in four cities—Newcastle in New South Wales and Launceston, Hobart and Burnie in Tasmania.

Teachers and support workers are members of the Independent Education Union (IEU) and have lodged over 30 claims nationwide. These include a pay increase, entitlements and classifications on a par with government schools, and minimum 12-month contracts for staff. Negotiations began 18 months ago. The last agreement between the IEU and the CEO was signed in 2009.

Melbourne rail workers protest sacking

On July 2, around 20 rail workers of Victoria's public transport provider V/Line protested at the Southern Cross station in Melbourne to demand V/line reinstate a sacked conductor. At least one train was prevented from leaving the station and other trains were diverted during the 45-minute protest.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union said the V/line conductor was fired after he was forced to defend himself from two youth who abused passengers before throwing punches at the conductor and another colleague. The veteran conductor had worked for 40 years with the company and had a spotless record. The union has lodged an unfair dismissal claim with Fair Work Australia.

According to the rail authority there have been over 300 verbal and physical assaults on V/Line staff in the last twelve months.



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