

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 August 2014

Truckers at China's Ningbo Port strike

Over 10,000 truck drivers at Ningbo's Beilun Container Port in China's Zhejiang province struck work and protested outside the port authority building on August 18 to demand increased haulage charges. Drivers clashed with riot police after they attempted to break up the picket lines on August 20. Two drivers were arrested and many others after they went to the police station to demand release of their colleagues.

Haulage rates have remained unchanged for the past eight years. The city's transportation association issued a notice in July stating that haulage rates should increase on average by 12 percent but drivers complained that many freight companies had refused to increase rates in line with the directive. Strikers told the media that they had to contend with numerous port and container charges, unreasonable port management, irregular working hours, and skyrocketing diesel prices.

All movement of cargo at the port was brought to a standstill during the strike, which ended on August 25. There has been no public announcement to say if the drivers' grievances were resolved.

Sanitation workers in China's Guangdong province protest

More than 200 sanitation workers in Guangzhou, Guangdong province stopped work and protested on August 26 to demand collective bargaining with their employer, a property services company whose cleaning contract with the local government will expire at the end of August. The company has refused to negotiate with workers' representatives.

The sanitation workers complained that they were persuaded to sign blank contracts and denied future severance pay and job security. Many of the workers had been employed for ten years as cleaners in University Town, a complex of higher education institutes in Guangzhou's Panyu District.

South Korean hospital workers strike

For the third time in three months, close to 400 of the 1,500 unionised workers at the Seoul National University Hospital (SNUH) took limited strike action on August 25 in opposition to the Park Geun-hye government's drive to privatise the health care system through outsourcing. In June, the government announced plans allowing public hospitals to establish profit-making telemedicine subsidiaries and medical tourism companies.

The SNUH, a public hospital, is at the forefront of the government's

drive to privatise medical services. The 44,000-strong Korea Health and Medical Workers Union has isolated the SNUH workers' industrial action. In July the union claimed it would take further strike action over the issue but failed to do so.

South Korean finance sector workers to strike

Ninety percent of unionised workers in 10,000 financial establishments across South Korea have voted to strike, following 18 rounds of failed negotiations in a dispute over wages, conditions and restructure. The Korea Financial Industry Union (KFIU), which covers 100,000 members in 37 bank branches, has issued a strike notice effective from September 3.

The KFIU is demanding an end to discrimination against non-regular workers, motherhood protection and gender equality, retirement age extension and talks over the ordinary wage issue. The union is also opposed to the consolidation of the Korea Exchange Bank and the Hana Bank, financial sanctions on the government-owned Kookmin Bank, and the government's restructuring plan for public sector financial enterprises and foreign banks.

Sri Lankan hospital workers on strike

Over 5,000 Professions Supplementary to Medicine or PSM hospital workers held a two-day national strike on August 26 to demand promotions in Class One, Special Grade and Supra Grade, the recruitment of PSM degree holders into government service and permission to engage in private practice.

Hospital authorities directed patients to obtain their drugs from the open market and X-rays at private institutions. Hospitals that specialise in children's and women's health and cancer were exempted from strike action along with emergency units. An official representing the PSM workers told the media that the strike would continue because discussions with the health ministry had ended inconclusively. Talks so far have only resulted in the appointment of committees to investigate the workers' grievances.

India: Maharashtra forestry workers on strike

Around 25,000 forestry workers across India's western state of

Maharashtra struck indefinitely on August 25 in a long-running dispute over pay scale revision. Maharashtra State Forest Guards and Promoted Foresters Union members are also demanding permanency for temporary employees, travelling allowances, promotions for staff in the wildlife wing, pensions for temporary forest workers and allowances as per other state security employees.

The union wants the current 1,800-rupee (\$US30) per month salary for the lowest paid worker increased to between 2,400 and 4,200 rupees according to their work category.

Tamil Nadu state highway maintenance workers oppose privatisation

For the second time in a month, Tamil Nadu Highway department workers, who work on 60,000 kilometres of state highways and main roads, walked off the job this week to protest the government's plan to privatise road maintenance. Over 370 kilometres of roads in the Pollachi region will be handed over to a private company under a five-year contract in the first stage of the government plan.

The Tamil Nadu Highway Workers Union said that the future of 9,600 workers at the highways department was uncertain. It warned that private companies will be allowed to collect tolls from the travelling public. The road maintenance workers are demanding the government abandon its privatisation plans.

Pakistan: Lady Health Workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa strike

Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province stopped work again this month to demand permanency and unpaid wages. On August 25, 200 LHWs in Mardan city marched from the district headquarters hospital to the Mardan Press Club to protest. Their action followed similar action earlier in the month in Peshawar and Timergara.

LHWs provide vital health services to rural women. They are demanding unpaid wages for conducting special anti-polio and anti-measles campaigns. Protesters complained that the provincial government had ignored an order from the Peshawar High Court to release their wages. LHWs also wanted a salary increase to compensate for performing the work of NGOs.

Paramedics in Karachi begin hunger strike

Paramedical Staff Joint Action Committee-Sindh Province members at Civil Hospital Karachi (CHK) began a hunger strike on August 25 for improved pay and conditions. They want job permanency, emergency duty allowances, reinstatement of staff who were contracted as part of outsourcing labour requirements and later fired, and the repair of rundown medical facilities.

Their action follows a province-wide protest on August 18 by paramedics outside the Karachi Press Club.

Cambodia: Jiun Ye garment workers' strike in second week

Around 3,000 Jiun Ye garment factory employees in Kompong Chhnang province in central Cambodia have been on strike since August 18, accusing management of withholding between \$5 and \$20 of their monthly bonuses. At least 500 strikers travelled to Phnom Penh on Monday to petition the ministry of labor over the dispute. Jiun Ye management has refused to meet workers' representatives.

Philippines radio station workers in Davao protest

Radio Mindanao Network (RMN) Davao Employees Union members picketed the RMN radio station in Davao City on August 27 to demand management negotiate on a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The media workers also accused management of union busting after they hired contractual workers without informing the union.

Catholic school teachers in ACT and NSW continue rolling stoppages

Three hundred teachers at 38 Catholic schools in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory struck on August 25 and 26 in a long-running national dispute with the Catholic Education Office over a new work agreement. Over 7,000 members of the Independent Education Union (IEU), which includes teachers and support staff, began industrial action in late June.

Teachers are concerned that a proposed agreement will increase class sizes and teaching hours. Class student numbers are capped under the current agreement. The proposed new agreement increases face-to-face teaching hours for high school teachers from 20 to 22 hours per week and makes no reference to class sizes.

The IEU has lodged over 30 claims nationwide. These include a pay rise, entitlements and classifications on par with government schools, and minimum 12-month contracts for staff. Negotiations began 18 months ago and are continuing. The last agreement between the IEU and the CEO was signed in 2009.

Lockout at Ausreo in New South Wales ends

The ten-week lockout of 24 employees at the factory of concrete reinforcing products supplier Ausreo at Wetherill Park in Sydney's west, was lifted last weekend after the company and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union reached agreement in a disputed enterprise bargaining agreement.

Ausreo locked the workers out on July 19, after they demanded wage parity with their interstate colleagues. Most workers are only paid \$20 an hour. They wanted their hourly rate increased by \$3 and improved redundancy provisions. Ausreo had only offered a 3 percent "Christmas bonus" but paid at management's discretion. Details of the union-negotiated deal have not been made public.

Papua New Guinea nurses protest

More than 100 nurses at the Port Moresby General Hospital, in Papua New Guinea protested outside the hospital on August 22 to demand backdated allowances and wages. The nurses are also concerned about housing allowances and the 25 percent working shift rate.

While community health workers have received their back-dated entitlements, members of the Papua New Guinea Nurses Association still awaiting these payments.



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