

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 September 2014

South Korean hospital workers in Seoul end strike

On September 1, the union representing hundreds of striking workers at the Seoul National University Hospital (SNUH) called an end to their six-day strike over privatisation. At least 400 of 1,500 union members at the hospital walked off the job on August 25 in opposition to the Park Geun-hye government's drive to privatise the health care system through outsourcing.

The South Korean government announced plans in June allowing public hospitals to establish profit-making telemedicine subsidiaries and medical tourism companies via external investments. Initially the SNUH union, along with the 44,000-strong Korea Health and Medical Workers Union (KHMWU) opposed privatisation. The KHMWU left the SNUH workers isolated, however, forcing an early end to their strike.

The SNUH union announced on Monday that it had made a deal with hospital management on wages, employee dispatches to overseas units and management of patient information, allowing privatisation to go ahead.

South Korean finance sector workers strike

About 10,000 union members at banks and financial institutions across the nation walked off the job for 24 hours on September 3 in a dispute over wages, conditions and restructure. The strike, which follows 18 rounds of failed negotiations, was called by the Korea Financial Industry Union (KFIU), which has 100,000 members.

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 (KEB) and the Hana Bank, financial sanctions on the government-owned Kookmin Bank (KB), the government's restructuring plan for financial enterprises in the public sector, and the restructuring of foreign banks.

Union officials have threatened to organise further walkouts in October and November if members' demands are not met.

Cambodian footwear factory workers strike

More than 5,000 employees of the Taiwanese-owned Juhui Footwear factory in Choeung Prey district walked out and demonstrated outside their factory on September 1 with 15 demands. These included a \$1 daily lunch allowance, skilled-worker payments and 2,000 riel (\$US0.50) for

every hour of overtime. Management responded saying they were willing to negotiate.

The strike, led by the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (CCAWDU), followed the Arbitration Council's rejection of a similar list of 11 demands in a ruling handed down on August 12.

Cambodia: Xin Fang Garment factory workers maintain strike

Over 400 Xin Fang garment workers in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district have been on strike since August 18 over 19 demands. These include a lunch allowance, benefits for pregnant women and new mothers, a \$3 bonus for working on holidays and a \$15 monthly accommodation allowance. Workers also want the reinstatement of two sacked CCAWDU representatives.

On Monday, 300 strikers marched 10km from their factory to the ministry of labor in Phnom Penh to demand authorities intervene in their dispute. Factory management told workers that they could not respond to their demands until September 12, when the company's directors return to Cambodia.

Bangladesh: Designer Jeans workers in Ashulia locked out

Designer Jeans workers at Jamgora on the outskirts of Dhaka have been locked out since August 27 following a strike the day before to protest the dismissal of two of their colleagues who complained of mistreatment by management. Police were called and forced protesting workers from the factory grounds. Police have filed cases against 14 workers, accusing them of assaulting the factory's chief security officer.

As further punishment, factory authorities on Tuesday sacked 125 workers alleging "violating discipline," and filed a case against 260 workers with the Ashulia police, accusing them of vandalising and looting the factory. Workers told the media that it was impossible for them to vandalise and loot the factory because the police had driven them out and are maintaining guard at the factory gates. Only 108 of the accused workers have been able to secure bail.

Garment workers demonstrate in Savar and Chittagong for unpaid wages

Several hundred Adorn Knitwear and SL Sweaters garment workers in Savar, Ashulia demonstrated on August 31 to demand their July wages. Adorn Knitwear workers complained that after many promises factory authorities had still not paid wages, while SL Sweaters workers warned that they would implement “tougher programs” if they were not paid by Monday. Ashulia Industrial Police were deployed to the factories.

The next day 400 Siraj and Sons garment workers in Chittagong walked off the job to demand unpaid wages. Police intervened when the demonstration spilled onto the streets in Bandartila. Police along with the local administration held negotiations with the factory owner that evening.

India: Karnataka irrigation workers strike

Irrigation department workers began an indefinite strike at Raichur and Bellary in Karnataka on September 1 and demonstrated outside the labour commissioner’s office in the two towns against the outsourcing of their jobs. The strikers said that 1,130 casual workers would lose their jobs if the outsourcing went ahead. They also complained about low wages and excessive workloads because management is not filling vacancies.

Tamil Nadu sanitation workers continue strike

Around 400 sanitation workers from Salem, in India’s southern state of Tamil Nadu, have been on strike and protesting outside the Salem district collectors office since September 1 against the privatisation of solid waste management in 21 wards. They are also demanding a 15,000-rupee (\$US248) monthly wage and permanency for 680 workers who have been in the department for seven years. The Federation of Indian Trade Unions (FITU) organised the protest.

Sri Lankan health workers end strike

Over 5,000 Professions Supplementary to Medicine or PSM hospital workers suspended strike action on August 31 after government health officials agreed to resume talks with representatives of the Joint Trade Union Federation of PSMs over their grievances.

PSMs across the nation, including pharmacists, radiographers, medical laboratory technicians, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, walked out 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. The striking workers had maintained their industrial action in defiance of a court injunction and a vicious media campaign.

Pakistan: Media workers in Peshawar protest

Workers from several print and broadcast media companies in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demonstrated outside the Peshawar Press Club on September 1 to demand the payment of wages and reinstatement of workers who were fired for participating in previous protests.

The protesters said that pay cheques were not honoured from several media companies, including Capital TV and Daily Pakistan. The workers called on the government not to advertise with the companies unless wages are paid. They have threatened to expand the action if their demands are not met.

Peshawar health workers protest against non-payment of wages

Lady Health Workers (LHW) program employees and paramedics from a government-sponsored immunisation campaign in Peshawar demonstrated on August 28 to demand unpaid wages and an outstanding 600-rupee (\$US6) entitlement related to the 15-day immunisation campaign. About 1,000 health workers are affected, some of whom have not been paid for four months.

Pakistani health workers receive only meagre wages and are frequently paid several months late. LHW employees have also been conducting a long-running campaign, included limited strikes and protests, for job permanency.

Police called in WA refinery dispute

Alcoa called the police to its Pinjarra refinery south of Perth on Monday in a bid to prevent union members from handing out leaflets about industrial action at the aluminium company’s Wagerup site. About 35 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union at the Wagerup refinery are holding four-hour rolling strikes amid negotiations over a new enterprise agreement which would cover the company’s five sites. The AMWU’s limited demands include a pay rise in line with inflation, which the company has rejected.

Papua New Guinea workers strike over pay

More than 100 workers employed by the Homestate Corporation in Lae walked off the job yesterday to protest over pay. The striking workers demanded that the rice company implement the government’s new minimum wage level and explain pay cuts over the previous fortnight. The employees agreed to return to work after company president Palboon Wetwattana claimed that payroll staff were unable to access a computer used by the sacked general manager and its records.



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