

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 September 2014

South Korean financial workers to strike again

Following limited one-day strike action on September 3, the 100,000-strong Korean Financial Industry Union (KFIU) has called another walkout for September 30 in a dispute over wages, restructure and the Park Geun-hye government's cuts to welfare at state-run firms.

The strike will affect six government agencies and banks in the Seoul metropolitan area, including the Industrial Bank of Korea and the Korea Development Bank. Another strike will follow on Oct. 10, when 15,000 members across the country will strike for the day. The industrial action follows 18 rounds of failed negotiations.

The KFIU wants an end to discrimination against non-permanent employees, motherhood protection and gender equality, retirement age extension and talks over wages. 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), and the government's restructuring plan for financial enterprises in the public sector.

Public sector workers are particularly concerned about the government attacks on welfare at public firms. Thirty-five public sector entities have been ordered to cut costs, which will lead to an annual reduction of 1.37 million won (\$US1,323) in welfare benefits per employee.

Pakistani police attack protesting teachers

Karachi police used batons and water cannon against hundreds of protesting government schoolteachers on September 11. The Teachers Action Committee claimed that at least 150 teachers were arrested and many others sustained minor injuries.

Government schoolteachers, including women who were among more than 3,500 teachers appointed in June 2012 by the then Pakistan People's Party government, had been holding a sit-in at the Boat Basin traffic intersection to protest against non-payment of salaries for the past 20 months. The police attacked when protesters tried to march toward Bilawal House, the Bhutto family's residence.

Sacked Telephone Industries of Pakistan contract workers protest

One hundred sacked Telephone Industries of Pakistan (TIP) contract workers held a sit-down protest outside the TIP factory's main gate in Haripur in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on September 15. The workers brought traffic on Khanpur-Taxila Road to a standstill to

demand unpaid salaries and the renewal of contracts.

The contract workers have not been paid since May after the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government ordered all ministries, state-owned enterprises and government departments not to renew employees' contracts after March 31. At least 830 TIP employees, including teachers and paramedics, some with 30 years' service, are affected.

The TIP Workers and Employees Union has refused to mobilise any of its members to support the sacked contract workers but filed a case in the Labour Appellate Tribunal. The next hearing is on September 22.

Lady Health Workers in Sindh province protest

On September 17, Lady Health Workers (LHWs) staged a two-hour protest outside the Hyderabad Press Club to demand permanency and two months of unpaid salaries. An All Pakistan Lady Health Worker Employees Association representative told the media that two separate court rulings had ordered LHWs be made permanent and their wages paid.

The workers ended their protest after government officials claimed they would be offered permanency before September 25 and outstanding salaries paid. Over 24,000 LHWs, including health supervisors, drivers and administrators, are affected.

India: Salem city garbage collectors end strike

On September 13, 680 Salem City contract garbage workers in Tamil Nadu ended a 12-day strike after the council agreed to increase their minimum daily wage from 165 rupees to 246 rupees (\$US4).

Workers struck on September 1 to demand a 15,000-rupee monthly salary and job permanency. The municipal commission agreed to hold talks with the contract employees to discuss other issues, including job permanency.

One garbage worker told the media that after deducting 380 rupees for the Provident Fund and 80 for Employee State Insurance (E.S.I), the contract employees only received about 4,000 rupees per month.

Chandigarh city garbage collectors walk out

Hundreds of Chandigarh municipal garbage workers in India's north-west state of Punjab walked off the job for three-days on September 12 to demand permanency and a pay rise. A spokesman for the safai karamchari

union and health workers drivers' union said the strikers wanted all contract employees' salaries increased from 7,400 rupees a month to 10,600. He said some workers recruited ten years ago were still not permanent.

Bosch Auto workers in Bangalore strike

About 3,000 Bosch Auto employees in Bangalore, including 300 temporaries, walked out on September 16 after conciliatory talks in the labor commission failed. Mico Employees Association members are demanding permanent jobs for temporary workers, reimbursement of hospital costs, promotions and review of working hours. Management declared the strike illegal.

Negotiations have been ongoing for nearly two years. The next meeting was scheduled for September 20.

New Delhi public sector bank workers protest

Public sector bank workers demonstrated in Delhi on September 13 over low pay and poor working conditions. The protesters said clerks were only paid 14,000 rupees (\$US230) a month and canteen employees just 1,250 rupees. Management threatened to transfer protesting employees.

The bank workers told the media that their long-outstanding grievances had been ignored by the unions and so they decided to form the Young Indian Bankers' Association (YIBA) to fight for their demands. The protest was supported by the Bharathiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) and the All India Ex-Service Men Bank Employees Federation.

Cambodia: Striking Juhui Footwear factory workers sacked

Five thousand Juhui Footwear workers in Kompong Cham province were locked out and sacked on September 16 after delayed negotiations on the workers' 15 demands. Management claimed that it had not sacked the workers because they left their jobs voluntarily.

The Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union (CCAWDU) has ordered their members to suspend all protests outside the factory during the Pchum Ben holiday, which ends on September 24.

The footwear employees originally walked out on September 1 to demand a \$1 daily lunch allowance, skilled-worker payments and 2,000 riel (\$US0.50) for every hour of overtime and other claims. They returned to work three days later after management agreed to negotiate. They walked out again the next day after management told them that they had to align themselves with the company or their union—not both.

Cambodian garment workers walk out

More than 1,000 garment workers at the Huey Chuen garment factory in Meanchey district Phnom Penh walked off the job on September 16 to protest the sacking of a fellow worker accused of organising a protest. Strikers are demanding reinstatement of the worker and a minimum wage

of \$US177 a month.

In an unrelated dispute, over 3,000 employees of the Chinese-owned Komchay Mear Trading factory in Prey Veng province have been on strike since September 12 to demand improved conditions and bonuses. Following the arrest of two representatives of the CCAWDU on Wednesday, the striking workers blocked National Road 1 and surrounded the police building, demanding their release. Police responded and released the pair after filing charges.

On Wednesday, riot police were deployed to industrial areas in Phnom Penh and the Svay Rieng province near Vietnam, where garment workers had left their factories and begun protesting for the higher minimum wage.

Cambodia exported \$5 billion in garments last year. The industry employs about 600,000 people on a minimum wage of \$100 a month. Some 18 unions at 300 garments factories have called for a nationwide walkout commencing this week in a campaign to increase the minimum wage to \$177. The National Trade Union Confederation, however, has already announced that it will settle for \$150.

Following national strike action by garment workers for higher wages in late December and early January the police have ramped up their suppression of protests in the sector by arresting, questioning and releasing workers' representatives.

Burma shoe factory workers strike

Around 300 workers at the Chinese-owned Yimei shoe factory in the Hlaingthaya industrial zone in the Yangon region have been on strike since September 9 to demand a wage increase and entitlements. They want a 500-kyat (\$US0.51) rise in the daily wage, 30,000-kyat monthly cost of living allowance and higher overtime pay. The company offered a wage increase of just 100 kyat and a 3,000-kyat monthly cost of living allowance.

The company exports children's footwear to Canada, the US and Europe. Management told workers that the factory's offer was in line with other factories in the industrial zone.

In Yangon, where wages in Burma are the highest, the average skilled worker at a garment factory earns approximately \$110 a month, with a maximum salary of \$150 counting overtime.

Maritime union threatens strike at Mermaid in Western Australia

Over 60 Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members at Mermaid Marine Dampier supply base in Western Australia have threatened to strike for five days, starting Monday, in an ongoing enterprising bargaining dispute with the company. The supply base supports offshore drilling operations and supplies materials to Chevron's \$US54 billion Gorgon project. BHP Billiton also uses the supply base.

The threatened walk out follows nine months of failed negotiations between the company and the MUA. While the union claims that the company is attempting to remove a number of safety and employee conditions from the existing agreement it has isolated the dispute while maintaining nine months of discussions with the company. The union last month called off a threatened 10-day strike over the dispute

Port Hedland tug boat officers approve strike action

Fifty tugboat officers from Teekay Shipping at Western Australia's Port Hedland approved industrial action for a second time this year in a dispute over leave and wages. The Australian Maritime Officers Union members voted to approve stoppages ranging from two hours to 24 hours. Teekay Shipping is contracted by BHP Billiton to run tugboats at the world's largest iron ore bulk-export terminal.

The workers are seeking four weeks annual leave and 10 percent annual pay rises over four years, after the MUA reduced the original pay claim of 20 percent annually. The deckhands currently work 12-hour shifts for four weeks straight and then have four weeks off, but receive no annual leave entitlements. They work an average of 2016 hours a year, the equivalent of around 54 weeks of a standard 37.5-hour working week.

The tugboat officers approved stoppages last May but the union took no action and the period to take "protected" strikes under Fair Work Australia rules expired. The Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers is currently balloting members on strike action for a second time. The MUA, which represents tugboat deckhands, approved strikes for a second time in July.

Iron ore is Australia's biggest export earner. Port Hedland shipments represented 55 percent of the country's iron ore exports last year and more than 80 percent of the cargoes go to China, port and government data show.

Catholic teachers stop work in regional New South Wales

Catholic teachers and support staff in Dubbo, Bathurst, Wellington and other regional cities in New South Wales (NSW) stopped work for an hour last Wednesday in protest against an enterprise agreement proposed by employers that would lead to larger class sizes, less time for lesson preparation and fewer resources in the classroom. The stop-work was part of a series of strikes in Catholic schools in the Australian Capital Territory and NSW.

The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU), which has diverted their members into a series of harmless protests during the past months, said the stop-work was to oppose a "sub-standard" enterprise agreement. An IEU spokesman said that employers also wanted teachers to undertake additional training which would cost each teacher between \$1,400 and \$2000 per year.

A teacher from Dubbo told the media that the industrial action was not about pay but working conditions. Catholic employers were "trying to change things like the hours. We work from eight to five anyway—you'll very rarely see cars leave the car park before then—and that's going to have a flow-on effect to families," she said.

South Australian truck drivers protest over safety

Dozens of truck drivers and their families demonstrated in South Australia's capital Adelaide on September 11 to protest the increasing road deaths caused by unsafe driving conditions. Protesters marched along the banks of the River Torrens to the crossroads between King William Road and Victoria Drive, halting traffic in both directions. The intersection is where several fatal accidents involving out-of-control trucks have occurred.

A Transport Workers Union official said drivers were being pressured to cut corners and were demanding better working conditions. The union has collaborated with employers in forcing down working conditions and

increasing working hours. The protesting drivers complained that trucking companies were not properly maintaining vehicles and forcing employees to work "extraordinary hours." At least 15 people have been killed in South Australia this year in accidents involving trucks.

Solomon Islands public sector workers on strike

Public sector workers in the Solomon Islands' Malaita province walked off the job on September 16 to demand unpaid wages. They told the media that they would remain on strike until last month's wages were paid.



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