

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

4 October 2014

## South Korea: Hyundai workers accept pay deal

Hyundai auto workers ended a month of rolling strikes on Wednesday, after their union accepted a new pay deal with the company. Around 47,000 workers are affected at Hyundai's Ulsan plant.

Under the agreement, basic monthly salaries will increase by 98,000 won (US\$93) and each worker will receive 300 percent bonuses and a further lump sum of 5 million won, plus a one-time 150 percent quality production bonus. Workers will also be given 3.7 million won each for meeting output targets this year, and 200,000 won in gift certificates. The retirement age will be extended from 59 to 60.

The union dropped its demand for bonuses to be included in the base pay rate, which would increase overtime, holiday allowances and severance pay, and accepted a management proposal that a wage reform committee "consider" the issue.

GM Korea and Ssangyong Motor successfully concluded their wage negotiations by including regularly paid bonuses as base pay. Hyundai's smaller affiliate, Kia Motors, remains the only local automaker that has not ended negotiations with its union.

## Cambodia: Lockout continues at Juhui Footwear factory

About 2,000 Juhui Footwear workers in Kompong Cham province are protesting outside the factory because management has refused to rehire unionists fired during a strike last month. About 5,000 workers walked out on September 16 after delayed negotiations on 15 demands. Management immediately locked the factory and sacked all workers.

On September 24, management allowed 3,000 to return to work but Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union (CCAWDU) members were refused reinstatement. The footwear employees originally walked out on September 1 to demand a \$1 daily lunch allowance, skilled-worker payments, 2,000 riel (\$US0.50) for every hour of overtime and other claims.

## Union betrays Komchay Mear Trading workers strike

About 3,000 Komchay Mear Trading workers in Prey Veng province, Cambodia ended a 15-day strike on September 27, following negotiations between the company and CCAWDU representatives. The union dropped workers' demands for a monthly bonus while factory management only agreed to keep the bathrooms clean and ensure that workers had a proper contract.

## Bangladesh: Gazipur police attack striking garment workers

Fourteen demonstrating ATS Apparels workers sustained serious injuries on September 28 when police broke up a demonstration at the factory in the Gazipur industrial zone just outside Dhaka. Workers had walked out to demand payment of overdue bonuses and leave entitlements. Management said they would pay the outstanding leave the next day and the salary bonuses on October 2.

## Tuba Group factory lockout in seventh week

The lockout of over 1,600 employees from five Tuba Group garment factories in Badda, Dhaka has entered its seventh week. The locked-out workers protested outside the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) headquarters in Dhaka on September 29 to demand unpaid wages and entitlements. The protest was called by the newly formed Tuba Group Workers' Movement Committee.

Tuba Fashion, Tuba Textile, Bukshan Garments, Tayeb Design and Mita Design employees walked off the job on July 28 over five demands including payment of wages, overtime, and bonuses for May, June and July. They also want compensation for 112 workers killed in the 2012 Tuba Group-owned Tazreen Fashions fire in Ashulia and the death penalty for Tuba Group managing director Delwar Hossain, who was recently released on bail.

Tuba closed its factories for an indefinite period on August 18 and began selling off assets claiming this was necessary to pay workers' entitlements. In an attempt to avert mass protests from other garment workers, BGMEA paid a portion of Tuba employees' entitlements but workers are still seeking pay for two months' work plus religious festival allowances.

## India: Kerala community organisers end hunger strike

The six-week strike by eight community organisers in Kozhikode, Kerala to demand better pay and job permanency was called off on September 30 following a Local Self-Government Department order to consider them for permanent positions. The community organisers were offered a 10,000-rupee honorarium per month until they are relocated to permanent posts.

The community organisers have been employed for 16 years for just 1,500 rupees (\$US24.3) a month. In their latest action they struck on August 16, which turned into a hunger strike on September 22 when the

government continued to ignore their demands.

### **Tamil Nadu telecommunications workers protest**

On October 1, around 70 BSNL workers walked off the job for two hours and demonstrated outside the national telecommunications giant's head office in Coimbatore with 30 claims. The BSNL Joint Action Committee is demanding a 30 percent wage increase for workers who joined between January 2007 and March 2010, no outsourcing of call centre jobs, the filling of job vacancies, and a 30 percent increase in pensions for regular workers.

### **Pakistan: Women teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa protest**

Around 100 women teachers from public schools in the Chitral district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province protested on September 30 against "forced duty" in the district's anti-polio campaign. They also demanded reinstatement of 30 colleagues sacked for refusing duty. A total of 256 teachers, including 122 women, have been forcefully transferred to the program, which aims to immunise around 270,000 children in the district against polio.

The female teachers said they were afraid to work in remote district villages where the law and order situation was dangerous. The teachers have refused to report for duty.

### **Indonesia: Freeport workers block access to Papua gold mine**

Up to 2,000 workers from the US-owned mining giant PT Freeport Indonesia (FI) have blockaded road access to the company's mine site in Tembagapura in Papua to demand improved safety. Striking workers are demanding that management take responsibility for 44 deaths at its mines in the last two years.

The protesting workers have a banner at the roadblock that declares: "4 people in Wanagon, 8 people in Boton Ore, 28 people in an underground mining site, and 4 people in Grassberg, there must be someone responsible for those who died in all of these accidents."

A spokesman from the Freeport branch of the Indonesian Workers Union (SPSI) demanded that management improve safety and be made responsible for all fatal accidents. The Papua Police are currently investigating the accident in Grassberg that left four workers dead on September 27.

### **Sydney local council workers walk out**

About 160 outdoor and indoor employees of Fairfield Council, in Sydney's west, walked off the job for 48 hours on September 25, after 11 months of negotiations over an enterprise agreement. Libraries were closed and garbage collections and other services suspended during the walkout.

Under the council's current wage offer workers could lose up to \$207 a

fortnight in entitlements. The United Services Union called off industrial action after a conciliation meeting at the NSW Industrial Relations Commission. The union has not released any details on the negotiations or future industrial action.

### **Tasmanian water utility workers strike**

Workers at the state-owned TasWater imposed industrial bans on September 30, after seven months of enterprise agreement negotiations. Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union members banned repair and maintenance of TasWater equipment and the resetting of electrical breakers at pump stations and plants.

Workers have accused the company of attacking holiday pay and annual leave entitlements. The union called off action the next day after TasWater agreed to recommence negotiations on October 14.

### **Vegetable processing workers in Tasmania implement work-bans**

Vegetable-processing workers at Simplot's Ulverstone plant in Tasmania will implement work-bans this weekend over a wage claim. The action follows nine months of negotiations and failed talks this week in the Fair Work Commission.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union wants 4 percent annual pay increases over three years and retention of existing conditions. Simplot wants a wage freeze for year one, 2 percent increases in years two and three at its Kelso and Bathurst plants in New South Wales and 2 percent each year for the next three years at Ulverstone and Davenport factories in Tasmania. The offers are below the inflation rate and are in effect a pay cut.

### **Victorian office cleaners implement work-bans**

Around 400 cleaners servicing office buildings in the Victorian state capital Melbourne have imposed work-bans in a dispute for a new pay agreement with cleaning contractor Consolidated Property Services (CPS). The bans affect restocking hand towels, soap and toilet paper, kitchen cleaning, emptying rubbish bins and dishwashers, and toilet cleaning. Up to 27 buildings are affected.

The United Voice union wants 3 percent annual pay increases in line with an agreement signed with Glad, another Melbourne CBD cleaning contractor, and an end to exploitive subcontracting. CPS has refused to reach agreement until all cleaning contractors offer the same pay rise. Its low paid workers earn between \$20,000 and \$25,000 a year and have not had a wage increase for two years.

### **New Zealand oil refinery unions suspend strike action**

The FIRST union and the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), covering 160 of the 300 employees of New Zealand Refining at Marsden Point, have suspended strike action planned for

October 7 and 8 in a dispute over a new collective agreement. The FIRST union has told management that it will accept a nil pay increase.

After mediation talks last week failed to resolve outstanding issues the unions capitulated to company wishes and agreed to withdraw the strike notice and enter “facilitative bargaining” at the Employment Relations Authority. Management claimed that the proposed strike action by refinery operators, emergency servicemen, mechanical, instrument and maintenance workers, would have forced the refinery to shut down its processing units for at least 11 days.

Workers want the number of continuous days worked on a 12-hour shift to be limited to 7 days. It is common for workers to work 12-hour shifts for 14 days in a row. Management is opposed to the 7-day limit. Workers also want management to stop using contract employees to replace full-time vacancies. The FIRST union is playing down its capitulation to management over a nil pay rise, claiming that workers are more concerned about safety and job security.

### **New Zealand bank workers protest**

ANZ Bank employees across New Zealand have begun industrial action for a new collective agreement, after 98 percent rejected the company’s last pay offer. Workers protested outside the bank’s headquarters in Tory Street, Wellington on September 29, as other employees were still voting in a national strike ballot.

Protesting workers pointed out that ANZ’s CEO last year received a 14 percent wage increase, taking his pay to \$4.17 million, while call centre and back office workers employed prior to September 2010 are being offered just 2 percent annual pay increases over two years. Fellow workers employed by the Westpac bank were offered annual 3.4 percent increases.

FIRST union members have also rejected ANZ’s demand that working hours for all new employees be flexible and reviewed on a monthly basis. Workers said they would accept flexible hours for only 20 percent of workers.

### **Papua New Guinea power workers threaten strike**

One hundred and fifty PNG Energy Workers Union members at PNG Power, the nation’s energy supplier, have threatened to strike if all outstanding payments, including government superannuation contributions, are not paid by October 3. The workers presented a petition to the O’Neill government after it announced that it planned to privatise 50 percent of PNG Power.

The power workers are concerned because the government sale of the PNG Banking Corporation and PNG Post and Telecommunications saw employees lose their jobs without being paid any of their entitlements.



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