

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 October 2014

South Korea: Kia workers continue wage strikes

Unionised workers at Kia Motors, South Korea's second largest auto maker, are continuing limited strike action after the union and management failed to reach agreement after three months of negotiations on a new wage deal. Union members stopped work for four hours on two shifts after the 23rd round of talks failed on October 8. The union is yet to decide on the form of further action. Negotiations recommenced on Monday.

The union wants a 159,000-won (\$US149) monthly wage increase, 30 percent of company net profits paid as bonuses and an extension of the retirement age. Kia management has offered a 92,000-won monthly increase and a four-month salary plus 8 million won bonus.

Workers at Kia's affiliate Hyundai Motor ended a month of rolling strikes on October 1 after their union accepted a 98,000-won monthly pay rise, a 300 percent bonus and a further lump sum of 5 million won, plus a one-time 150 percent quality production bonus. Retirement was extended from 59 to 60 years.

The Kia and Hyundai unions have dropped their demand for bonuses to be included in the basic pay rate, which would increase overtime, holiday allowances and severance pay, and accepted a management proposal that a wage reform committee "consider" the issue.

Cambodian garment workers march for pay increase

Up to 2,000 workers from six garment unions of the Collective Union of Movement of Workers rallied at Freedom Park in Phnom Penh on October 12 to demand that garment workers' monthly minimum wage be increased next year from \$US100 to \$177. The next day they marched to the US and European embassies and the National Assembly where union officials met with several parliamentarians and delivered a petition.

The march came less than a week after Cambodia's labour minister postponed a Labour Advisory Committee's (LAC) decision on the minimum wage until next month. The 21 LAC members, who include factory management, the government and unions, were originally scheduled to announce a decision by October 10. The seven unions on the LAC—none of which participated in the march—have ignored workers' \$177 demand and agreed to \$150 a month.

Cambodian footwear factory workers summoned over strike

Five union representatives at the Juhui Footwear factory in Kompong

Cham province have been summoned to appear in court later this month following a clash between workers and managers at a factory last week. Three supervisors and four female workers were injured.

About 2,000 workers protesting their dismissal forced their way into the factory grounds on October 6 and threw rocks at Taiwanese managers. The incident was sparked by reports that one of the managers had grabbed a female worker by the shirt collar and began slapping her.

Five thousand workers originally walked out on September 1 over demands relating to overtime payments and lunch allowances. They returned to work but struck again on September 16 after management refused to negotiate. The company responded by firing the entire workforce. Around 3,000 workers, who are not members of the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers' Democratic Union, were reinstated. The company has refused to rehire the sacked union members.

On Monday, about 1,500 workers continued their demonstration outside the factory while some 50 police and military police guarded the entrance. Union leaders walked out of talks last week after factory management said it would only negotiate directly with workers.

Phnom Penh municipal bus drivers protest

About 40 drivers from Phnom Penh's recently established City Bus service protested outside the Night Market on October 11 alleging they were not paid their promised wage rates for September. Drivers said the municipal government had pledged at the end of August to pay them between 1,200,000 and 1,400,000 riel (\$300 to \$350) per month depending on seniority. They only received 720,000 riel.

A city official told the media that the new rates would not be paid until the service became profitable. City officials agreed to meet with drivers following the protest.

Philippines radio broadcast workers on strike

For the second time in two years, Radio Mindanao Network (RMN) union members in Davao City have gone on strike against management's alleged violations of their collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and attempts to bust their union. RMN Davao Employees Union-National Federation of Labor Unions-Kilusang Mayo Uno members walked out on October 1, temporarily suspending operations of the network's AM and FM stations. A union spokesman said the decision to go on strike was unanimous and followed at least 15 conciliation conferences.

Workers ended strike action in 2012 after RMN agreed to sign a new CBA. The union has accused RMN management of hiring contractors

instead of filling vacant positions with regular employees as stipulated in the CBA. They also claimed that management promoted a number of employees to supervisory positions in an alleged effort to force them to resign from the union.

Striking workers held processions in Manila, Cagayan de Oro and General Santos City on Wednesday to protest RMN's illegal use of temporary employees to resume broadcasting from an undisclosed location.

India: Striking Bosch workers ignore return-to-work order

Close to 3,000 Bosch Auto employees, including 370 temporaries, at the Adugodi plant in Bangalore have been on strike since September 16 in a dispute for a new work agreement. At least 200 were arrested by police on Monday when 1,000 strikers tried to protest outside the chief minister's residence in Bangalore over the government's decision to ban their strike and cut eight days' pay for each day they remained on strike.

The Mico Employees Association wants the 10,000-rupee (\$US166) monthly wage ceiling removed, an end to punitive wage cuts, withdrawal of new medical insurance policies, a working hours review and permanency for temporary workers. They also oppose management's demand for productivity increases. There have been 36 rounds of failed talks since their last wage increase was due in January 2013.

West Bengal tea plantation workers strike

Nearly 400,000 tea estate workers at 350 plantations in West Bengal's Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar districts struck for one day on October 13 to press for their long-standing demand for a wage rise. The walkout, which followed protests in August, was called by a joint forum of 23 unions led by the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC).

While the state minimum daily wage for unskilled agricultural workers is 206 rupees (\$US3.40), tea estate workers are only paid 95 rupees. The United Tea Workers' Forum wants the minimum daily wage set at 322 rupees. Tea plantation owners have offered a 21-rupee rise, phased in over three years.

The last meeting with employers was held in August. The unions have threatened to call a two-day strike on November 11 and 12 if their demand is not met.

Telangana contract power workers on strike

Around 12,000 contract workers at the Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited walked off the job and demonstrated in Hyderabad on October 9 demanding permanent jobs and direct salary payments into their bank accounts. Contract workers do not receive Employee State Insurance or Provident Fund benefits. The indefinite strike was called by the Telangana Electricity Contract Employees' Joint Action Committee.

A spokesman for the contract workers alleged that the government reneged promises of regularising the services of all contract employees. He said that contract employees' salaries were very low compared to permanent workers. Workers are also concerned that about 1,200

employees were killed in work accidents and that family members have not been given adequate compensation or jobs.

Pakistan Airline pilots walk out

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) pilots walked off the job in Karachi on October 11 to demand six months of unpaid allowances. About 350 pilots were not paid overseas-stay allowances, which are usually paid in foreign currencies. The strike caused delays and cancellations of a number of international flights. Pilots also protested against PIA management's decision to end the practise of giving pilots 12-hour prior notice before being called in to work.

The Pakistan Airline Pilots Association (PALPA) called off the protest after authorities agreed to pay three months' dues within the first week of November. PIA is one of the state-run entities earmarked for privatisation. The government plans to sell a 26 percent stake in the airline. It is currently being assessed for restructuring.

Maritime workers in Western Australia on strike

Some 65 Mermaid Marine stevedores walked off the job on Wednesday at the port of Dampier, in Western Australia's north-west Pilbara region, in an eleven-month dispute for a new enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). Mermaid Marine's operation at Dampier is a key supply base for the \$54 billion Chevron Gorgon Gas project on Barrow Island, one of the world's largest natural gas projects. Ten-day strikes planned for August and September were called off by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) after the company agreed to restart negotiations even though no improved offer was presented.

Mermaid Marine refuses to renew a performance and retention allowance which means workers' wages would be cut by up to 8 per cent. The company also wants to reduce shifts from 10 hours to 8.5 hours which the union claims will force stevedores to work an extra day to maintain their current wage levels.

Australian public sector workers to vote on strike action

About 15,000 public sector workers in Medicare, Centrelink and Child Support, as part of the Department of Human Services (DHS), will vote on whether to take action in a dispute over new work agreements. The ballot, the largest ever electronic vote on industrial action in Australia, will ask Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members to decide on a range of industrial actions—from bans to through to a 24-hour strike.

The CPSU said the current DHS offer will see 60 percent of members' conditions and rights cut for an annual pay increase of less than 1 percent. DHS staff will begin voting on October 27.

In September, CPSU delegates from 70 different government agencies employing 165,000 public sector workers, voted to endorse the use of protected industrial action in their dispute for new work agreements. The CPSU claims that months of negotiations made no headway because agency heads were under instructions from the Liberal-National government not to make any pay deals that did not cut conditions.

The union, which has consistently refused to fight any of the federal

government's previous job cuts and attacks on working conditions, wants a 12 percent pay increase over the three-year agreements.

Simplot vegetable processing workers continue strike action

Following nine months of negotiations and failed talks in the Fair Work commission for a new work agreement, Simplot vegetable processing workers at Bathurst and Kelso plants in New South Wales, and at Devonport and Ulverstone in Tasmania, have decided to step up industrial action.

Devonport workers will strike for four hours on October 17, while Kelso and Bathurst employees imposed a one-month overtime ban on October 16.

The long-running dispute between Simplot and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) has escalated since September after negotiations stalled. Workers want a 12 percent pay increase over three years, income protection and guaranteed hours for casuals. Simplot is demanding a wage freeze for year one, 2 percent increases in years two and three at its Kelso and Bathurst plants, and 2 percent each year for the next three years at Ulverstone and Davenport factories. The offers are below the inflation rate and are in effect a pay cut.

Following the axing of 110 jobs last year at the Bathurst plant the company threatened Devonport workers, demanding that they increase productivity or face closure within three years. This would see the elimination of 300 jobs and hundreds of farmers without vegetable contracts.

Papua New Guinea power workers on mass sick-leave

PNG Power operators from Moitaka, Kanudi, 4-Mile and Rouna plants in Port Moresby submitted "generation sick leave forms" on October 15 stating that they will not work until their wage claims are settled.

The industrial action follows PNG Power management's decision not to pay field employees an approved wage increase and other outstanding claims. The state-owned company claimed it could not pay all outstanding claims because of its "poor cash flow situation." A workers' representative told the media that the company gave executive management a 43.3 percent pay rise but was withholding a 17.7 percent rise for workers that it had agreed to last year. "If nothing eventuates, nobody will attend to any blackouts, interruptions and faulty lines," he said.



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