

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

29 November 2014

South Korean shipbuilding workers take further strike action

For the second time in two weeks, workers at Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI), the world's largest shipbuilder, walked off the job at the Ulsan plant for four hours on Wednesday in a dispute for a pay increase. HHI and the union have had 50 rounds of talks in the past six months.

The union wants the monthly base pay increased by 6.5 percent (132,000 won) and a one-off bonus equal to 10 weeks' wages. The company only offered a 37,000 won raise, a 5 million won (\$US4,500) bonus, and to extend the retirement age from 58 to 60. The union also wants HHI to abandon a performance-based annual salary system, which pays bonuses according to employees' performance ratings. The bonuses were previously paid to all workers.

Prior to Wednesday's strike, HHI management sent letters to all workers stating that the company has made its final offer and there would be no further negotiations.

Cambodian airport workers on strike

Close to 150 workers at the Siem Reap International Airport in Cambodia's northwest have been on strike since November 24, accusing airport management of breaking several conditions in their March collective bargaining agreement.

According to the Cambodia Tourism and Service Workers Federation, Cambodia Airport Management Services, which employs some 500 people at the airport, has been hiring subcontractors and directing workers to do tasks outside their job descriptions contrary to their collective agreement.

Workers vowed to continue striking Wednesday after rejecting a vague deal struck by management and the union that they would end their strike if the company promised to consider their demands.

Indonesian workers continue protests over new minimum wage

Thousands of workers, from 800 local industries, stopped work and marched in Tangerang city, 25 km west of Jakarta, on November 25 to protest the 2015 minimum monthly wage standard of 2.73 million rupiah (\$US224) set by the Tangerang City Administration. Protesters demanded that the minimum monthly wage be raised to 3.3 million rupiah (\$271).

The protest follows rallies by thousands of workers in most Indonesian cities on November 14 to demand the 3.3 million rupiah minimum wage. Meanwhile, the Central Java governor has accepted Central Java

Struggling Workers' Movement demands to lift the minimum wage of the province's 35 regencies/municipalities by 10 percent to the poverty level of 1.3 million rupees (\$107) a month.

Philippines workers protest against new minimum wage

On November 20, workers across the Philippines participated in a "National Walkout Protest" to demand a national monthly minimum wage of 16,000 pesos (\$US363). The demonstrations were organised by All Workers Unity (AWU), an alliance of unions.

The AWU is calling for a national standard minimum wage because of the large number of wage levels across the country—over 1,000—that enables employers to pay below the official minimum wages for their industry or location. Wage levels vary between provinces, country and city, agriculture and manufacture. The AWU's call for a national minimum wage of 16,000 pesos a month is less than half of the Family Living Wage (FLW) which was endorsed by the national government in August.

India: Andhra Pradesh junior doctors on strike

Junior doctors at public hospitals across Andhra Pradesh have been on strike since November 22 to protest against compulsory one-year internships in rural areas. Only emergency cases are being attended to by the striking doctors. After several failed attempts to resolve the issue in talks with the government the Andhra Pradesh Junior Doctors' Association (APJUDA) accused the health minister of using delaying tactics by saying the issue must be referred to the Chief Minister.

Meanwhile, striking junior doctors in the adjoining state of Telangana, formerly part of Andhra Pradesh, have ignored an order from the Hyderabad High Court to end their 53-day strike by November 25. The doctors are striking over the same issue as Andhra Pradesh junior doctors.

Tamil Nadu juvenile detention home workers protest for pay

Workers at the Juvenile Observation Home in Madurai in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu demonstrated outside the District Collectorate on November 24. Protesters, comprising wardens and cooks who are temporarily employed through private contracts at the home said that they had not received salary for 16 months.

“Despite repeated pleas to regularise our salary and ensure monthly payment, no action has been taken,” one worker told the media. Demonstrators also demanded that their jobs be made permanent and that they be made government employees with regular 8-hour shifts.

Karnataka construction workers protest

Members of the Udupi District Construction Workers’ Union, affiliated to the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), protested outside the deputy commissioner’s office in Udupi, Karnataka on November 25 against delays in the provision of entitlements by the Karnataka Building and other Construction Workers’ Welfare Board.

The board provides school scholarships, medical expenses, marriage grants, pensions and other minor grants to poorly paid workers. Workers complained that grants were not paid on time, or not paid at all. They demanded more transparency in the operation of the board and the immediate payment of all outstanding entitlements.

Pakistan: Health workers in Quetta stop work

Around 850 Lady Health Workers (LHWs) employed in the polio-vaccination campaign in Quetta city, in Pakistan’s southwest province of Balochistan, have refused to continue their work following the murder of four colleagues and the injury of three others whilst on duty in the city on November 26. Police said the three female health workers and their male driver were attacked by two gunmen on a motorbike.

A spokesman for the health workers claimed that there was a lack of security and explained that at least eight polio and other health workers have been killed in Balochistan in the past two years.

LHWs in Karachi stopped work earlier this month to demand improved security. Polio teams have been accused of being spies or that the vaccine causes infertility. Pakistan is one of only three countries where the disease is still endemic, the others being Nigeria and Afghanistan.

Australian seafarers end strike over job losses

Eighteen crew members of the Australian-operated petrol tanker *Tandara Spirit* ended a 20-day strike and occupation of their ship on Wednesday in a failed attempt to save their jobs. The 36 crew members began occupying the ship, which remained anchored in Melbourne’s Port Phillip Bay, after Viva Energy were ordered on November 6 to sail to Singapore, where they would be made redundant.

The crew ended their action after they were threatened with individual legal action and were abandoned by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). The union told the media it had no intention of organising any broader industrial action over the dispute.

Tandara Spirit, one of five Australian-crewed petrol tankers, will be handed back to its owners after Viva Energy, which bought Shell’s Geelong refinery and 870 service stations, said it had no need for the ship. Crew members allege that Viva Energy had already chartered *Vinalines Galaxy*, an alternative Vietnamese-manned tanker.

According to the International Transport Workers Federation, *Vinalines Galaxy* crew are paid about \$2 an hour, or \$20 a day. The ship has been

inspected three times by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority since December 2011, which imposed 49 defect notices, including “pollution prevention”, “fire safety” and “working and living conditions” breaches.

Sydney construction workers stop work over safety

Over 40 electricians at the Lend Lease construction site of the International Convention Centre, Darling Harbour in Sydney voted on November 21 to stop work until safety breaches at the site were investigated.

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) alleges that a Lend Lease foreman ordered a worker to ignore the standard safety warning notice on electrical switchboard and restore power to the circuit. The next morning an electrician was almost electrocuted when he recommenced work on what he believed was still a de-energised circuit.

The electricians were also concerned that Lend Lease took a week to report the incident to WorkCover NSW and that the safety regulator had said it would not be investigating the breach. The workers said they will only carry out emergency work at the site until WorkCover agrees to a full investigation into the incident.

WorkCover NSW reported that in 2013 two construction workers died after being electrocuted and 14 received electric shocks.

Tasmanian public sector workers strike over budget cuts

Around 10,000 public sector workers, including public servants, school teachers and nurses, stopped work for two hours on Thursday morning at 18 locations across Tasmania in protest against the state Liberal government’s budget cuts.

In April, the government warned that it could cut 1,500 public sector jobs to balance the budget. It intends to shed at least 821 jobs by June 30. Teachers are concerned that at least 266 positions are to be axed. Public sector workers previously rejected the government’s offer to restrict job cuts to 561 if they accepted an 18-month wage freeze.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), Australian Education Union (AEU) and other unions called the protests to dissipate workers’ anger. They have previously told the Liberal government that they would accept a 12-month pay freeze. The unions, which have accepted all previous job cuts, appealed to the government to negotiate job losses and other budget savings. The government has refused to negotiate.

The CPSU told the Thursday rallies that there would be no further demonstrations and that public sector workers would conduct a “work to rule” campaign, which includes taking all meal breaks and claiming all overtime.



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