

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 January 2015

South Korea: HHI workers reject union's pay deal

Over 10,000 workers at South Korean shipbuilder Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) have voted down a tentative wage agreement their union negotiated with management.

The union ended two months of limited strike action at the Ulsan plant last week after stitching up a pay deal with the company. Workers had demanded their monthly base wage be increased by 6.5 percent and that they receive a one-off bonus equal to 10 weeks' wages. They also wanted the retirement age increased from 58 to 60 years and for HHI to drop a proposed performance-based annual salary system.

The union wanted workers to accept the company's original 2 percent pay rise offer, which workers had previously rejected. Workers were to receive company stocks equivalent to 150 percent of their base monthly salary and another 2 million won (\$US1,800) as a bonus. HHI agreed to increase the retirement age to 60 years, include its regular bonus, which is 700 percent of the base salary, as ordinary wages, and give other benefits, such as 200,000 won in gift coupons.

More arrests at Foxconn's Tamil Nadu plant

For the third time in less than a month, around 250 workers were arrested at Foxconn's factory complex in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu on January 5 for attempting to enter the factory. The plant suspended operations on December 22. In March, Foxconn lost 70 percent of its business after Nokia India closed its Sriperumbudur facility.

Union representatives have turned down final settlement packages offered by Foxconn and demanded that the Taiwanese-owned phone manufacturer divert some of its orders from China or Vietnam to Sriperumbudur to salvage jobs. A Foxconn India Employees Union representative said that about 1,700 workers were affected, including 100 who live on the premises.

Striking auto workers in Tamil Nadu arrested

Over 90 protesting employees of NVH India Auto, a component supplier to Korean automaker Hyundai, were arrested and forcefully removed from the premises in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu on January 2.

The workers were staging a sit-in strike to demand reinstatement of 17 dismissed employees. They were also demanding recognition of their union. About 28 other employees were arrested for protesting outside the plant in support of the striking workers.

The strike was sparked when 18 employees were suspended for demanding that the company only use permanent staff, not contract workers, for production. NVH Auto has 120 permanent employees, 500 contract workers and 150 trainees. Following the arrests, management agreed to meet workers' representatives.

India's public sector bank unions defer strike

The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), representing over 800,000 public sector bank employees across India, called off a proposed one-day strike planned for January 7. The walkout was cancelled during negotiations with the India Banks Association (IBA) in which it agreed to lift its pay offer from 11 to 12.5 percent. This falls far short of the workers' original demand in December 2013 for a 40 percent pay rise. Bank employees, who have not received an increase for almost six years, were due to receive a pay rise in November 2012. The UFBU has progressively reduced its wage claim during negotiations over the past year, down to 19.5 percent.

Bank workers across India walked off the job on relay one-day stoppages from December 2 through to December 5. They have also called for improved pensions, better healthcare benefits, five-day banking and voiced opposition to plans to merge several nationalised banks and allow foreign institutions to compete with the State Bank of India.

Sri Lankan telecom union calls early end to strike

The All Employees' Union of Information and Telecommunications (AEUIT) called off strike action and ordered its members back to work on January 5. Some 2,700 telecom contract workers in Colombo Fort struck on December 29 demanding permanent positions. Many have been working for as long as 16 years as contract employees for manpower agencies. Workers defied a return-to-work court order on December 31 and intimidation letters from one of their employers, SLT Human Capital Solutions Company, and said they would remain on strike until their demands were met.

Union leaders, however, persuaded the workers to end the strike

following a vague assurance from a parliamentary opposition candidate who promised to “solve their issue” after Sri Lanka’s presidential elections on January 8.

Pakistan: Sindh Lady Health Workers protest

Members of the Sindh chapter of the All Pakistan Lady Health Worker Employees Association protested outside the Hyderabad Press Club on December 29 over several demands. These included payment of two months’ outstanding salaries and 29 months of increased wages arrears. The protesters also want upgraded salary scales, three years’ fuel allowances to lady health supervisors and other demands.

Protesters complained that LHWs in all three provinces of Khyber—Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Balochistan—were already receiving upgraded salary scales in accordance with a Supreme Court order in July 2012 but the Sindh government was only paying 7,000 rupees (\$US70) per month. An association representative said that according to the revised pay-scale, each worker should be paid 13,200 rupees, supervisors 15,400 rupees and drivers 12,200 rupees.

There are over 22,500 LHWs, 770 supervisors and 668 drivers in Sindh. The protesters said they would take further action if the government did not resolve these issues within 15 days.

Sindh water and power workers protest privatisation

Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) workers in several Sindh provincial cities held rallies on Wednesday against government plans to privatise the utility. Workers are concerned that the government’s move to appoint executives from the private sector as part of its restructure strategy will ultimately lead to full privatisation.

The All Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union and the WAPDA Hydro Electric Central Union have conducted a long campaign against privatisation in the sector. Union officials, however, have restricted workers’ actions to demonstrations and harmless protest strikes. The government has declared that it will continue privatising state-run utilities, especially in the energy sector, as demanded by the International Monetary Fund’s bailout loans.

Bangladeshi garment workers strike over sackings

Alliance Knit Garments workers in Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka, refused work and demonstrated outside the plant on January 1 in protest over the dismissal of 20 workers. The sackings followed a provocation initiated the previous day by the factory’s general manager who verbally abused some workers for no apparent reason. The strike began when employees arrived for work and discovered a notice on the factory’s gate declaring that the 20 workers were retrenched.

Cambodian garment workers on strike

Around 1,200 employees of the South Korean-owned Campo Kotop garment factory in Phnom Penh’s Pur Senchey district have been on strike since December 16 to demand reinstatement of five union representatives. On December 29 around 600 strikers ignored a court injunction ordering them to return to work and protested outside the South Korean embassy in Phnom Penh vowing that they would not return to work until the union representatives were given their jobs back.

According to the Collective Union of Movement of Workers (CUMW), the five representatives were dismissed illegally after management learnt that they were planning strike action at the plant, which employs a total of 2,500 people.

New South Wales power unions apply for strike ballot

The Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the United Services Union (USU), which represent 9,000 workers at New South Wales energy companies Ausgrid and Endeavour Energy, applied to the Fair Work Commission on Wednesday for approval to ballot their members for proposed strike action following failed negotiations for new enterprise agreements.

The industrial campaign to be put to members in a secret ballot includes bans on callouts, including repairs to the electricity network during storms or blackouts, and refusal to disconnect customers who fail to pay their bills.

Workers rejected a pay offer put to them by Ausgrid and Endeavour Energy last month which would have cut their take-home pay and put at risk permanent jobs and work safety. A union spokesman said workers wanted job security, no loss of conditions and a pay increase above the current consumer price index of 2.5 percent.

Ausgrid has flagged the potential loss of 2,400 jobs while Endeavour Energy indicated that 700 jobs could be axed in coming years.



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