

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

6 June 2015

Cathay Pacific flight attendants call off strike

Following a 48-hour sit-in by Cathay Pacific flight attendants at the Hong Kong airport arrival lounge on May 21, the attendants' union has reached an agreement with the airline and called off a planned August strike.

The flight attendants were concerned over cuts in some cabin crew allowances, pay discrepancies for junior staff renewing their contracts and the loss of legal support for workers involved in court cases, such as civil action stemming from passenger assaults.

On May 28, the 6,300-strong Cathay Pacific Flight Attendants Union signed a deal with management who agreed to reinstate a legal protection clause for employees dealing with unruly passengers and withdrew a cut in lunch allowances for those posted to Melbourne. The airline also agreed to give a significant pay rise to those switching to long-term permanent contracts after their initial three-year service.

South Korean workers protest against new industrial law

Some 500 workers, organised by the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), demonstrated inside the CCMM Building in Yeouido, Seoul on May 28 against the Park Geun-hye government's plan to amend the industrial law with its "peak wage system." Protesters blocked the South Korean labor minister from giving a keynote speech at a government meeting on the legislation.

The amendment, which is intended for the private sector, gradually cuts salaries of senior workers after they peak at a certain age, between 55 and 60. Companies claim that by cutting wages a few years ahead of workers' retirement, they can extend the retirement age by several years.

The National Assembly passed a new law in 2013 to extend Korea's retirement age to 60 from an average 57, starting next year in all private and government-run companies. As workers near retirement, their salaries are more than twice those of entry-level workers in Korea.

Philippines: Alcohol beverage factory workers on strike

About 400 contract workers at the Tanduay Distillers plant in Cabuyao, Laguna, 44 kilometres south of Manila, have been on strike since May 18 demanding regular jobs and better working conditions. Despite attacks by security guards and thugs, reportedly hired by the employer, the strikers, supported by family members, are maintaining their stoppage and picketing the factory.

For at least 11 years, 90 percent of employees at the factory have been contractual labour through Global Skills Providers Multi-Purpose Cooperative and HD Manpower Service Cooperative. These workers are not entitled to standard legal labour benefits. They earn just \$US7 a day and are not entitled to bonuses, paid time off for sick leave or vacations and do not receive medical and other benefits. They can also be legally sacked without explanation.

The workers have formed the Tanggulan Ugnayan Daluyong ng Lakas-Anakpawis sa Tanduay Distillers Inc and filed a petition for regularisation with the Department of Labor and Employment.

India: Tamil Nadu long distance bus corporation workers protest

Employees of the state-owned State Express Transport Corporation, which runs long distance bus services across Tamil Nadu, demonstrated in Nagercoil district on June 2 to demand workload reductions and increased vehicle maintenance. The workers allege that the buses travel over 700km without proper maintenance due to recent staff reductions. The workers have accused management of restructuring in order to close depots.

Tamil Nadu hospital workers protest for pay rise

Over 100 unionised workers at the St. Isabel's Hospital in Chennai demonstrated outside the facility on June 1 to demand management increase its 20 percent wage rise offer to 30 percent. Workers protested in shifts so as not to affect patients. Two hundred of the private hospital's 800 employees are members of the St. Isabel's Hospital Employees Union, which is affiliated with the Stalinist Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

Tamil Nadu construction workers in Ramanthapuram district protest

Construction Workers' Federation of India (CWFI) members stopped work in Aranmanai on Monday to demand an increase in the monthly pension to 5,000 rupees and a pension for women workers when they reach 55 years of age.

The building workers also demanded the entitled payment of 100,000 rupees (\$US1,560) to the families of construction workers who die from natural causes to be paid immediately upon their death. Families are currently forced to wait up to five years before they get assistance.

Protesters also demanded that union representatives be included in the construction workers' welfare board committee.

Karnataka sugar workers strike

Mysore Sugar (Mysugar) factory workers walked out and protested outside the managing director's office on June 2. The strikers claim that five of their colleagues were sacked without any prior notice. They allege that the company practices caste politics. The sugar workers also want payment of two months' outstanding wages and the immediate transfer of the managing director.

Uttar Pradesh woman dies during hunger strike

A 40-year-old woman died of dehydration on May 30 during a hunger strike with 30 fellow workers calling for the reopening of a long-closed sugar factory in Maholi, Uttar Pradesh. The protest follows petitions to the labour department to intervene on their behalf to re-open the factory, which has been closed for 17 years.

New Delhi sanitation workers strike over delayed wages

Close to 11,000 East Delhi Municipal Corporation sanitation employees struck on June 2 over delayed payment of last month's wages. Workers threw garbage on the road and burned effigies of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. The city mayor alleged that the pay delay was because the federal government had withheld funds due to municipal corporations.

Pakistan: Healthcare workers strike in Karachi

Doctors and paramedics in out-patient departments of two major Sindh government hospitals—Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre (JPMC) and National Institute of Child Health (NICH)—stopped work and held a sit-in protest over approval delays in the health professionals' allowance. The allowance, equal to the monthly salary, was stopped after authority was transferred to provincial governments in 2010. Workers complained that health authorities in other provinces had resumed payment of the allowance.

A joint action committee representing JPMC and NICH workers called off further action on Monday after health authorities announced they would begin paying the allowance.

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National database employees threaten strike

National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) workers have announced a national strike for June 17 over long-pending demands. The workers want a service structure revision, time-scale promotions, salary and bonus increases, medical allowances and other benefits and job permanency for contract workers, some of whom have been employed by NADRA for up to 15 years.

In Sindh province, NADRA workers protested outside the Karachi Press Club on May 28 over the same demands. NADRA staff in Islamabad are maintaining a hunger strike.

Strikes in February and May were called off by the All Pakistan NADRA Employees Union after the government made false promises that their demands would be met.

Australian federal public servants step up action

Thousands of federal public servants in 18 cities and towns across Australia will hold one-hour stop work meetings between June 16 and 26 in a long-running dispute for new work agreements. Their action follows one-hour stoppages and bans by Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members last month in a limited number of departments. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union members in the Defence Department have been holding rolling stoppages between one and 24 hours and imposing overtime and other work bans at multiple locations.

Enterprise agreement negotiations for around 160,000 public servants have been underway for a year. Workers in all departments have rejected the Abbott government's pay "offer" of between zero and 1.05 percent annual increases combined with cuts to conditions and entitlements. For some employees the so-called offer would be a \$2,000 annual pay cut.

The CPSU and other unions covering federal public servants are demanding 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions.

Melbourne furniture workers locked out

Around 50 workers employed by Canterbury Windows and Doors in South Clayton in Melbourne were locked out by management on May 28 after they held a two-hour stoppage one week earlier over a workplace agreement. The workers were escorted off the premises at 6 a.m. and were told that they were locked out. They are maintaining a picket outside the factory.

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members took industrial action after rejecting a one percent wage increase in a new workplace agreement.

New Caledonia bank employees end strike

Bank workers in the South Pacific French territory of New Caledonia ended their nine-day strike on Thursday, after reaching agreement with the French Banking Federation for a wage increase. Following a demonstration of 400 bank workers and supporters in the territory's capital Noumea, the federation agreed to increase its original offer of 0.2 percent. Workers accepted a 1.1 percent immediate pay increase, followed by 0.4 percent in December.



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