

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

4 July 2015

China: Lever Style factory workers maintain strike

About 400 workers from Shenzhen Artigas Clothing & Leatherware, contracted by Hong Kong-based Lever Style, are maintaining strike action they began on June 8. The workers, who are occupying the plant in an attempt to prevent it being relocated, are also demanding all previously dismissed employees be re-hired. The factory produces goods for Japan's Fast Retailing, which owns the Uniqlo clothing brand.

Workers ended a previous strike in December after management promised not to relocate operations. A spokesman for the workers told the media last month that the company had again started to move equipment out. "This time the workers have decided to fight through to the end," he said. Around 500 of the company's 900 employees, however, have already moved to the company's new factory location 5km away.

Cambodian garment workers maintain strike for unpaid wages

Around 500 workers from the S.H. International garment factory in Phnom Penh's Pur Senchey district have been on strike since May 28 after the South Korean manager abandoned the factory without paying employees for the month. They are defying an injunction from the Phnom Penh Municipal Court ordering them to return to work.

Last week, four female workers were hospitalised when a company truck removing sewing equipment tried to ram through a picket of 100 strikers who were blocking the factory gate. A spokesman for the Khmer Union Federation of Workers Spirit said the driver was arrested after the workers locked him inside the factory compound to prevent him escaping.

Cambodian electronics factory workers strike for minimum wage

Four hundred workers at the Kuantech electronics factory in Takeo province walked out on June 11 alleging that management had not honoured an agreement to increase their monthly salaries from \$123 to the official mandated minimum of \$128. The provincial court handed down an order on June 23 ordering them back to the factory, but at least 30 workers ignored the order and are maintaining a protest outside the factory. On Tuesday, management called police who arrested nine protesters alleging they had damaged factory property.

Indonesia: Philips factory workers end strike

Striking workers at PT Philips Industries in the Batam Free Trade Zone, Indonesia returned to work after an agreement was reached with local management on June 19.

About 600 members of the newly formed PUK PT Philips Batam walked out on June 3, accusing the company of union-busting after it sacked over 80 founding members of the union. In response to the strike the company broke off collective bargaining negotiations with the Indonesian Metal Workers' Union, of which PUK is an affiliate.

Under the agreement negotiated by the Metal Workers Union (FSPMI) local company management will resume collective bargaining negotiations. This will involve restructuring of the company which will be monitored by local authorities and/or government representatives. The strikers are to be paid their salary while on strike.

Although the workers were also demanding reinstatement of the 80 sacked union members, the FSPMI press release did not mention their fate.

South Korea: GM auto assembly workers vote for strike

Following 12 rounds of failed negotiations, 71 percent of General Motors' 13,884 union workers on Wednesday voted in favour of a possible strike over pay and production volumes. GM is demanding productivity increases following a 24 percent fall in global sales last year.

GM has told its South Korean workforce that if labour costs were not lowered the company would reduce its production quotas. Earlier this year GM said it planned to end production in Indonesia and cut operations in Thailand as part of broader restructuring. South Korea currently accounts for nearly one-fifth of GM's global output.

South Korea's National Labor Relations Committee is expected to meet on July 6 to decide whether to order a 10-day arbitration period.

India: Mumbai airport workers strike

Around 1,900 contract cleaners at Mumbai International Airport held an 18-hour strike on June 30 to demand higher wages. International and domestic terminal workers were involved in the sudden walkout. Their action followed a two-hour strike early last month, which ended after their employer, Krystal Integrated Services, falsely promised to increase wages.

Workers said they are only paid 8,500 rupees (\$US134) a month and have not had an increase for eight years. The strike ended following an assurance from airport management that their wages would be increased within two days.

Tamil Nadu state railway workers protest

Around 350 railway workers protested in Trichy, Tamil Nadu on June 30 to oppose the central government's plan to allow direct foreign investment in the rail system. Southern Railway Union workers wore black badges and shirts as a part of the protest. The workers raised slogans against the government and blocked the Trichy railway junction.

Karnataka ambulance workers protest over wages

Following a two-day 87 km march from Chikko to Belagavi in Northern Karnataka, workers of the 108 Ambulance Service protested outside the winter assembly and handed a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner on June 30. They were demanding minimum wages and the reinstatement of an employee who was removed without any valid reason.

Workers complained that they work for 10 to 12 hours a day for a paltry 7,000 to 8,000 rupees a month.

Haryana rural health workers protest

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers from rural areas protested outside the health minister's residence in Ambala on June 30 over cuts to benefits by India's BJP government. The cuts included elimination of a 500-rupee monthly incentive and 50 percent increase in remuneration for every baby delivered.

The protesting workers presented a memorandum with their demands to the health minister. An ASHA Workers Union representative warned that if workers' demands were not met there would be a state-wide strike.

Sri Lankan government contract workers protest

Thousands of contract employees (known as "man power workers") in state owned enterprises such as the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), Urban Development and Water Supplies & Drainage Board picketed their work places on June 25 demanding job permanency. Around 2,000 workers picketed the CEB head office in central Colombo.

Most contract workers in the state-owned enterprises have been employed for between 5 to 13 years but without permanency in their relevant posts. They are paid a daily wage and their work limited to 25 days per month. They do not receive paid leave and health insurance or have access to loan facilities and other entitlements permanent state-sector workers get.

Sri Lankan government pharmacists on strike

Government pharmacists held a strike and protest fast on June 29 to demand the resolution of several outstanding issues. The pharmacists' major demand is a payment of a long promised 3,000-rupee allowance. The Government Pharmacists' Association organised the strike and

demonstration outside the Suwasiripaya Health Ministry in central Colombo.

Australian customs and immigration staff strike

Around 2,000 Customs and Immigration staff walked off the job for two hours at airports and seaports across Australia on Wednesday as part of a long-running work agreement campaign by federal public servants. Some 160,000 public servants in over 70 departments have rejected the Abbott government's below-inflation pay offers—between zero and 1.5 percent per year—and reduced conditions.

Customs and immigration officers are also concerned that wages will be cut when they are absorbed into the newly formed Australian Border Force, a single frontline operational border agency within the immigration department. The annual pay of customs investigators and immigration officers could be slashed by \$5,800 and \$3,000 respectively.

Wednesday's strike follows a week of half-day rolling stoppages by tens of thousands of public servants nationally and covered by 118 agreements, which expired on June 30, 2014. The unions, led by the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), began negotiations for new agreements in April last year. The Abbott government has only made one offer, which has been overwhelmingly rejected by staff in all departments.

The CPSU and other unions covering federal public servants are demanding 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions. The unions delayed industrial action until December and have restricted it to harmless protests, limited strikes and ineffective work bans.

South Australian rail transport workers strike

Public transport workers in the South Australian capital city, Adelaide took protected industrial action this week over the terms of a proposed enterprise agreement. On Monday, Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) train drivers walked off the job for four hours. On Tuesday the RTBU announced work bans involving other Metro workers.

The bans include a refusal to report or cover over graffiti, no collection of non-safety related information from CCTV footage and no reportage of ticketing system faults. The drivers are threatening further action on July 7 over concerns with rostering and time off between shifts.

RTBU members rejected the government's last offer of an annual 2.5 percent pay rise over three years in return for changes to work conditions and acceptance of forced redundancies. Despite union members' opposition to forced redundancies, the union has offered a "grandfather" policy, which allows job cuts to current but not future employees.

Melbourne's Metro rail workers apply for strike ballot

RTBU members in Metro Trains, Melbourne's commuter rail service, have applied to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to hold a ballot of its 4,500 members to decide on industrial action over a new work agreement. A union representative said action could include four-hour stop-work meetings, bans on reporting late trains and free ticket days.

The RTBU has accused Metro Trains of attempting to cut long existing work conditions. The current agreement expired on June 30. The FWC is

not expected to process the ballot request until the end of the month.

Papua New Guinea port workers strike

Workers at several ports in Papua New Guinea, including Lae, Rabaul, Port Moresby and Wewak, have begun 24-hour rolling stoppages. Workers in Lae struck on Monday and Port Moresby on Tuesday. The PNG Maritime and Transport Workers Union called the action after the PNG Ports Corporation failed to ratify terms of employment it previously agreed to. About 400 of the 700 workers at PNG Ports are members of the union.

A union spokesman said the corporation had agreed to 97 percent of a log of claims, including a 5 percent pay rise over three years. The ports corporation rejected union claims for workers' leave fares and an end to forced redundancies. The spokesman said workers had been waiting for the enterprise agreement and a 5 percent wage rise since 2011.



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