

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 September 2015

South Korea: Kia Motors workers vote for strike

Workers at Kia Motors, South Korea's second-largest carmaker, voted on Wednesday to take strike action after their union failed to reach agreement with management over a new work agreement. Over 70 percent of the 34,000-strong workforce voted for industrial action, the fourth consecutive year of strike action at the automaker. The union wants a 159,900 won (US\$135) increase in the base monthly salary.

Last week workers at Hyundai Motor, a Kia Motors affiliate, voted for strike action in their pay dispute with the nation's number one car maker. The Hyundai union, representing more than 48,000 employees, wants a 7.8 percent increase in the base salary, guaranteed job security until age 65 and bonuses worth 30 percent of the carmaker's net profit for last year. Workers strongly oppose management's decision to implement the peak-wage system next year.

India: Kerala tea plantation workers end wildcat strike

Over 7,000 tea workers from the Kannan Devan Hills Plantations in Munnar ended a nine-day strike on September 13 after the company partially agreed to some of their demands. Workers wanted their daily wage lifted and a 20 percent bonus increase. They walked off the job on September 6 to protest a deal between management and their unions, the All India Trade Union Congress, Centre of India Trade Unions and Indian National Trade Union Congress, which only consisted of a 10 percent bonus increase.

In a new agreement between workers and government representatives, the tea workers will receive a 20 percent increase in their bonus. A meeting of the Plantation Labour Committee will be convened on September 26 to discuss a pay rise and other demands.

Meanwhile women workers at four plantation estates of Harrison Malayalam Limited (HML) walked out on Tuesday to demand higher wages and bonuses. Like their counterparts at the Kannan Devan Hills Plantations in Munnar, they have barred their unions from negotiating for them. Workers want a 20 percent bonus and a 500 rupee (\$US7.55) daily wage. The strikers said they would form a separate union with four representations from each estate. HML has nine plantations in Kerala.

Andhra Pradesh rural health workers protest

Rural health care (Anganwadi) workers and helpers demonstrated in Vizianagaram on September 14 against the Collector's order to give

postings to 375 new recruits. Their protest blocked National Highway 36.

The Anganwadi workers demanded that the postings be deferred until transfers and promotions were given to existing employees. They also want the reinstatement of 50 workers forced to retire before reaching the age of 60.

Karnataka daily wage workers protest

Around 650 daily wage workers from Krishna Raja Sagar Dam in Mandya protested outside the Deputy Commissioner's office on September 14. They have demanded equal pay for equal work, job permanency, improved wages and other benefits. The workers had been employed on a daily basis for many years.

Pondicherry daily wage workers protest

Daily wage workers of the Public Works Department demonstrated in Pondicherry on September 14 to oppose outsourcing of their jobs. Out of 500 vacancies in the PWD, only 25 percent are to be filled by existing daily wage workers while the rest would be outsourced. Demonstrators said they had been daily wage workers for about 11 years and their jobs would be affected if they were outsourced.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand salary and festival bonus

Some 5,000 garment workers of Adib Dyeing demonstrated in Gazipur, a district of Dhaka, on Monday demanding payment of last month's salaries and the Eid religious festival bonus. They blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for two hours. The strike was sparked when factory management failed to keep a promise to pay workers on Monday. Management had earlier said August wages would be paid by September 7.

The demonstration ended after several hours following police intervention. Management said they would meet with workers on Tuesday and pay outstanding wages on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, around 400 garment workers from eight factories demonstrated on September 11 in Ashulia of Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka for a salary increase and the Eid bonus. The protest was organised by the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation to coincide with a demonstration by garment workers with the same demands at the

Rana Plaza site in Dhaka, where the nine-storey building complex collapsed on April 2013 killing over 1,000 garment workers.

Pakistan power utility workers hold more protests

Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco) and Sukkur Electric Power Company (Sepco) workers demonstrated in several districts in the Sindh province on September 10 in protest against power utility privatisation. All Pakistan Wapda Hydro Electric Workers Union members rallied in Hyderabad at the Press Club calling for the government to drop its privatisation policy and “Free Wapda [Water and Power Development Authority] from the bondage of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank”.

The power union has consistently opposed any independent industrial and political action by Pakistani workers against the government. Its protests, which have been ongoing for nearly three years, are designed to demoralise workers and create the conditions for the government to implement the IMF and World Bank demands for privatisation of state owned industries.

Karachi police attack government contract workers

National Program for Improvement of Watercourses (NPIW) contract workers were brutally attacked by baton-wielding police in Karachi on September 10 after three days of protests. The contractors were assaulted after they attempted to march to the Chief Minister’s premises to demand permanency. At least three protesters were knocked unconscious in the attack. A total of 1,500 workers were appointed to the NPIW on a contractual basis 11 years ago.

Islamabad hospital workers end action over health risk allowance

Employees from five major government hospitals in Pakistan’s capital Islamabad ended a three-day sit-in strike on September 10 after the government agreed to restore the Health Risk Allowance. Government hospital employees won the allowance in 2011 after a 35-day protest outside parliament. It constitutes a major part of their monthly income but was permanently withdrawn earlier this year.

The months-long campaign by 10,000 employees, including doctors and paramedical staff, at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Polyclinic, Capital Hospital, Federal Government General Hospital and National Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, was brutally attacked earlier this month injuring 30 and arresting 15. All arrested workers were released after the government agreed to restore the allowance.

Karachi government health workers strike for pay and allowances

Doctors and paramedical staff at the government run Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre and National Institute of Child Health in Karachi walked out on Monday to demand the government honour

commitments made for a salary increase and a health allowance. The strike forced the closure of the out-patient department and disrupted ward services.

The Young Doctors’ Association directed its members to end the strike the next day after the government gave another commitment to address their demands. Paramedical staff, however, refused to call off their action for what could be another false promise.

Punjab government employees protest

Thousands of government clerks in Punjab province demonstrated in Lahore on September 9 to demand the upgrade of pay scales, time-scale promotions and permanency for contract employees. The demonstration outside the Punjab Civil Secretariat blocked traffic in the Lower Mall.

Their action was in response to the government rejecting their demands at a meeting on September 1. The All Pakistan Clerks Association, which called the protest, threatened to continue the campaign if the government continued to reject their demands.

Cambodian construction workers strike

Some 200 Nuri construction company workers at a Hongkong Land building site in Phnom Penh’s Daun Penh district walked off the job on September 10 to demand better conditions. A spokesman from the Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia said the workers wanted set working hours from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., the removal of two staffers, a two-hour lunch break and higher pay. Strikers returned to work after the company agreed to consider their eight demands.

Foreign workers in Taiwan protest

A group of foreign workers protested outside the Legislative Yuan in Taipei on Tuesday over a report that industrial law is to be amended to require them to leave the nation every three years. A Taiwan International Workers’ Association representative said the amendment would only benefit labour agencies.

“For workers, the requirements are mainly a means to force them to pay another set of agency fees,” she said, adding that the requirement is discriminatory because it only applied to blue-collar workers.

A Filipino worker said that foreign employees were forced to borrow money to pay placement fees. She said her own fee was 97,700 pesos (\$US2,090) and the equivalent to three years of her expendable income in the Philippines. Demonstrators called for the government to take responsibility for the placement of foreign workers and for visa extensions to be automatic.

Indonesian part-time teachers protest

About 20,000 part-time teachers from across Indonesia demonstrated on Jalan Gatot Subroto outside the House of Representatives building on

Tuesday to demand permanent jobs. Traffic was diverted during the protest. Protesters demanded a meeting with the government and the president to discuss their issues.

The part-time teachers carried signs calling on the government to make them civil servants by the end of the year. Part-time teachers in Indonesia are only paid 300,000 rupees (\$US30) a month, around half the wage of full-time teachers, and do not receive benefits paid to civil servants.



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Australian federal public servants stop work

Thousands of federal public servants in Australia's capital city Canberra walked off the job for four hours and demonstrated on Tuesday to protest the Liberal-National government's attack on working conditions and take home pay. The action by workers from Human Services, the Tax Office, Immigration and Border Protection and Employment, was part of a year-long enterprise agreement dispute involving 160,000 federal public employees.

Enterprise agreement negotiations covering 118 federal public servants' agreements and several unions have been underway since March 2014. Limited industrial action called by the public sector unions has had no impact on the government's wages policy with less than 2 percent of public sector workers covered by new agreements. Most of the agreements accepted have pay rises at or near 4.5 percent over three years—well below the annual cost of living increase of 2.5 percent.

Department of Human Services and Department of Veterans' Affairs workers rejected the latest pay offers earlier this month. Tens of thousands of public servants at the Immigration Department and the Australian Taxation Office are soon to vote on the government's latest offer.

The Community and Public Sector Union and other unions want 4 percent annual pay increases for three years with no loss of conditions. The government is insisting that annual pay increases be limited to below 1.5 percent in return for cuts to entitlements.

New Zealand garbage collectors end action

Garbage truck drivers of Christchurch Waste Management, on New Zealand's South Island, ended a five-day ban on working overtime after the Amalgamated Workers Union reached agreement last weekend with the company over the length of the working day. From September 7, the city's 50 rubbish truck drivers refused to work past 2 p.m. The drivers wanted to be paid time-and-a-half for hours worked on top of an eight-hour shift. They normally work 10 to 12 hours a day. Details of the agreement have not been reported.

Solomon Islands municipal workers strike

City council workers in Honiara, the Solomon Islands capital, walked off the job on Monday to protest the delay in salary deposits into their bank accounts. Workers at the Honiara Central Market, Works Division and the Law Enforcement Officer complained that delays had been ongoing since March. Most city services, including rubbish collection, stopped during the strike. Strikers returned to work on Tuesday after salaries were deposited into their bank accounts.