

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 February 2016

## Korean airline pilots vote for strike

Unionised pilots at Korean Air, South Korea's flagship airline, overwhelmingly voted last week for strike action in a dispute over a new work agreement. Korean Air claimed that the vote was illegal, citing technical reasons. Korean Pilots Union (KPU) and the New Korean Air Pilot Union members are demanding a 37 percent pay increase. The company has offered just 1.9 percent.

A KPU spokesman said pilots' pay had been suppressed for several years. The average annual salary of 2,340 local pilots at Korean Air is around 100 million won (US\$81,000), far lower than at Chinese airlines, which pay 200–300 million won. According to the unions, last year 140 pilots left to join other companies in China and the Middle East on salaries up to three times higher.

Last time Korean Air pilots walked out was in 2005 when they struck for four-days over inadequate rest breaks on long-haul cargo flights.

## South Korean food delivery drivers maintain five-month strike

Forty contract delivery drivers for the food processing company Pulmuone, have been on strike since last September to demand a fee increase and union recognition from subcontractors Daewon and Seoul Garam Logistics. The drivers own their vehicles and are members of the Korean TruckSol union, a unit of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). They claim to have not had a fee increase for 20 years.

The KCTU has kept the strike isolated while the International Transport Workers' Federation and International Union of Food, Agricultural and Hospitality Workers issued a series of bogus appeals for negotiations with Pulmuone.

## Cambodian garment workers walk out

Around 2,000 workers from the Malaysian-owned Global Apparels garment factory in Phnom Penh walked out on Wednesday and demonstrated outside the factory after management said it would be axing 500 jobs in the coming months. A spokesman from the Collective Union of Movement of Workers said that 100 jobs were recently eliminated after the company decided not to renew fixed-term

contracts.

Workers demanded that the 100 sacked workers be reinstated and that all fixed-term contracts be renewed when they expire. It is common for factories not to renew short-term contracts before a worker reaches two years of employment in order to avoid paying termination entitlements.

## Pakistani paramedics protest over arrests

Paramedics at Chandka Medical College Hospital in Larkana, Sindh province, boycotted duties on Monday to protest the arrest of health workers who had been demonstrating against alleged corruption and mismanagement. The peaceful demonstrations against the medical superintendent were forcefully ended by the paramilitary Rangers, a section of the military, who arrested about 50 demonstrators.

Paramedical Staff Association members demanded the release of the detained workers. The hospital outpatients department was closed during the strike.

The Pakistani government is increasingly using the military against protesting workers. Earlier this month the police and paramilitary attacked Pakistan International Airlines workers in Karachi, killing two strikers and injuring a dozen more.

## Hyderabad water utility workers strike

Hyderabad Development Authority Employees Union members closed the city's water filtration plant for six hours on Wednesday in protest against non-payment of their monthly salaries and other benefits. The plant supplies Hyderabad with 30 million gallons of water per day.

An official from the Water and Sanitary Agency met union officials and assured them that finances to cover five months' wages and the pensions of retired workers had been allocated by the Sindh government. Workers have threatened to close down all reservoirs if their wages are not paid.

## India: Rajasthan judicial workers' strike called off

A nine-day strike by 13,500 employees at subordinate courts in Rajasthan was called off on Tuesday after the state government and the Rajasthan Judicial Employees Union reached agreement on most of the workers' demands. All subordinate courts (courts below the high court) were unable to proceed with hearings during the strike.

The workers had walked out on February 15 over 19 claims. Their main demand was for pay increases and promotions recommended by the Shetty commission and agreed by the Supreme Court in 2010.

### **Telangana school noon-meal workers protest**

For the second time this month, noon-meal workers in Nizamabad, Telangana demonstrated outside the Collector's office on February 22 over several demands. The workers want the minimum wage, immediate payment of six months' outstanding salaries, job permanency and for the government to pay agency bills on time.

Workers also complained that the rate paid by the government for each school child was insufficient, forcing the noon-meal workers to run their services on borrowed money from loan sharks.

### **Kerala veterinary workers strike**

Around 1,400 veterinary surgeons across Kerala walked out on an indefinite strike on Monday demanding rectification of anomalies in the Pay Commission recommendations. The Kerala Government Veterinary Officers Association, which is affiliated to the Indian Veterinary Association, organised demonstrations at all district headquarters.

The veterinary surgeons want restoration of pay parity with allopathy doctors. They said parity was removed a few years ago, then made worse by the Pay Commission recommendations which have further reduced their pay.

### **Queensland Catholic school teachers walk out**

More than 8,500 teachers in over 240 Catholic schools in Queensland struck for 24 hours on Thursday over a proposed new work agreement.

The Independent Education Union (IEU) and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) have been in negotiations over a new enterprise agreement since April last year. The QCEC has offered a 2.5 percent pay increase but the union wants a 3.25 percent rise and for the commission to address long-standing pay disparities between Catholic schools in New South Wales and Queensland.

A union representative told the media that some teachers in Queensland's Catholic schools are paid \$6,792 a year less than their New South Wales colleagues. Other issues include workload, preparation time and multimedia work.

Thursday's strike was the eighth stop-work action since the middle of last year. Rallies were held in cities across the state, with about

1,000 demonstrating in Brisbane. The teachers have also banned some administrative work. Teachers in Mackay will stop work for the day on March 1.

### **Australian pharmacists stop work**

Pharmacists employed by National Pharmacies in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia walked off the job for an hour on Tuesday in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement.

According to their union, the Professional Pharmacists Australia, the company wants to slash Saturday penalty rates and introduce a two-tiered wage scheme. The union claims that this will lower pay for new pharmacists by \$4 an hour.

Currently, pharmacy graduates receive a median starting annual salary of \$44,300, the lowest of all graduate salaries. While negotiations are continuing, the union has threatened to call 24-hour stoppages if the deadlock is not resolved.

### **New Caledonia nickel smelter workers strike**

SLN nickel workers in the French Pacific island colony of New Caledonia went on strike on February 19 after management announced possible job losses, which they claim were due to a slump in the price of nickel. Production at the smelter in Noumea has ceased.

The main union on site said that while no dismissals have been announced about \$US6 million will be cut from salary allocations, which could mean 150 jobs cut. Nickel is New Caledonia's principal export earner.

The announcement comes one month after the Queensland Nickel refinery in Australia was put into voluntary administration, directly threatening the jobs of almost 800 refinery workers. Queensland Nickel takes all of New Caledonia's nickel.

The New Caledonian government has officially declared a crisis in the industry. This allows for the release of money from the country's Nickel Fund, which was established in 2009 to help assist mining companies maintain profits and cope with a crisis.



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