

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

5 March 2016

Korean airline pilots and flight attendants take action

Unionised pilots at Korean Air, South Korea's flagship airline, are conducting a work-to-rule in a dispute over a new work agreement. While Korean Pilots Union (KPU) members had voted for strike action, the union used a district court injunction lodged by the carrier to restrict industrial action to work bans.

The KPU and the New Korean Air Pilots Union are demanding a 37 percent pay rise. The company has offered just 1.9 percent. Pilots want pay parity with their colleagues in other Asian airlines. According to the unions, 140 pilots left last year to join other companies in China and the Middle East where salaries are up to three times higher.

Meanwhile, flight attendants of Korea's second-largest carrier, Asiana Airlines, are in dispute over restructuring plans that will cut the number of flight attendants per flight. Asiana Airlines Labor Union members have been staging a sit-in protest outside the carrier's main hangar at Gimpo International Airport since January 3.

McDonald's workers protest in Seoul

Part Time Workers' Union (AWU) members demonstrated outside McDonald's offices in Seoul's Jongno district on February 29 over unsafe working conditions and for negotiations on a list of ten demands.

The workers said that restaurant manuals set maximum times, down to the second, for each job which was causing a high number of accidents. The AWU claimed that 80 percent of McDonald's workers had been injured on the job.

McDonald's workers held five-months of demonstrations outside various restaurants in Seoul in 2014-15 over low wages and poor working conditions. The AWU claimed that the company arbitrarily adjusted rosters to save money and often failed to pay wages on time. Most McDonald's workers in Korea earn a minimum 5,580 won (\$US5.10) per hour. Protestors demanded stable working times and wages be increased to 10,000 won an hour.

India: Tata-Marcopolo bus and coach factory workers locked out

Tata-Marcopolo workers at the bus and coach manufacturing plant in Dharwad, Karnataka demonstrated in front of the deputy commissioner's office on Tuesday to oppose what the Krantikari Kamgar Union said was an illegal lockout. The plant employs 2,500 workers and produces 15,000 buses per year.

Management locked out the workers on February 1 after they walked out over the previous suspension of 12 workers and calls for a wage rise. President of the Tata Motors Marcopolo Workers Association, a company union, told the striking workers that they would lose their jobs if they did not drop their demands.

Tata Motors auto workers maintain strike at Sanand plant

Over 400 workers at Tata Motors' Nano plant in Sanand, Gujarat have been on strike since February 22. They are demanding reinstatement of 28 employees who were suspended for walking out in protest against the sacking of two workers two months ago on disciplinary charges. Around 2,200 workers are employed at the plant.

The sacked workers claimed that they were removed because they tried to form a union and a seven-member committee to organise the walkout and negotiate with management.

Jharkhand municipal workers' union shuts down six-week strike

Ranchi Municipal Corporation (RMC) workers in Jharkhand ended a six-week strike on February 29. The RMC Men Workers Union told the council workers that the government had given assurances that their demands would be met soon and no action taken against strikers.

The council workers walked out on January 19 over long outstanding demands. These included payment of arrears to about 800 employees, as per the Fifth Pay Commission, for increases in family and regular retirement pensions and provision of jobs on compassionate grounds.

Bangladeshi fertiliser workers end strike

Ninety day-labourers who load fertiliser sacks at the government-owned Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila ended a 30-hour strike on February 26. They had struck indefinite strike to demand seven months' wages arrears and a pay rise. Their union called the strike off, claiming management had agreed to pay the arrears and a wage increase. These day-labourers currently receive 18 taka (\$US0.23) for every 20 sacks of fertiliser loaded.

Pakistan: Rawalpindi teachers protest against privatisation

The Punjab Teachers Union this week announced a new round of protests against privatisation of government schools in the Rawalpindi district. According to the union, 59 primary schools are to be handed over to the Punjab Education Foundation, a non-governmental body.

In late January, government teachers from several Punjab provinces demonstrated in Lahore accusing the government of planning to privatise 5,000 schools, including 275 schools in Rawalpindi. The authorities have since announced they will reduce the list to 59 in Rawalpindi but insisted that the privatisation program will continue.

Islamabad cardiac institute contract workers protest

Contract health workers at the Cardiac Centre of Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in Islamabad protested on Wednesday over the suspension of salary payments for the last eight months. Those impacted include over 30 doctors and paramedical workers who were hired on contracts 10 years ago. The health workers want permanency, promotions and other benefits provided to permanent employees. Co-workers at the institute announced solidarity with the contract workers and threatened to join the protests.

Thailand fish-processing workers strike

Striking Golden Prize Tuna Canning workers in Samut Sakhon province ended a one-day strike on February 26 to demand withheld wages and overtime payments.

Almost 1,400 workers walked out the previous day before, ignoring sacking threats by management, and protested outside the factory and at the local Labour Protection office.

A spokesman for the workers said the mainly immigrant workers—mostly from Burma—had never received the national minimum wage increase in 2013 or any overtime pay. Workers said that there were other “unfair” practices at the factory, including no sick leave even when employees provided medical certificates.

Cambodian garment workers end strike

Around 2,000 workers from the Malaysian-owned Global Apparels garment factory in Phnom Penh ended a three-day strike on February 27 after the company agreed to reinstate around 100 workers who were sacked after their fixed-term contract ended. The whole factory had walked out after management said it would not be renewing fixed-term contracts and axing 500 jobs in the coming months.

The striking workers demanded that the 100 dismissed employees be reinstated and all fixed-term contracts 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.

Vietnamese footwear factory workers strike

Around 17,000 workers at the giant Taiwan-based Pou Chen Group footwear factory in Dong Nai Province ended a three-day strike on Monday after management agreed to some of their demands. All production at the plant, which has 21,600 employees, ceased during the strike.

A Pou Chen Vietnam Footwear Plant Workers’ Union representative told the media that the company had agreed to the workers’ demands to suspend implementation of a new manpower management policy and pay them wages for the three days they were on strike.

Under the new manpower policy announced in February, work hours would be used to determine the distribution of performance bonuses. Workers opposed this pointing out that they would be penalised for using their legitimate benefits, such as taking legally-mandated days off.

The Pou Chen Group makes athletic and casual footwear for many international brands, such as Nike, Adidas, Reebok, Asics, Under Armour, New Balance, Puma, Converse, Salomon and Timberland. It has seven production bases in Vietnam, employing around 160,000 people.

Australia and the Pacific

Australian public sector workers threaten to strike

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has threatened to call over 100,000 federal public sector workers out on strike next month unless the Liberal-National Coalition government agrees to immediate discussions on the two-year dispute for new work agreements.

The CPSU said employees would strike on March 21 for 24 hours across several agencies, including Medicare, Centrelink, Child Support, the Australian Taxation Office, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Three days later, Border Force officers and other staff in the Department of Immigration and Border Protection intend to walk off the job, three days later on Easter Thursday, at international airports, freight terminals and other sites.

Workers in over 100 federal departments have rejected government enterprise agreement offers that would eliminate existing rights, including family-friendly conditions, in return for a two-year wage freeze and 2 percent annual pay increases over three years.

After two years of negotiations 130,000 workers, almost 85 percent of the total federal public sector workforce still do not have a new enterprise agreement. The CPSU and other unions have reduced their original pay demand from 4 percent annual pay increases for three years to between 2.5 and 3 percent with no loss of conditions.

New South Wales hospital laundry workers protest

HealthShare Linen Services employees walked off the job across New South Wales for 21 hours on February 25 to oppose the government’s move to privatise services at all state-run hospital laundries. At least 560 jobs could be axed.

HealthShare has announced that will release an expression of interest (EOI) to the private market for the provision of linen services at its

Illawarra and Wagga Wagga sites with plans to extend it to other areas. HealthShare Linen Services employs about 63 people in Wollongong, 30 in Wagga Wagga, 200 at Parramatta, 60 in Tamworth, 150 in Cardiff, 60 at Lismore and 60 in Orange.

New Zealand tannery workers on strike

Union members at the Tuakau Proteins animal-skin processing plant in Waikato on New Zealand's North Island, walked off the job on March 1, after unanimously voting to strike. Their action follows a "zero increase" wage offer from the plant owner Lowe Corporation.

The tannery is maintaining production with non-union workers. Lowe said it would return to negotiations with the FIRST union but would not offer any pay increase. The union said it would end the strike when negotiations resume.

Auckland health workers vote to strike

On Tuesday, public health workers at three District Health Boards (DHBs) in the Auckland region on New Zealand's North Island voted to hold three strikes in April to oppose a proposed new roster which attacks working conditions and jobs.

The 3,000 workers, members of the Public Service Association (PSA), include anaesthetic technicians, pharmacists, physiotherapists, mental health workers and occupational therapists. They held a series of two-hour work stoppages in November to oppose the Waitemata, Auckland and Counties-Manukau DHBs' joint plan to run clinic and elective services on a seven-day work cycle to compensate for under-staffing caused by funding cuts. The DHBs also want to force new recruits to sign inferior contracts which include "sector-standard" time-and-a-half weekend rates. Health workers are currently paid double time for weekend work after midday Saturday.

The PSA ended industrial action in November after the DHBs agreed to resume negotiations, which have once again reached an impasse.

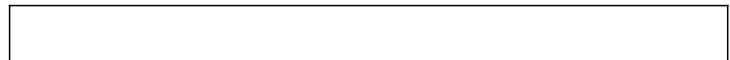
On Tuesday, a DHB spokesperson told the media the health management were "at the bargaining table" with the union and expected to avoid the proposed strike by reaching a deal. No details were provided.

New Zealand lumber mill workers down tools over safety

After 12 months of ongoing health and safety breaches at the Pan Pac Mill in Napier, on New Zealand's North Island, lumber division workers issued a health and safety strike notice, effective from 10 a.m. Thursday.

A FIRST union spokesman said that a neighbouring community has reported outbreaks of rashes, breathing problems and other ailments, after a new kiln was installed at the mill last April. The kiln was inspected by WorkSafe and allowed to continue operating.

On February 23, however, the kiln malfunctioned and emitted toxic fumes that hospitalised four workers, include one who was rendered unconscious. Workers said that their action will only be lifted when they are confident that the workplace is safe.





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