

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

18 June 2016

South Korean shipbuilding workers vote for strike

An overwhelming majority of union members at Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME) voted on Tuesday to strike in protest against a management restructure plan. The company wants to cut wages by 20 percent, sell two of five floating dry-docks and drastically reduce its workforce to 10,000 positions.

South Korea's top three shipbuilders—DSME, Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) and Samsung Heavy Industries—intend to sell off various business divisions to reduce costs and cut their workforces. On Monday, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye called for "bone-crushing" overhauls of the three shipbuilding companies.

On Thursday, hundreds of HHI workers at the Ulsan, South Gyeongsang Province shipyard demonstrated outside the company headquarters, denouncing the shipbuilder's latest "self-rescue" plan, which they say will result in massive layoffs. Union representatives affiliated with the Korean Metal Workers Union are meeting to decide on strike action to be announced next week.

Bangladeshi garment workers attacked by police

At least 50 protesting workers were hospitalised on June 10 when police using tear gas and batons attacked their demonstration in Gazipur division, Dhaka. The protest was provoked when Hasan Tanvir Fashion Wear was six days late paying May monthly salaries and only paid half the outstanding amounts.

Pakistan: Doctors and paramedics in Balochistan end strike

Government hospital doctors and paramedics from Balochistan province, who had been on strike for one-and-a-half months and protesting outside the Quetta Press Club, ended all industrial action on June 11. They were assured by the provincial government that their demands were accepted.

Members of the Young Doctors Association (YDA) and the Balochistan chapter of the All-Pakistan Paramedics Federation (APPF) began a boycott of outpatients departments on May 3 in a province-wide dispute. The unions were calling for increased wages, job permanency, positions for unemployed doctors, health risk allowance, and for the provision of basic facilities in the hospitals.

Their action followed a two-day strike on April 10, which ended after the government falsely said it would "immediately address their

demands." The government has reneged on strike-settling commitments numerous times.

According to health officials, the government needs to allocate an additional 2 billion rupees in the forthcoming budget to fulfil doctors' and paramedics' demands.

Sindh government clerks walk out

Members of the All Pakistan Clerks Association of Larkana district, Sindh province walked off the job on Monday and demonstrated at the Jinnah Bagh Roundabout to demand pay upgrades and time-scale promotions. The workers accused the government of ignoring the promised measures for two years. Similar demands have already been granted to government workers in the Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Azad Kashmir provinces.

The clerks union threatened to call a provincial strike on June 16 if the government failed to include their demands in the budget for the next financial year.

India: Punjab police attack protesting teachers and health workers

About 1,200 contract teachers from 400 schools and rural health care workers from Punjab state demonstrated in Bathinda on June 11 to demand that their monthly wages be lifted above the current 4,500 rupees (\$US67). The peaceful protest, which blocked several roads, was attacked by the police and harassed by state authorities. It coincided with the 19 days of protest action in the city by poverty-stricken Punjab farmers calling for a debt waiver from the state government.

Himachal Pradesh bus drivers end industrial action

Around 10,000 employees of the state-run Himachal Road Transport Corp. (HRTC) ended a planned two-day strike after 24 hours this week when the government agreed to most of their demands.

The transport workers, who struck to demand permanency for contract staff and pension benefits, defied a High Court order which claimed their action was illegal. The HRTC, which has over 2,500 buses, provides vital links between far-flung villages and urban areas.

Punjab power utility workers protest

Around 100 members of the Powercom and Transco Contract Workers Union held a protest march in Bathinda on June 11 to demand job permanency. Many of the workers had been employed on a contract basis for 15 years as meter readers, bill distributors and cashiers. Workers also demanded the end to privatisation.

Meanwhile, power workers in Punjab's capital Chandigarh staged their 17th demonstration in the city this week. They were calling for improved facilities, adequate work equipment and filling of vacant positions. Other demands include fault-locating vans, boom ladders, cable joints, meters, fuse wire, safety devices, drinking-water facilities and proper seating at work stations.

A union representative blamed management for the increasing number of accidents in the department and said that basic safety devices, tools and boom ladders were not being provided to fault-repair workers. The union threatened to call strike action by June 16 if authorities did not respond favourably to workers' demands.

Sri Lankan postal workers impose work bans

Around 22,000 postal workers began work-to rule action and banned overtime work from June 12 over 15 demands. The action was triggered by the government's intention to replace a special allowance with overtime payments. Postal services across the island are affected with tens of thousands of letters left undelivered.

The postal workers want recruitment and promotions restrictions removed, a review of anomalies in salary scales, and an end to problems related to efficiency bar exams. Workers pointed out that there are around 2,000 vacancies within the Postal Department.

Management has cancelled all leave and threatened to cut salaries if workers continue their bans. The Joint Postal Trade Union Front leaders entered talks with the government on June 15.

Cambodian garment workers protest

Workers from the Malaysian-owned Global Apparel garment factory in Phnom Penh demonstrated outside their factory on Tuesday to demand unpaid wages and improved compensation for sacked workers. Protesters burnt tyres and blocked the road outside the factory. A spokesman from the Collective Union of Movement of Workers, claimed that about 300 terminated workers were still owed their May salaries.

On May 30, management declared that it would close the factory at the end of October and would not be renewing any worker contracts ending between May and October.

Around 600 workers were terminated earlier this month with the contracts of another 1,200 employees due to expire before October. Factories in Cambodia commonly do not renew short-term contracts before a worker reaches two years of employment in order to avoid paying termination entitlements.

The Cambodian ministry of labour, which is holding talks with representatives from workers and factory management, has declared that negotiations would cease if the protests were not ended.

Victorian refrigeration workers end strike

Striking workers from Bitzer, which manufactures refrigeration parts and large evaporators in the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine, ended a nine-week strike on June 9 after the company withdrew various enterprise agreement demands.

Fifty-four members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) walked off the job on April 6 and maintained a 24/7 picket outside the factory's main gate in an enterprise agreement dispute over wages and conditions.

Bitzer wanted to eliminate rostered days off (RDOs), stop contributing to income protection, and pay any new workers the base award rate, which is less than the previous EBA rates. The over-all pay offer was restricted to increases in the cost of living index.

Workers have accepted a final offer from the company, which included a 10 percent pay increase over three years, a 36-hour week with two RDOs a month for all workers, guarantee of permanency for casuals after six-months' service, and control over what hours they work. Bitzer agreed to axe the separate shifts brought in a year ago and go back to their traditional 7 a.m.–3.30 p.m. roster. Casuals are to remain on EBA conditions.

Victorian psychiatric prison hospital nurses walk out

Nurses at Victoria's Thomas Embling psychiatric prison hospital in Melbourne walked off the job for two hours on Monday over safety concerns. Nurses complained that overcrowding and insufficient staff were the cause of an increase in assaults on staff by patients. The Health and Community Services Union said there had been 100 incidents at the hospital over the past three months, including one in which four people were injured. Nurses want bed numbers and staffing levels increased to handle the growing number of patients.

Sydney light rail employees strike

Sydney light rail drivers and customer service workers walked off the job for four hours on Thursday over safety concerns. Drivers said that they are stretched to the limit and want private operator Transdev to address safety concerns.

A representative of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) told the media that Transdev was refusing to deal with various safety problems as part of current negotiations for a new enterprise agreement and wants to increase drivers' shift limits from 8 to 9 hours—a move that will have a severe impact on worker and passenger safety.

The RTBU wants pay rises of 3.5 percent in the first year of a new enterprise agreement and 3.9 percent in the second. It has also called on the company to reinstate a monthly rostered day off.



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