

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 July 2016

South Korean airline pilots protest

More than 100 Korean Air pilots rallied outside the carrier's headquarters in Seoul on Tuesday in a dispute over a new work agreement. Some 1,900 members of the Korean Pilots Union (KPU) and the New Korean Air Pilots Union (NKAPU) have been maintaining work-to-rule action since voting for strike action in February.

The unions want 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.

Following Tuesday's demonstration Korean Air management formed a special disciplinary committee which demoted Lee Kyunam, the KPU leader, from a captain to a vice-captain over his role in the industrial campaign. The KPU said it will appeal the decision.

More South Korean shipbuilding workers vote for strike

Samsung Heavy Industries (SHI) shipbuilding workers voted Tuesday to strike in protest against management's restructuring plan. About 92 percent of the 4,700 union members participating in the ballot voted for industrial action. The ballot followed votes for strike action early last month by Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME) and Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) workers. Union representatives affiliated with the Korean Metal Workers Union have yet to decide on a strike date.

South Korea's top three shipbuilders—DSME, HHI and SHI—intend to sell off various business divisions to slash costs and reduce their workforces. SHI plans to cut about 1,500 jobs at the shipyard this year and sell non-core assets. DSME wants to slash wages by 20 percent, sell two of its five floating dry-docks and reduce its workforce to 10,000 positions. In early June South Korean President Park Geun-Hye called for “bone-crushing” overhauls of the three shipbuilding companies.

Cambodian garment workers protest

Over 400 workers from the Korean-owned Cambo TDG garment plant in Kampot protested outside the factory on Monday to demand the rehiring of 21 workers whose contracts had expired. A Cambodian Textile & Garment Workers' Federation spokesman said most of them had been on three-month contracts, despite having worked at the company for more than two years.

The union, which has accused the company of falsely claiming the workers were sacked because of a downturn in orders, has pointed out that the plant had already begun hiring replacements.

One worker told the media that the 21 workers were sacked because they had “helped other workers demand benefits from the company.”

India: Haryana power utility workers strike against privatisation

Around 23,000 employees from Haryana state-run power utilities walked off the job for 48 hours on June 29 to demand an immediate end to the outsourcing of operation and maintenance jobs at 23 power sub-divisions. Workers ignored the government's invocation of the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), which makes strike action illegal.

Workers rejected government assurances that it would establish a three-member committee to negotiate with the workers' representatives. The power workers said they would strike unless the government unconditionally accepted their demands.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers demand wages

Workers from nine state-owned jute mills in the Khulna-Jessore industrial belt have threatened to strike over several issues. These include non-payment of wages and festival bonuses and 20 percent dearness allowances if they were not paid before June 30. The jute workers also demanded allocation of funds for purchasing raw jute, the filling of all vacant positions and the establishment of a

wages commission.

Their action follows a ten-day strike by thousands of workers at the same state-owned mills in April. The strike ended after the government falsely promised to clear outstanding wage payments by April 25 and said that provident fund and gratuity arrears would be cleared by the cabinet.

According to the union Oiykko Parishad, nearly 80,000 jute workers are living in abject poverty.

Bangladeshi garment workers demand wages and festival allowance

The Garments Sramik Odhikar Andolan, a combine of 12 garment workers' rights bodies, on Tuesday appealed to the government and factory owners to pay delayed wages and a festival allowance before the Eid-ul-Fitre holiday. A workers representative said most of the garment factories did not pay wages and the festival allowance on the scheduled day fixed by the government. Workers complained that only 20 percent of factory owners have paid wages and bonuses on time.

Sri Lankan immigration officers stop work

Immigration and Emigration officers of Katunayake Bandaranaike International Air Port walked off the job on Tuesday to protest the instillation of an additional CCTV system in their working area without informing them. All international flights were delayed by the strike.

The immigration workers resumed work after one hour on written assurances by management that the CCTV installation would be temporarily suspended.

Sri Lankan indigenous health workers strike

Following two-weeks of national demonstrations by workers and doctors at Auyfveda (indigenous) hospitals countrywide, workers and doctors at an Auyfveda (indigenous) hospital in Nawinna, on the outskirts of Colombo, walked off the job and protested outside the Health and Indigenous Medicine Department office on June 29. They were demanding the removal of a government-appointed chairman of the agency. Demonstrators climbed onto the office-building's roof. Police escorted the chairman from the building.

The walkout followed two-weeks of national demonstrations by Auyfveda (indigenous) hospital workers. The protests were in response to the department's false promise that "special allowance" arrears would be paid by early June.

According to the All Ceylon Ayurveda Health Service Union,

over 600 health workers, including doctors, are owed nearly 11,000 rupees (\$US163) each. Union leaders had threatened to call an indefinite strike if the issue was not immediately resolved.

Western Australian coal miners strike over pay cut

Seventy maintenance workers at the Griffin Coal mine in the Collie Basin in south-west Western Australia walked off the job for 24 hours on June 24 over a planned 43 percent pay cut. Their action follows a Fair Work Commission (FWC) ruling in favour of the company's move to scrap an existing enterprise agreement and force the maintenance workers onto the Black Coal Award, effective from July 10.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) says that the maintenance workers would have their annual wages cut by \$50,000, redundancies, basic entitlements and other allowances reduced and the abolition of various protective clauses.

During 16 months of negotiations with the AMWU, Griffin Coal management demanded workers take a 26 percent pay cut and work an extra seven hours a week. The union has isolated the maintenance workers and is appealing the FWC's ruling, which is due to be heard on July 5.

Melbourne brewery workers strike

Fifty-four Carlton & United Breweries (CUB) maintenance workers held a 24-hour picket outside the Abbotsford plant in Melbourne to protest their dismissals. The 32 fitters and 22 electricians, who are members of the AMWU and the Electrical Trades Union respectively, were terminated on June 24 and replaced with contract labour on 65 percent lower base rate wages.

While production has slowed to a trickle as the newly-recruited contract workers attempt to maintain and repair brewing, bottling and packaging machinery, the AMWU and ETU have isolated the sacked workers.

A union spokesman said the company was "offering" the terminated mechanical fitters a \$19.50 an hour base rate under a new non-union enterprise agreement. Some of workers had been employed at the plant for over 30 years.



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