

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

9 July 2016

Taiwan university lecturers protest

Part-time lecturers working at private universities protested outside Taiwan's ministry of education in Taipei on Tuesday to demand laws ensuring that they are paid the same hourly rates as their counterparts at public institutions. There are more than 46,000 part-time lecturers working at private universities.

A Taiwan Higher Education Union spokesman said that 72 of the nation's 110 private universities pay part-time lecturers the basic hourly rates set over 20 years ago. She said the hourly rate needed to be raised by 16 percent to establish pay parity with government university lecturers.

South Korean construction workers strike

Over 24,000 construction workers walked off the job on Wednesday and demonstrated in the Seoul Plaza to demand better working conditions and revision of laws to protect their rights. Korean Construction Workers Union members said they would remain on strike until their 18 demands are met.

These include guarantee of fair wages, expansion of direct employment by builders, instead of outsourcing to subcontractors, and laws punishing companies for work-related deaths and accidents.

Cambodian shoe workers on strike

More than 7,000 workers from the Can Sports Shoe factory protested outside their workplace in Kampong Chhnang's Samaky Meanchey district Wednesday, demanding better working conditions. A Cambodian Youth Power Union League (CYPUL) representative said workers had been protesting inside the factory since Monday, and on strike since Tuesday. They have nine demands, including for incentive bonuses and the cessation of unfair penalties against employees a few minutes late for work.

Workers have organised a petition to file with the ministry of labour, but said they would remain on strike until their demands are met.

Cambodian garment workers picket factory

About 200 workers at the Hong Kong-owned Chung Fai Knitwear

factory in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district are holding 24-hour vigils outside the factory amid suspicions the company has gone bankrupt and is trying to sell off assets. Workers caught a transportation company removing equipment from the factory on July 1.

A Free Trade Union member said the factory has been idle for a month and workers were owed June wages. Workers said they had not been given notice that the factory was closing.

Bangladeshi tea plantation workers end strike

Around 7,000 workers at five tea plantations of the state-owned National Tea Company (NTC) in Moulvibazar walked off the job and held demonstrations outside their plantations on June 29 to demand a wage rise. Workers complained that the mandated daily wage for tea plantation workers was set last year at 85 taka (\$US1.1) but they are still only being paid 69 taka. Strikers returned to work the next day after NTC officials assured them the new rate and back pay would be paid on July 4.

India: Haryana auto workers demonstrate in Gurgaon

Several hundred from auto manufacturing sector unions held a one-day demonstration outside the mini secretariat in Gurgaon Sunday demanding reinstatement of 130 workers of Bellsonica Auto Component India Private Limited.

Bellsonica suspended 40 workers in October 2014, the day after they formed a union. They were dismissed in February 2015, along with another 90 workers accused of participating in union activities. Despite a series of court rulings that the dismissals were illegal the unions have not called any united industrial action in support of the workers.

Following Sunday's demonstration, which included workers from Maruti MotoCorp, Auto International and Honda, a delegation of union leaders submitted a memorandum to the deputy commissioner appealing for reinstatement of the workers.

Migrant workers in Tamil Nadu demand minimum wage

Migrant workers in the Chennai Corporation region demonstrated in the Ambattur industrial estate on Sunday to demand the minimum wage and to be registered so they are entitled to voter ID cards, ESI (employee state insurance), Provident Fund and other citizens' entitlements. According to

the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU), which organised the protest, there are around 20,000 migrants in the Ambattur industrial estate. None of the workers are registered with the Labour office.

“We are not from outside India but are treated as third-class citizens. Some 10 of us stay in one room and don’t have enough to eat. Adding to that, we are ill-treated by our employers,” a worker told the media.

Tamil Nadu agriculture supplies distribution workers strike

Puducherry Agro Services and Industrial Corporation (PASIC) employees stopped work on Tuesday and took over the government agency’s main office in Thattanchavady, following the vicious assault on two workers by the manager. Police were deployed to the site to evict the workers and protect the manager.

The walkout, by voucher-based daily wage workers, was to protest the non-payment of 18 months of wages. Workers also claimed that their employee state insurance and provident fund payments had not been deposited on time.

Tamil Nadu sanitation workers protest

In two separate but related protests, sanitation workers from the Swaach Bharat program demonstrated in Dindigul and Thiruvannamalai over several grievances. Workers in Dindigul protested outside the Collector’s office demanding 300 days of wages which contractors had not paid and continuation of employment.

Workers in Thiruvannamalai, who collect and separate biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste, are demanding re-employment when their 100-day contract runs out and new workers are supposed to replace them.

Ola taxi drivers in Karnataka strike

Ola cab drivers in Mysore city struck for three days on July 1 to protest against exploitation by the company. More than 300 drivers drove their taxis to the Maharaja’s college grounds to protest and drafted a memorandum to deliver to Mysore’s deputy commissioner.

The drivers accused the company of exploiting them through excessively high charges. One striker said the company charges drivers 4 rupees for each customer phone call, 2,000 rupees a month for collection of fares and 27 percent commission for each ride. Workers want collection charges limited to 300 rupees a month and commission reduced to 10 to 15 percent.

Magadh University workers down tools

Close to 500 non-teaching staff at the Magadh University in Bihar observed a “pen-down” strike on Monday and protested inside the university. The Magadh University Non-Teaching Employees’ Union members were protesting against criminal charges made by university

management against their union general secretary.

Workers accused university authorities of framing up their union leaders on frivolous charges and said they would take mass leave if the charges were not dropped.

Pakistan: Construction workers strike over safety

Following 11 fatal accidents at various construction sites along the Orange Line Metro Train construction project in Lahore, workers at the Kotli Ghaasi site walked off the job indefinitely after the death of a colleague on June 30. Muhammad Hasan, 18, and his uncle were laying sewerage pipes in a trench when it collapsed on them. Both were hospitalised but Hasan did not survive.

The striking workers said the excavation did not comply with engineering standards and the contractor paid only 100,000 rupees (\$US1,482) to the uncle. In an attempt to stop the strike a project manager said that the government would release one million rupees for Hasan’s family and 300,000 rupees for his uncle.

Karachi police attack protesting garment workers

Karachi police used tear gas and batons in an attempt to break up a demonstration of workers outside their ADM Garments factory on Monday. When the demonstration spilled onto the road outside the factory, police used this as an excuse to attack the workers, arresting several of them. Some factory vehicles were burnt during the clash.

The strike was sparked when factory management reneged on a promise to pay wages and bonuses before the Eid holiday. After failing to crush the protest, management released the wages and bonuses later that day.

Australian Capital Territory casino workers take industrial action

Staff from gaming, food and beverage, security and surveillance at the Canberra Casino, in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), began protected industrial action on June 24 in a dispute over low pay. The action consists of refusing to wear uniforms but wearing union t-shirts. Management has threatened to stand-down workers if they continue their action.

The United Voice union and Hong Kong-based casino owner Aquis Entertainment have been involved in negotiations over an enterprise agreement since February. Management claimed that workers receive lucrative penalty rates and good conditions. An application from Canberra Casino for the suspension of industrial action was dismissed by the Fair Work Commission on July 4.

Canberra garbage collectors resume strike action

Thirty-nine garbage truck drivers employed by Canberra’s collection contractor SUEZ struck work on Friday—the fourth time in three months. At least 23 suburbs were affected. The strike followed failed negotiations

between the Transport Workers Union and SUEZ over a new enterprise agreement.

The main sticking points in negotiations have been workers' calls for redundancy pay be restored to 4-weeks' pay, up from two weeks, and a pay rise. Workers want a 3 percent pay increase, which was accepted in the first proposed enterprise agreement. SUEZ has reduced its offer to 2.2 percent.

New Zealand: Aviation security staff vote to strike

Public Service Association and E t? union members, in a year-long dispute for a new collective agreement with the government's Aviation Security Service (Avsec), have voted for three 3-hour strikes at Auckland and Wellington airports. They will also ban overtime and extra hours at Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. The strike action will be over a two-week period starting on July 20.

In an attempt to avert strike action, Avsec and unions have agreed to enter into mediation talks with the Ministry of Business, Employment and Innovation on July 15. The unions have not withdrawn their strike notice and, in response, Avsec issued a lockout notice if the strike goes ahead. Prime Minister John Key said he would assign police and customs workers as strike breakers.

Workers accused Avsec of attempting to claw back previous concessions in the proposed new collective agreement. A union spokesman said workers were reluctant to strike but decided to after the latest offer from management would see some members go three years without a pay increase.

South Island Avsec employees in the city of Christchurch are primarily represented by the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE). Some NUPE members were pressured into voting to accept the latest contract offer forcing the union to splinter to secure a separate agreement.

Wellington bus drivers stop work

Around 300 drivers from Wellington City and Hutt Valley gathered to discuss their response to threats to local bus services at a stop-work meeting held during off-peak hours in Kilbirnie on Tuesday. Bus routes currently operated by NZ Bus are being put out to tender by the regional council with documents likely to go to market in early July and take effect in early 2018.

Tramways Union members are concerned that radical cost saving changes in the new tender will leave passengers and workers worse off. Workers claim changes would see passengers having to take two or three buses where they would normally take one, with people travelling in off-peak times worst affected.

The drivers are also concerned that from past experience new providers will cut costs by targeting drivers' wages and conditions, including introducing longer shifts for lower pay. Workers pointed out that NZ Bus paid a flat rate of \$20.97 an hour while drivers working for Go Bus in Dunedin and Auckland were paid just \$16.02 and \$18 an hour respectively.

A Tramway Union spokesman said drivers at the stop-work meeting voted to strike if they were unsuccessful in maintaining current conditions.

New Zealand timber mill workers strike

Workers at the Japanese-owned Pan Pac timber mill at Napier, on New Zealand's North Island, walked out for 24 hours on Thursday, after rejecting the company's offer to settle a collective agreement.

An official from the First Union, representing most of the mill's 200 employees, said workers agreed to forgo a pay rise when the company was struggling to turn a profit, but their loyalty now is not being rewarded.



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