

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 July 2016

South Korean shipbuilding workers to strike

Thousands of workers from eight shipbuilding yards in South Korea will strike on July 20 in protest against government and industry efforts to “reshape” the nation’s yards. The strike will include workers from the “big three”—Samsung Heavy Industries (SHI), Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME) and Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI).

On July 7, 3,000 Samsung workers held a four-hour sit-down strike over the company’s plan to axe 1,500 positions this year, and to cut its workforce by 40 percent by the end of 2018. 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.

Hyundai Motor’s South Korean workers vote for strike

The union representing workers at Hyundai Motor has called a partial strike for four days next week after 77 percent of Hyundai’s 48,806 unionised workers at the company’s Ulsan plant on Wednesday approved industrial action for a wage rise. It will be the fifth year in a row that workers have taken strike action after wage talks broke down.

The union is demanding a 7.2 percent rise in the basic monthly wage and performance pay totalling 30 percent of the automaker’s 2015 net profit. Other demands include giving employees the right to refuse promotion so that they can maintain their union membership.

The union claimed that Hyundai wants to freeze wages, revamp the wage structure and expand the “peak-wage system,” which reduces salaries in return for extending the retirement age. When workers reach the age of 59 their pay would be reduced by 10 percent. It is one of the labour-market reforms demanded by the Park Geun-hye administration in 2015.

India: LG electronics factory workers strike

About 400 LG electronics production workers from the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (Noida) in the National Capital Region, Uttar Pradesh, struck on Monday over fixed working hours, a wage rise and in protest against the expulsion of trade union leaders. Workers demonstrated outside the plant and held a hunger strike. Two female hunger strikers fainted and were admitted to hospital.

The strike began after 11 union members were locked out of the plant

following their refusal to transfer to another location. The workforce includes 820 technicians and assistants.

Rural employment scheme workers in Tamil Nadu demand wages

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme workers demonstrated in Thiruvannamalai outside the Block (district) Development Office on Tuesday to demand outstanding wages. The employment scheme is supposed to guarantee landless labourers and middle farmers 100 days’ work in a year for a minimum wage.

While the national government claims the meagre reform helps the majority of rural poor, the scheme lacks funding. Workers from villages like Thatchampattu, Periya Kallappadi and Chinna Kallappadi have not been paid their wages for six weeks.

Goa government sports authority workers protest

Three former female daily wage workers from the Sports Authority of Goa have been on a hunger strike in the state capital Panjim since June 25 demanding the reinstatement of 60 daily wage workers. The workers were sacked by the ruling BJP government 21 months ago. They were originally hired in 2011.

Sri Lankan non-academic university workers strike

Some 13,000 non-academic workers from universities throughout Sri Lanka walked off the job for 48 hours on Wednesday and marched from Independence Square to the University Grants Commission in Central Colombo to demand an increase in wages and other entitlements.

The workers want an increase in the monthly compensation allowance, a 2,500-rupee salary rise, medical insurance scheme, reinstatement of the language-proficiency allowance, the pension age to be increased to 60 and a new agreeable pension scheme.

The walkout followed several unsuccessful appeals to the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government. Representatives from several unions have said they would call strike action on July 27 if their demands were not met.

Sri Lankan teachers want salary rise

All Ceylon Teachers Association members marched from the D.H. Buddadasa Ground to the ministry of education in Battaramulla, on the outskirts of Colombo, on Tuesday to call for a salary increase for teachers' assistants and other demands. While union leaders met with government officials no issues were resolved.

Cambodia: Cambo TDG strikers return to work

Around 400 striking Cambo TDG garment workers in Kampot began returning to work on July 8 after management agreed to reinstate sacked employees and dropped charges against three union leaders. The garment workers walked out on June 27 to demand the rehiring of 21 workers whose contracts had expired. Most of them had been on three-month contracts, despite having worked at the company for more than two years.

The company claimed they were sacked because of a downturn in orders. Workers rejected this, saying that they were sacked because they had "helped other workers demand benefits from the company".

Cambodian shoe factory workers on strike

Aerosoft Summit Footwear workers in Battambang's Sampov Loun district have been on strike since July 1 to demand permanency and entitlements. More than 300 strikers gathered at Battambang city hall on Monday to present a log of claims.

The footwear employees want permanency and travel allowances for those who have worked for the company for three months, health insurance and other basic benefits. The claim also said no one had received the government's monthly \$7 allowance, which is supposed to be paid to all factory workers.

Cambodian construction workers protest

About 100 construction workers protested outside the office of labour hire company Theng Sreng in Kandal province's Chbar Ampov district on Wednesday after the firm fired a newly elected union leader on Monday. It was the first elected union representative at the company.

A Building and Wood Workers Trade Union of Cambodia representative said 500 Theng Sreng employees established the union to improve their working conditions, such as holidays, working hours and assistance for work-related injuries.

Victorian power workers ordered to resume working overtime

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) issued an interim order on Monday against the Construction Forestry Energy and Mining Union (CFMEU), ordering its members to "return to normal working conditions" at the Loy Yang A power plant in the Latrobe Valley.

AGL Energy alleged that the union had imposed illegal overtime bans in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The union denied the allegation, saying that workers only refused overtime on safety grounds when shifts could not be adequately manned.

The FWC has twice rejected applications from the CFMEU to ballot its 600 members on possible industrial action during 11-month dispute over wages and conditions. A protected ballot application was denied in March on a minor technical ground and again in July with the FWC claiming that the union was not "genuinely trying to reach agreement."

While the CFMEU has accepted a 21.5 percent increase over four years in return for the extensive trade-offs, the union says AGL Energy wants to reduce superannuation payments, cut long-service leave and other entitlements, remove minimum staffing levels and change restrictions on some work practices. Workers are also concerned that various cost-cutting measures will endanger health and safety.

Melbourne brewery workers picket factory

Carlton & United Breweries (CUB) maintenance workers have formed a "community protest" outside CUB's Abbotsford plant in Melbourne, saying they will maintain the protest until they get their jobs back.

CUB's entire maintenance workforce, 32 fitters and 22 electricians, who are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) respectively, were terminated on June 24 and replaced with contract labour on 65 percent lower base rate wages.

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 the workers had been employed at the plant for over 30 years. The unions have refused to call any industrial action at other breweries over the company attack.

Victorian milk processing workers locked out

Thirty-seven workers at the Parmalat milk processing factory in Longwarry, in south-east Victoria, have been locked out since July 5. The lockout began after employees told the company that they would impose work bans following ten failed meetings for a new enterprise agreement. There are 26 full-time permanent staff at the plant, along with 11 casuals employed through a labour hire company. The locked out workers are picketing the milk processing plant.

National Union of Workers (NUW) members had planned to impose bans on overtime, paperwork and loading and unloading trucks. The multinational company, which is transporting local milk to its nearby Rowville factory, said that the lockout is indefinite.

Victorian shire council workers implement work bans

Australian Services Union (ASU) members at Gannawarra Shire Council, which services four rural towns in northern Victoria, began protected industrial action this week for a new enterprise agreement.

An ASU spokesman claimed a council management offer was unrealistic and would see substantial cuts to wages and conditions. He

added that work bans will be limited at first but will increase daily until agreement is reached.

Tasmanian ambulance paramedics end industrial action

The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), which covers Tasmania's ambulance paramedics, has ordered its members to end low-key industrial action after reaching a tentative agreement with the Hodgman Liberal state government for a new pay deal.

After months of protracted negotiations, the HACSU accepted a slightly improved wage offer of an 8 percent pay rise over four years, backdated to 2014. The original offer did not include backdating.

Earlier this year the state government offered pay increases of 4.5 percent in July, followed by another 4.6 per cent next year and 5 per cent in 2017. It later withdrew the offer claiming it could not afford it. The union is urging members to accept the offer claiming it is close to the union's initial demands.

The Public Service Association and E t? unions called off planned strike action by airport security workers after reaching a tentative agreement with the government's Aviation Security Service (Avsec). The call for industrial action followed a year of failed negotiations for a new collective agreement in which workers accused Avsec of attempting to claw back previous concessions.

Avsec employees had planned a series of three-hour stoppages spanning two weeks, commencing July 20. Avsec threatened to lock out striking workers, while Prime Minister John Key said he would assign police and customs workers as strike breakers. The unions said that they would recommend members accept the new offer.



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South Australian paramedics stop work

Around 350 ambulance paramedics in South Australia's capital Adelaide stopped work for two hours on Tuesday to discuss possible industrial action over an "industry in crisis." The Ambulance Employees Association (AEA) claimed cost-cutting was leading to chronic staff shortages, ramping, and an unmanageable workload within the ambulance service.

The union told its members that they should withdraw support for the government's "Transforming Health," which will restructure and rationalise medical services in Adelaide. Under the government plan emergency surgery will no longer be performed at Modbury Hospital and the Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre will shut and have its services integrated into the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

New South Wales corrective services teachers protest

Corrective Services Teachers Association members have been holding protest meetings outside prisons in nine cities and towns across New South Wales to oppose the state Liberal government's cost-cutting plan to sack experienced and qualified teachers from prisons and replace them with administrative staff and trainers on a much lower pay rate. Recognised teaching qualifications will no longer be required within state prisons.

The teachers complained that the Baird government's decision to contract out prison education services will cost jobs and leave prisoners unable to access the broad adult education curriculum. The union has lodged a case in the NSW Industrial Relations Commission opposing the cost-cutting measures.

New Zealand airport security workers call off planned strike