

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

13 August 2016

South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers resume strike action

Following four days of rolling strike action in mid-July, 15,000 unionised workers at Hyundai Motor, South Korea's top automaker, again walked off the job at the company's Ulsan plant this week. The strike was held for three consecutive days—in a two-shift system for eight hours a day—until August 12.

The union has called for 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.

According to the union, 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.

Negotiations between Hyundai and the union resumed on Wednesday. The union said if the negotiations fail to reach "middle ground" it would join its affiliate Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMMU) to walk out on both Hyundai Motor and its sister company Kia Motors on August 12 and 19.

Cambodia: Chung Fai Knitwear factory picket continues

About 200 workers from the Hong Kong-owned Chung Fai Knitwear factory in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district are maintaining 24-hour vigils outside the factory amid suspicions that the company is bankrupt and trying to sell off assets. Workers discovered a transportation company removing equipment from the factory on July 1.

While late last month the municipal court issued a ruling barring the owners from selling the factory equipment, the issue of unpaid wages and benefits remains unresolved. Workers want the government to sell the factory assets and use the proceeds to settle the company's debt to workers.

In a similar but separate dispute, more than 200 workers from the Chhang Voy factory in Phnom Penh's Russey Keo district protested yesterday. A worker told the media that the company had started moving to a new location without paying July wages.

Sri Lanka: University workers' unions end strike

Trade union leaders representing over 130,000 striking non-academic university workers ordered their members to end a two-week strike on Monday after the government agreed to enter talks. The University Grants Commission (UGC) had threatened to cancel the jobs of temporary workers and deduct the wages of permanent workers.

Non-academic workers at universities throughout Sri Lanka walked off the job on July 27 after the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government and university authorities refused to meet with them over pay and conditions. The unions were demanding an increase in monthly compensation allowances, a 2,500-rupee salary rise, medical insurance, reinstatement of the language-proficiency allowance, the pension age increased to 60 and a new agreeable pension scheme.

The unions accepted open-ended government promises to "find viable solutions to demands," such as a better Employee Trust Fund (ETF) contribution, reduction in salary anomalies and a proper pension scheme. A ministry official said talks would be held with finance officials to solve the ETF issue and a common framework developed to pay allowances in the next five years. Wage and allowance increases within the university establishment would be organised after a "common understanding."

Sri Lankan veterinary surgeons walk out

Around 750 members of the Government Veterinary Surgeon Officers' union called a two-day strike on Monday demanding higher salaries and their recognition as professionals. Veterinary services at zoos, quarantine, provincial and municipal councils and the animal production and health department were impacted.

Surgeons want salaries increased from SL-1 scale to SL-2, which would put them on par with government medical officers' salary, and qualified veterinary surgeons classified as professionals in permanent positions.

Pakistan: Karachi university workers end strike without resolution

The Karachi University Teachers Society representing academic and non-academic staff at the University of Karachi called off a three-day strike on August 4, after talks with authorities. While strikers returned to work they plan to maintain daily protests until their grievances are fully resolved.

Teachers and non-academic workers walked out when the university administration failed to pay July salaries, leave encashment since last year, and 10 percent wage increase announced by the government. The strikers condemned the government for not increasing the university grant and not releasing funds in a timely manner.

India: Uttar Pradesh government workers on strike

Over 1.6 million Uttar Pradesh state government employees from 155 departments began a three-day strike on Wednesday following the ongoing refusal of the Samajwadi Party-led state government to honour promises to act on workers' long-pending demands. All government services were affected including hospitals and schools.

The walkout followed a strike over the same issues in July last year. That strike was called off after the government promised to meet workers' demands. Workers want a cashless medical facility, house-rent allowances equal with federal government employees and anganwadi workers, cooks, computer operators and others classified as government employees.

The strike was called by the State Employees Joint Council and Uttar Pradesh Secondary Teachers Federation and was supported by more than 250 employees and teachers' organisations.

Lucknow police assault protesting sanitation workers

Several workers were severely injured on Wednesday when police physically attacked a demonstration by hundreds of Lucknow Municipal Council (LMC) sanitation workers. Workers responded by pelting police with garbage and mud. Darulshafa Road was closed during the confrontation.

The sanitary workers want the council to begin making contractors permanent and remove delays in appointments. The workers have threatened to begin indefinite strike action.

New Delhi sanitation workers end strike

Sanitation workers in the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (Noida), on the outskirts of New Delhi, returned to work on August 5 after a one-week walkout over various demands. Nearly 1,600 contract workers struck on July 29 and held a continuous sit down protest outside Noida's offices.

The authority rejected the workers' demands for permanency but agreed to pay them their salary directly and pay an additional 2.5 percent commission to contractors. Workers will also now get uniforms, shoes and other equipment for cleaning the city streets.

Karnataka cement factory workers strike

Up to 3,500 contract workers at ACC Cement, India's largest cement manufacturer, in Wadi struck on August 5 demanding a wage increase as per the Cement Wage Board (CWB). A union representative told the media that although the CWB had fixed wages at 550 rupees per day for contract labourers, ACC were only paying just 250 rupees (\$US3.75).

The company had failed to honour its agreement to increase wages and include contract workers under CWB coverage during a tripartite meeting of the Joint Labour Commissioner in February. Of the 4,200 employees in

the cement factory, only 700 are permanent. The 3,500 contractors, some of whom have worked at the plant for 20 years, do not receive any CWB benefits.

Telangana university teachers walk out over delayed wages

Teachers at the Osmania University in Hyderabad walked out on Monday and demonstrated outside the administration block over the non-payment of July wages. A spokesman from the Osmania University Teachers Association said this had never happened before and that strike action would continue until the July wages were paid. Their action followed a protest over the issue on August 5.

Tamil Nadu rural care workers protest

Rural health care (anganwadi) workers staged a protest in Tiruchi on August 8 with a charter of ten demands. These include the filling of vacant posts, a monthly minimum wage of 26,000 rupees (\$US390) and 300,000 and 200,000 rupees for anganwadi workers and helpers respectively on retirement. The rural care employees also complained that they were being forced to work for other government departments. The protest was called by the Tamil Nadu Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Association.

Tamil Nadu liquor store workers protest

Workers of state-owned TASMAL liquor outlets in Tamil Nadu protested in Coimbatore on August 5 to demand permanent employment and deployment to other departments of the state government. The liquor outlet workers fear they will be terminated as the state government begins phasing in its liquor prohibition policy. The government has already closed five shops in Coimbatore.

Workers complained that while the government had provided alternative employment in some districts, it was only temporary or contract employment. The workers are demanding permanent employment in other government departments.

Australian border protection workers strike

Thousands of Department of Immigration and Border Protection employees, who are members of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), began three days of protected industrial action on August 11. Strike action occurred at airports, sea ports, container examination terminals, client services, visa processing centres and international mail centres.

Border protection workers are in dispute with the federal Liberal-National government over a new enterprise agreement (EA). Tens of thousands of federal public sector workers are involved in a long-running enterprise agreement dispute with the federal government.

After two-and-a-half years of negotiations, almost 75 percent of the total

federal public sector workforce of 160,000 still do not have a new enterprise agreement. At least 100,000 government employees have not had a pay increase for three years.

The Turnbull government has ordered that all federal public sector EAs must restrict annual wage increases to between 1.5 and 2 percent and be combined with cuts in current conditions. There will no back pay from when the last EA ended, the equivalent of a three-year pay freeze.

New South Wales railway controllers walk out

Following two-hour stoppages on August 5, employees of the federally-run Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC), which controls outer-Sydney train movements in New South Wales (NSW), walked out for 24 hours on August 6. Passenger and cargo services in country NSW were affected, while Hunter Valley coal trains were cancelled during the strikes.

The enterprise agreement dispute involved over 580 workers of four unions, Professionals Australia, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, the Australian Services Union and the Electrical Trades Union. The unions and ARTC have been in discussions for 18 months.

Workers want 4 percent annual pay increases and conditions from their previous agreement rolled over into a new four-year agreement. The unions claimed that improvements, including fairer rostering, improved consultation with workers and better dispute resolution, could be implemented at no cost to the corporation.

ARTC has insisted that the future agreement is within the government's 1.5 to 2 percent annual pay rise cap with cuts to existing entitlements. Workers rejected an offer made in December and are set to reject management's latest offer. There is no provision for back-pay in the latest offer, more employees will not be covered by the EA and the current consultation clause has been removed.

ARTC is a federal government-owned corporation, which manages and maintains the freight rail networks in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. Workers are concerned that the corporation will be privatised and the unions want clauses in the new EA that protect wages and conditions and improve redundancy and redeployment protection if it is sold.

Melbourne casino workers demand improved weekend wages

Hundreds of workers from Crown Melbourne protested in the Victorian state capital last night to demand better late- and over-night pay rates on weekends. The demonstration is part of a long-running enterprise dispute with the company.

The casino workers—games dealers, restaurant workers, security guards and hotel staff—are paid the same rates, irrespective of when they work. United Voice, the union that covers the workers, has called for new allowances of up to an additional \$3 an hour for all weekend shifts falling between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m.

Crown Melbourne, which employs over 5,000 workers and is the largest single site employer in Victoria, made \$662 million profit last year, a 30 percent increase on the previous year.





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