

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

27 August 2016

Asia

South Korean auto union reaches tentative agreement with Hyundai Motor

After 19 rounds of negotiations, the union representing 48,000 workers at Hyundai Motor reached a tentative contract deal on Wednesday, ending a series of limited strikes since July. Workers will now vote on the deal.

Under the proposed Hyundai-union agreement, workers' basic monthly pay will be increased by 58,000 won (\$52), each worker will receive a one-off payment of 3.3 million won and granted bonuses and incentive payments worth 3½ times their basic monthly wage. Workers will also receive 10 Hyundai shares.

No agreement was reached on company plans to cut salaries for employees nearing retirement age. Hyundai wanted to slash the wages of workers aged 59 and 60 by 10 percent. The union called for retention of current arrangements, which imposes a wage freeze on 59-year-olds and a 10 percent pay cut for 60-year-olds.

South Korean shipbuilding workers hold more strikes

Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) suspended production at its Gunsan yard for four hours on Friday in response to strike action by unionised employees in protest against government and industry efforts to "reshape" the nation's yards.

In June, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye called for "bone-crushing" overhauls of the three shipbuilding companies, HHI, Samsung Heavy Industries (SHI) and Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (DSME).

The latest walkout followed strikes over the same issue at HHI's main shipyard in Ulsan on 20 July and 22 July. On Thursday, union members at the Hyundai Mipo Dockyard, which is owned by HHI, voted to participate in joint strike action with HHI employees on August 31.

The proposed restructure includes massive cuts to wages, jobs and conditions. Samsung plans to axe 1,500 positions this year and reduce 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.

Bangladesh: Tea garden workers strike over starving colleagues

Thousands of workers at 23 tea gardens in Habiganj district, north-east Bangladesh, stopped work on Monday to demand wages and rations for 400 permanent workers and their families at the Boikunthapur Tea Estate in Madhabpur upazila.

Boikunthapur Tea Estate workers, who have not been paid wages and food supplements for 15 weeks, demonstrated near the deputy commissioner's office on August 12 appealing for emergency food relief. The workers decided to strike indefinitely after the tea garden owners failed to meet a promise to pay wages by August 11.

Members of Bangladesh Tea Labour Union, Lashkarpur Valley unit have pledged to strike in sympathy with the Boikunthapur Tea Estate workers if the authorities continue to ignore their plight. There are around 2,400 workers and their family members at the Boikunthapur tea garden who are surviving on liquid extract from boiled rice, mashed tea leaves and chilli peppers.

Bangladesh water transport workers strike

Around 200,000 Bangladesh Water Transport Workers' Federation (BWTWF) members walked off the job indefinitely on Monday to demand a minimum monthly wage of 10,000 taka (\$US127.5), increased compensation for workers killed in accidents, and higher overtime pay, festival bonuses and other benefits.

Nearly all passenger services and cargo movements from coastal and river ports, such as Chittagong, Chandpur and Munshiganj, have ceased. It is the third time this year water transport workers have taken nationwide strike action.

The BWTWF called off a nationwide strike in January after vessel owners and the government promised workers' demands would be "considered." A six-day strike in April was cancelled by the federation after accepting the vessel owners' offer of a 9,000-taka minimum monthly wage and revision of the salary structure. The minimum wage was last increased in 2013, from 3,000 to 4,100 taka.

Chittagong police attack garment workers

At least 100 people were injured on Wednesday when police violently attacked a garment workers' march in Chittagong. Police used batons, teargas and rubber bullets to disperse the demonstrating workers. Around 100 protesters were arrested. Six workers were hospitalised and many others received medical attention on the spot.

Asian Apparels workers walked out the day before and demonstrated outside the factory to protest verbal abuse and "misbehavior" against

female workers by a manager. Management told the strikers to return to the company head office the following day but instead of talks the workers were attacked by police.

India: Meghalaya teachers on strike

Around 14,000 teachers from 4,500 government-aided schools in India's north-eastern state of Meghalaya walked out on a 14-day strike on Monday to protest the non-payment of wages. They have also called for their services to be taken over by the government, which would mean job security and equal pay with government school teachers.

The teachers have formed a Joint Action Committee of All Teachers' Association of Meghalaya (JATCAM) and said that they would remain on strike until September 5, which is Teachers' Day in India.

Tamil Nadu village nurses hold hunger strike

Village health nurses in Tirunelveli held a one-day fast on August 22 to demand the filling of 2,500 vacancies, adequate medicine supplies in health centres and more health centres. The nurses are members of the Tamil Nadu Government Village Health Nurses Association and Public Health Nurses Federation.

Pakistan: PIMS doctors and paramedics protest

Doctors and paramedical staff at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in Islamabad demonstrated at the institute on August 22 to demand wage increases, benefits and reestablishment of PIMS' status as a government run hospital.

The doctors and paramedics had planned to strike in the outpatients department but it was called off by the PIMS Restoration Movement on Monday after government authorities claimed that the hospital's original status would be restored. Parliamentary legislation to that effect has been pending since 2014.

When PIMS became an autonomous body its workforce were no longer considered government employees and deprived of wage rises, timely promotions and other government employees' benefits.

Cambodian brewery workers strike

Cambrew, Cambodia's largest beer manufacturer, stood down 1,150 workers at its Sihanoukville factory on Tuesday in response to strike action by 600 warehouse employees. The striking workers are picketing the factory.

The walkout began on August 20, following the sacking of a warehouse manager accused of taking bribes. The warehouse employees, who are members of the Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation, are demanding the manager's reinstatement.

Former shoe factory workers in Kampong Speu protest

More than 200 former workers from the closed Victor Handbag Industrial factory in Kampong Speu, Cambodia demonstrated outside the Samrong Tong district hall on Tuesday. They demanded the government speed up its investigation into the factory's closure so that workers can receive some of the money they are owed from the sale of the remaining machines and building materials.

A spokesman from the Collective Union of Movement of Workers said over 1,000 workers were impacted when the factory—an Adidas supplier—was closed. The company initially claimed it was suspending operations for two months—March and April—while it worked to secure more orders from abroad.

Employees of the factory were only given \$24 each, with the owner promising to reopen the factory in May. When workers returned in May, the factory doors were shut and they were told the owner had fled the country.

A Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia representative has told the media that at least 70 garment factories recently closed due to major falls in overseas orders.

Australia and the Pacific

South Australian metro train drivers stop work

Metro train drivers on the Belair line in Adelaide, the South Australian capital, stopped work for four hours on Thursday in a long-running dispute with the state Labor government for a new enterprise agreement. Two four-hour strikes planned for yesterday's morning- and afternoon-peak periods were cancelled by the Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) after emergency talks with the government.

Adelaide Metro drivers, train controllers, station staff and ticket inspectors have not had a pay increase for nearly three years since their old agreement expired in December 2013.

Adelaide Metro has offered 2.5 percent annual pay increases over three years but wants the agreement to include a provision allowing forced redundancies. The union has called for a higher pay rise, better rostering arrangements and improved job security provisions.

Drivers took limited strike action and imposed work bans in July last year over the same issue. The RTBU has accused the government of using stalling tactics and sending "consultants" who lacked the power to make decisions to negotiating meetings.

Victoria: Sacked CUB workers maintain picket

Carlton & United Breweries (CUB) maintenance workers are maintaining a "community protest" outside company's Abbotsford plant in Melbourne. The company outsourced its factory maintenance work to a new contractor Programmed Skilled in June, effectively sacking its entire maintenance workforce of 32 fitters and 22 electricians.

Programmed Skilled offered to reemploy the workers on the minimum safety net award rate, plus 50 cents—just \$19.50 an hour. The impact on these 24 hours a day, 7 days a week maintenance workers amounted to a 65 percent reduction in real wages. The workers refused the offer and set up a picket at the plant.

While Programmed Skilled has brought in semi-skilled workers to

maintain the plant's machinery, production has declined by around 70 percent, forcing the labour-hire company to begin discussions with the sacked workers' unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union.

On Thursday, around 200 day and afternoon production-line workers at the plant held a three-hour stop work meeting to discuss the dispute. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union and United Voice members said workers were concerned about safety standards at the plant and other problems posed by the use of temporary semi-skilled maintenance workers. All production at the plant ceased during the meeting.

New South Wales bus drivers stop work

Busways drivers will walk off the job next Monday during the morning peak travel period to attend a stop work meeting in their dispute for a new enterprise agreement. Busways is privately owned and operates buses in western and southern Sydney and on the Central Coast, north of Sydney. The drivers' action followed several fare-free days over the last two weeks and a four-hour stop work meeting on August 17.

The transport Workers Union (TWU) and Busways have been negotiating a new EA since March to replace the agreement that expired on June 30. A TWU spokesman said that the company wants an agreement that does not protect drivers' pay and conditions or match the one currently used in the industry.

Busways employs over 1,400 people and maintains a fleet of 700 buses on 100 routes in Sydney and on the Central Coast. Only 30 percent of its employees are union members.

Melbourne Town Hall council workers impose bans

Australian Services Union (ASU) members at the Melbourne Town Hall implemented work bans on Thursday in a dispute over a new enterprise agreement. The nine-day bans include not reading emails after midday, non-participation in meetings and not issuing parking fines. The workers were told they would lose pay because of their action.

About two-thirds of the 1,300-strong workers rejected management's proposed offer last month. Council has proposed a 2.5 percent annual pay rise for three years, a \$1,000 bonus, extra leave for secondary carers and a \$500 annual superannuation bonus for all female employees. An ASU spokesman claimed that council management had not fairly negotiated voluntary redundancies, pay classifications and other issues.



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