

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

3 September 2016

South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers reject union deal

An overwhelming majority of Hyundai Motor workers this week rejected a new pay deal organised by their union and company on August 24. The 78 percent “no” vote followed 14 partial walkouts since July and 19 rounds of negotiations.

The union-company deal offered a monthly pay increase of 58,000 won (\$52), a one-off payment of 3.3 million won to each worker, bonuses and incentive payments worth 3½ times their basic monthly wage and 10 Hyundai shares. Workers complained that the offer was less than last year, which gave an 85,000 won monthly pay increase and 20 company shares to each employee.

Hyundai Motor workers were also concerned about plans to cut the salaries of employees nearing retirement age. The company wants to slash the wages of workers aged 59 and 60 by 10 percent.

The union has called for retention of current “wage peak system” arrangements, which impose a wage freeze on 59-year-olds and a 10 percent pay cut for 60-year-olds. A union representative claimed that the lower wage deal was a “compromise” in exchange for the company maintaining the existing wage-peak system.

Cambodia: Garment workers in Takeo province strike

Following a week of strike action, 1,000 workers from the Garbotex Trading Company factory in Takeo province’s Daun Keo town moved their protest into the town centre and blockaded a street demanding that the town authorities assist in their dispute for better conditions. While factory management have accepted eight of the workers’ ten demands they rejected the main demand—that a supervisor who workers say is unnecessarily cruel be dismissed.

The garment workers claim that the supervisor “looks down on us like dogs” and fires employees she does not like, “without any purpose or reason.” The provincial governor called on the workers to end their protests and wait for a decision from the arbitration council.

Sacked garment workers in Phnom Penh demonstrate

Hundreds of sacked workers from the Dongdu Textile factory in Phnom Penh’s Dangkor district are protesting outside the labour ministry office demanding that the government intervene and secure the reinstatement of 800 sacked employees. The workers were terminated over a month ago for demanding better working conditions.

The garment workers claim the factory owner has ignored an arbitration council directive ordering reinstatement. Workers handed a petition to a labour ministry official who told them that their protest was illegal and ordered them to leave. Workers refused saying they had already been fired and did not fear arrest.

Philippines: Manila light rail workers protest

Sacked Manila light rail workers and supporters demonstrated outside the Department of Transportation (DOT) in Ortigas on August 25 to demand reinstatement of 41 workers by the Light Rail Manila Corporation.

The workers allege that they were dismissed in June to make up for the government-run company’s losses. Light rail tickets sales are managed by a private company. The protesters also demanded that the government rescind all onerous contracts with private businesses in the country’s railway system.

India: Gurgaon auto-rickshaw workers end strike

Gurgaon auto-rickshaw drivers called off a two-day strike on August 30 after police accepted some of their demands. Close to 40,000 drivers struck on August 29 in protest against a police “enforcement drive.” Since the “enforcement drive” began on August 17 over 1,800 auto-rickshaws have been impounded for various traffic rule violations and not carrying valid documents. The strike ended after police agreed to give the drivers five days to get their documents in order and resolve other traffic violations.

Tamil Nadu non-teaching staff protest

Non-teaching staff of Anna University Constituent Engineering College in Konam protested inside the principal’s chamber on Tuesday over the non-payment of allowances and benefits.

Workers recruited after 2007 said they had never received allowances, monetary benefits and privileges given to other government employees. Though the university principal held talks with the workers, they were not prepared to accept any compromise and the protest continued into the evening.

Tamil Nadu noon meal workers protest

Tamil Nadu Noon Meal Employees Association members in Ramanathapuram and Dindigul held street demonstrations on Tuesday over a series of demands.

These include the filling of existing vacancies, time-scale pay, a 3,500-rupee (\$US52.3) pension and termination payment of 300,000 rupees for organisers and 200,000 for assistants. The majority of noon-meal workers are women on very low wages who provide meals for impoverished children at government schools.

Tamil Nadu agricultural workers demonstrate

All India Agriculture Workers Union members protested on August 26 in Erode to demand the eradication of poverty and longer work contracts under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS). The workers want their employment extended from 100 to 200 days a year. The employment scheme is supposed to guarantee landless labourers and middle farmers 100 days' work a year for a minimum wage. The workers insist that 100 days of work is not long enough.

Their other demands include provision of new family cards, increased membership of the Farmers' Protection Scheme, housing plots for poor farmers, an increase in the daily wage to 400 rupees and guaranteed weekly payments.

While the Indian government claims that the meagre assistance provided by MNREGS helps the rural poor, the scheme lacks funding. MNREGS workers from three villages in Tamil Nadu demonstrated in Thiruvannamalai in July after not being paid their wages for six weeks.

Punjab university contract workers on strike

Around 750 contract workers from the Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (GADVASU) in Ludhiana, Punjab have been on strike since August 22 to demand permanency and paid full entitlements. They are currently holding a hunger strike and picket at the university's main gate.

The contract workers also want provision of a Provident Fund, Employee State Insurance and compensation for the family of a deceased worker who died on June 26 during duty hours. They are also protesting the transfer of two union office bearers after they led a protest demanding compensation for the family of the deceased worker.

Bangladeshi petrol pump operators and tanker drivers strike

At least 5,600 petrol filling stations throughout Bangladesh closed for nine hours on Sunday after a strike by Bangladesh Petrol Pump and Tank-Lorry Owners-Workers Unity Council members. They have issued a 12-point charter of demands, including an increase in sales commission and a rollback of increased leasing charges.

Union representatives allege that although the authorities had promised to fulfil their demands within three months, nothing had been done in the

past six months. They said that commission rates had not been updated since 2011.

Union reduces Bangladeshi water transport workers' pay claim

Water transport workers ended a four-day national strike on August 26 after the union made a deal with the government and vessel owners. Over 200,000 passenger and cargo vessel workers struck demanding a minimum monthly wage of 10,000 taka (\$US127.5), increased compensation for workers killed in accidents, higher overtime pay, festival bonuses and other benefits. The minimum wage was last increased in 2013, from 3,000 to 4,100 taka. The Bangladesh Water Transport Workers' Federation reduced their minimum wage claim to 9,000 taka (\$114) per month.

A six-day strike in April was cancelled by the union after accepting the vessel owners' same offer of a 9,000-taka minimum monthly wage and revision of the salary structure. The employers never honoured the agreement.

Pakistan: Peshawar teaching hospital doctors walk out

Doctors at the Mardan Medical Complex (MMC) in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa boycotted duties on August 25 in protest against the withdrawal of their Health Professional Allowance (HPA). The out patients department was closed and scheduled bedside visits were cancelled. The doctors said they would maintain their boycott and other protests but would exempt emergency services.

The protests began after certain hospitals were reclassified as Medical Teaching Institutions and doctors' HPA payments stopped. The doctors were also directed to return previous HPA payments. Paramedics, nurses and doctors in all other government hospitals facilities receive the allowance.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa power utility workers protest

Peshawar Electric Supply Company workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province demonstrated outside the company's headquarters in Peshawar on August 25. They were demanding increased basic pay scales for technical staff, meter readers, linemen and inventory control workers.

Punjab brick kiln workers on strike

Brick kiln workers in Toba Tek Singh district, Punjab province began a hunger strike on Monday to demand minimum wage payments. Under the current law kiln owners are supposed to pay 1,036 rupees (\$US9.89) per 1,000 bricks made by a worker. Toba Tek kiln owners, however, are paying just 600 to 700 rupees per 1,000 bricks.

The strike is part of a long running campaign for better working conditions for kiln workers, who are organised by the Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union.

Brick-kiln workers are one of the most exploited sections of the Pakistani working class and subjected to bonded labour and police and thug attacks. Kiln owners have said that they will not pay the minimum legal pay, claiming that they are already paying the highest rates within the region.

Sindh province university workers strike

Academic and non-academic staff of major universities in Sindh province held a one-day strike on Wednesday. They are demanding payment of overdue wages, a halt to continued government interference in the universities and the proper allocation of funds. The Federation of All Pakistan Universities Academic Staff Association has also called for payment of bonuses and better and equal facilities for all universities.

The Karachi University Teachers Society also joined the strike demanding unpaid wages and leave payments. The government was given until September 9 to meet their demands.

Frequent delays in wage payments and increasing cuts to tertiary institutions are part of escalating attacks by the Pakistan federal government and provincial administrations in line austerity measures and privatisation demands from the International Monetary Fund.

Australia: Bureau of Meteorology workers implement bans

Following three years of failed negotiations with the federal Liberal-National government for a new work agreement, Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) staff across the country have begun a fortnight of industrial action. This includes bans on responding to media requests or updating the BoM Twitter feed, with the exception of severe weather events. Internal phone calls and responses to emails will also be affected.

BoM staff walked out in March, along with tens of thousands of other federal government workers in their long-running dispute. 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 (EA). 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 cap annual wage increases at 2 percent and be combined with cuts in current conditions. There will be no back pay from when the last EA ended, the equivalent of a three-year pay freeze.

Workers in over 100 federal departments have rejected government offers that eliminate existing rights, including family-friendly conditions. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) and other unions have reduced their original pay demand from 4 percent annual pay increases for three years to between 2.5 and 3 percent with no loss of conditions.

Queensland coal miners on strike

Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at Anglo American's German Creek coal mine in the Bowen Basin, Central Queensland walked off the job on August 29 in a dispute over a proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). The previous EBA, covering 140 workers, expired in early April, 2014. The union has held 16 meetings

with the company since then.

The union wants an end to casualisation of the permanent workforce, improved redundancy processes, accident pay consistent with the coal industry standard, and maintenance of the current rate of remuneration. The union claimed that members have already suffered a considerable reduction in income with roster changes implemented last year.

In a move to break the strike, the mine operator Capcoal has engaged labour hire company WorkPac to advertise for excavator operators. According to the union, they are being offered \$60 an hour, plus an extra \$2 per hour back-paid if they stay on for three months, along with free accommodation and meals.

New South Wales bus drivers continue strike action

Transport Workers Union (TWU) members of the privately owned commuter transport company Busways have called a 24-hour strike for Monday September 5. The planned action follows four-hour stoppages last week and on Monday in Sydney's western suburbs and on the Central Coast. Drivers did not turn on the automatic ticket registering machines on Friday allowing passengers free travel.

The TWU and Busways have been negotiating a new enterprise agreement since March to replace the previous agreement which expired on June 30.

A TWU representative said a Busways pay offer was not in line with current industry standards. It gives no guarantee of permanent work, provides no company pay rise until 2018, forces drivers to answer anonymous complaints with no representation allowed at disciplinary meetings. Busways wants to be the sole appointer of workplace representatives for drivers to take their leave when it suits the company.

Papua New Guinea: Mt Hagen doctors on strike

Doctors at the Western Highland's Mt Hagen hospital walked out on August 24 in an extended dispute over alleged mismanagement and corrupt practices at the hospital and the provincial health authority. Doctors, nurses and senior staff stopped work in March and again in June with a list of claims.

A petition to PNG in March revealed a range of major problems. These included no microbiology unit in the hospital for 13 years; closure of the operating theatre for eight months; no blood test department for six months; and the blood bank crippled for a year.

The government has suspended the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority and appointed an interim hospital board and administration. The health minister has ordered doctors to return to work under the threat of dismissal and legal action. Meanwhile patients have been transferred to other Western Highlands hospitals.



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