

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 October 2016

South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers escalate strike action

Production at South Korea's largest automaker, Hyundai Motors, stopped for a full day on Monday due to a walkout by thousands of assembly line workers in a dispute over annual wage negotiations. It was the first full-day walkout in 12 years. Their action followed three days of strikes last week, ranging from six to eight hours, adding to 16 partial walkouts since wage negotiations began on May 17.

Monday's strike stopped Hyundai Motor's assembly lines in three plants in Ulsan, Jeonju and Asan, disrupting the production of some 7,000 vehicles worth 160 billion won (\$144 million). Workers planned to strike for the rest of the week on a two-shift basis for six hours a day.

While the union and management struck a provisional wage contract late last month, workers overwhelmingly rejected the deal. The company 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 3.5 times their basic monthly wage and 10 Hyundai shares. Workers said it was less than last year's offer and were also concerned about company plans to slash the wages of all workers aged 59 and 60 by 10 percent.

The union wants retention of the current "wage peak system" arrangements, which impose a wage freeze on 59-year-olds and a 10 percent pay cut for 60-year-olds. The union claimed that the lower wage offer was a "compromise" in exchange for maintenance of the current wage-peak system.

South Korean government workers strike over performance-based pay

Thousands of government employees covered by the Korean Railway Workers Union, the Seoul Metro Union and the Korean Health and Medical Workers Union walked out for the day on Tuesday to protest the expansion of a performance-based pay system. Around 2,000 members of the Federation of Korean Public Industry Trade Unions demonstrated in Seoul on September 22, while members of the 100,000-strong Korean Financial Industry Union (KFIU) walked out the next day and rallied at the Seoul World Cup Stadium in protest against the expansion of the merit-based pay system in the financial sector.

Finance workers are concerned that their transformation from permanent to full-time contract employees and the imposition of a merit-based pay system will make it easy for management to sack staff. The government, which said it intends to proceed with the merit-based system, has threatened strikers that the "no work, no pay" principle would apply.

Workers at the Seoul National University Hospital say they will be measured based on medical fees they generate, which will push them to make patients undergo unnecessary tests and treatments, and force them to

charge fees for services that were originally free.

The walkouts were part of a campaign by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Korean Trade Unions over the merit-based pay system.

Garment workers in Burma end two-month strike

The two-month strike by workers at the Japanese-owned Sakura garment factory in Hlaing Tharayar, Yangon region ended on Monday after a meeting between workers and management with government officials. However, the company reneged on the agreement when workers returned to work.

Over 300 workers walked out in late July when management announced increased daily production targets. Management terminated the strikers. Although government officials ordered the factory to rehire all striking workers in early September with no loss of pay, around 170 refused to return until the issue of increased production quotas was resolved.

In talks last weekend with government officials, the company agreed to allow the remaining protesting workers to resume their jobs, with the former baseline production targets. However, when they returned, management said there was only work for those who accepted the new quotas and all workers had seven days to sign new contracts with "consolations and compromises."

India: Honda motorcycle workers maintain hunger strike

Five sacked workers from the Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) plant in Tapukara, Rajasthan are maintaining a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, begun on September 19. One worker fainted on Monday and was forcefully taken to hospital by police but he refused treatment and returned to the protest.

The protesters are facing several police charges following a strike at the factory by 4,000 workers in February to demand re-instatement of 10 permanent workers and the re-employment of 400 contract workers whose terms had ended. Workers also demanded registration of their union, the HMSI 2F Kamgar Union Tapukara.

Police attacked workers in the plant, causing many injuries. More than a hundred strikers were arrested and charges were concocted against the union leaders, ranging from attempted murder to looting and rioting. At least 100 permanent and 2,000 contract workers were sacked.

The hunger strikers issued a statement listing three demands: that all suspended and terminated Honda workers be reinstated, all criminal charges be immediately withdrawn and all trade union rights guaranteed.

HMSI workers have been trying to register their union, without success, since August 2015. Prior to the February strike, the company had systematically sacked over 800 workers accused of involvement in union activity.

Uranium mining and processing workers in Jharkhand on strike

Hundreds of workers from three unions covering the state-owned Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) walked off the job for an indefinite period on Tuesday over a wage dispute. Production at all UCIL units in Jharkhand has stopped. UCIL operates six underground mines and an open cut mine in Jharkhand, as well as two processing plants.

A spokesman from the Uranium Kamgaar Union (UKU) said a memorandum of understanding for wage revision was signed between UCIL and the unions in March but was never implemented. He said workers unanimously agreed to strike after a 12-hour meeting with management on Sunday failed to resolve the issue.

Unions involved in the strike are UKU, Singhbhum Uranium Mazdoor Union and Jadugora Labour Union.

Jharkhand power utility workers strike

Workers at Jharkhand State Power (JUVNL) walked out on a three-day strike on Tuesday to press for long-pending demands. These include promotion for eligible fourth grade employees into vacant Grade III posts, payment of overtime pending for seven years, permanency of man-days workers and provision of two-day special leave for female workers.

A representative from the Jharkhand Rajya Bجلي Kamgar Union said management agreed to consider their demands nine months ago.

Striking sanitation workers attacked by Ahmedabad police

Over 600 contract sanitation workers from the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), New West Zone have been on strike since August 22 to demand permanent jobs. Police baton-charged workers on Monday as they demonstrated in front of the AMC office. Around 170 were arrested on September 18 when they participated in a cultural program of song and dance held in their support outside the Vastrapur Lake area's open air theatre.

The AMC has begun firing striking workers and hiring strike-breaking contractors, under police guard, to remove hundreds of tonnes of garbage accumulating in the city.

The AMC employs around 6,000 contracted sanitation workers on a wage of 6,000 rupees (\$US90) a month. Many have been on a contract basis for 15 to 20 years. Despite several protests in the past, the AMC refuses to make them permanent. Strikers say their demands for permanent jobs and wage increases are according to law. Under the slogan, "No Rights, No Work," they have refused to go back to work until their demands are met.

Ahmedabad bus drivers and conductors on strike

Contract bus drivers and conductors of the Ahmedabad Municipal Transport Service (AMTS) have been on strike since September 25 to demand a wage increase. Of the 800 AMTS buses, 250 are off the road due to the strike. Workers are angry that the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) is challenging a ruling by the industrial court supporting their pay claim.

Over 2,000 workers complained that they were paid a meagre 4,000 rupees (\$US60) per month ever since being recruited in 2006—well below regular workers' pay. AMC's challenge to the labour tribunal ruling was due to be heard in the Gujarat high court on Thursday.

Punjab government employees boycott work

Punjab state ministerial office workers, including from the offices of Deputy Commissioner, Sub-Divisional Magistrate and Tehsildhar (tax collector), stopped work on Tuesday and held sit-down protests outside their offices in Bathinda with a raft of demands.

Their main demands were payment of dearness allowance arrears since January, the rollback of austerity measures of only basic pay and no allowances for all fresh recruits for the first two years of their service, and the filling of vacant posts. Other demands were transfer of arrears of various allowances, implementation of the old pension scheme for workers recruited after 2004, full implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission and the reinstatement of allowances.

Tamil Nadu nuclear power plant workers strike

Technicians and supervisors at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) in Koodankulam, Tirunelveli district stopped work for the day on Tuesday to demand payment of Annual Physical Progress allowances. Workers alleged they had not been paid the annual incentive allowance since 2013, despite repeated formal notifications issued by individuals and trade unions.

Uttarakhand cooperative bank workers strike

Around 1,000 employees at government cooperative banks in 11 districts in Uttarakhand, with over 100,000 customers, struck with several demands on September 23. The Cooperative Bank Employees Union (CBEU) and the Cooperative Bank Employees Association (CBEA) have submitted four demands to the government that include pay revision, state-wide central online connectivity in banks, recruiting 350 people into vacant posts and pay revision from April, with revisions every five years.

Pakistan: FATA government teachers protest

Government teachers in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northwestern Pakistan demonstrated in front of the Peshawar Press Club on Tuesday to demand unpaid wages. The protest was also a part of an ongoing campaign for service upgrades and risk allowance.

FATA teachers protested in Islamabad and other parts of the country in December over these issues. Demonstrators said that while teachers in settled areas in Pakistan were upgraded four years ago, FATA teachers had been ignored. A representative from the All Teachers Associations-Fata Mohmand Agency said FATA teachers were not provided with the facilities and incentives other teachers received.

At Tuesday's protest, teachers also accused authorities of ignoring a Peshawar High Court ruling directing the reinstatement of 67 sacked colleagues.

Sindh government health workers on strike

Several hundred Sindh government health workers have been on strike since September 22 demanding 14 months of unpaid wages. They held a protest in front of the Mithi Press Club on Sunday calling on the Sindh Chief Minister to respond to their continuing protests and release funds for their salaries. A government spokesman condemned the workers, saying they were bringing a bad name to the department's "sincere efforts" to resolve the issue.

Australian Border Force workers join rolling stoppages

In a long running dispute with the federal Liberal-National government for a new work agreement, Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) workers at Australia's international airports, cruise ship terminals and cargo facilities commenced two weeks of protected industrial action on Monday. Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members began walking off the job in 30-minute blocks at various sites without any prior warning.

More than 80 percent of DIBP staff voted in March against an agreement that would have seen rights and conditions stripped away in exchange for a pay rise of just 1 percent per year. A CPSU spokesman said the government's proposed agreement would have cut workers' existing rights and conditions and cut some workers' current pay.

DIBP workers are among the nearly 75 percent of the 160,000-strong federal public sector workforce who still have no new enterprise agreement (EA) after nearly three years of union negotiations. At least 100,000 government employees have had no pay increase for three years.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's government ordered that all federal public sector EAs must cap annual wage increases at 2 percent and be combined with cuts in conditions. There will be no back pay from when the last EA ended, the equivalent of a three-year pay freeze.

The CPSU and other public service unions have reduced their original pay demand from 4 percent annual increases for three years to between 2.5 and 3 percent.

Papua New Guinea health support workers to hold strike ballot

The 3,000-strong PNG Health Support Workers Association has been given permission from the Labour Industrial Relations Department to conduct a secret ballot to take strike action against the Department of Personnel Management (DPM) for not responding to their long-outstanding log of claims. An association spokesman said it submitted a

log of claims last year but received no feedback from the DPM.

The claims include an upgrade of job ratings by one grade, accommodation allowances, a subsidiary allowance of 400 kina and leave fares. Other demands are for the health support service allowance of 25 percent, 100 kina per fortnight for mental health allowance, insurance cover, overtime and risk allowances. The association also accused DPM of not paying staff according to their qualifications.



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