

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 October 2016

## South Korean truckers end strikes

Unionised truckers ended strike action on Wednesday after the government made an unspecified agreement to negotiate their demands.

About 15,000 members of Cargo Truckers Solidarity walked off the job on October 10 to protest the government's "cargo transport market development plan" which will allow more small freight trucks to operate. The truckers fear that additional competition would cut freight rates and lead to job losses. About a third of freight movements around the country were affected.

## Korean Rail workers maintain three-week strike

Nearly 7,500 members of the Korean Rail Corporation (Korail) walked off the job on September 27. At least 40 percent of Korail workers are on strike, taking out about half the nation's freight train capacity. Passenger services in Seoul have been reduced by 10 percent.

Korail workers, along with other government employees, walked out demanding President Park Geun-hye's government drop plans to expand a merit-based salary system for government employees. Salaries have been set by seniority in the past. Some of the government strikers returned to work after two days.

Korail has warned the strikers that unless they returned to work before Friday they would face "serious consequences." The company has suspended 218 strikers and begun recruiting 500 additional permanent workers, the first time it has added permanent staff members during strike action.

## Seoul metro rail workers suspend strike

Striking Seoul Metro (tracks 1 to 4) and Seoul Metro Rapid Transport Corporation (tracks 5 to 8) employees returned to work on Wednesday afternoon after walking out the morning after wage talks with management failed. Their union suspend the strike without resolution claiming concerns over public opposition following the death of a passenger during the strike.

The unions at the two subway operators had launched a strike on September 27 to join with government employees opposing the expansion of the performance-based wage system. They returned to work two days later after the Seoul Metropolitan Government said the labour unions of five public corporations under Seoul City had struck a deal on the implementation of a merit-based wage system.

## China Airlines flight attendants resume protests

Hundreds of flight attendants from Taiwan carrier China Airlines (CAL) demonstrated in front of the company headquarters in Taipei on October 14. The attendants accused management of abrogating an agreement signed by the Taoyuan Flight Attendants Union (FTAU) and CAL to end a five-hour strike in June. Protesters waved banners and pelted the building with eggs.

The June walkout was to oppose CAL's proposed new contract, which the airline asked them to sign in May. The contract would increase their working hours to 220 per month and cut rest time from 24 to 12 hours on certain long-haul flights. All flight attendants would have to report for duty at the nation's main airport in Taoyuan, instead of Songshan Airport in Taipei, but would not be paid for the extra travel time.

Attendants allege that the airline had failed to meet five of seven promises and demanded an answer by the end of October. The FTAU alleged that while the airline followed through with providing a guaranteed 123 days off each year, it cut the number of attendants working on each aircraft from 12 to 10, increasing the workload of those on duty.

## India: Goa mine workers strike

Mine workers at the Bilcholim iron ore mine in Goa have been on strike since October 11 over safety issues and recognition of their union. The mine is operated by Sesa Mining Corporation.

Management suspended operations on October 13 and forced all remaining workers on the site to leave. The open pit mine has 462 direct and 190 indirect employees. All pay has been suspended.

Workers demonstrated in Bilcholim and submitted a memorandum to the Goa chief minister. The miners are demanding no night shift work until safety issues are addressed, an end to the suspension of workers using its hire and fire policy and recognition of the mine workers new union leader.

## Telangana hospital sanitation and security workers walkout

Contract sanitation and security workers at the state run Fever (quarantine) Hospital in Hyderabad walked off the job indefinitely on October 19 over unpaid salaries for the last three months. Workers claimed that Crystal, the contract employer, had been paid by the state government but had not distributed wages.

The hospital has deployed 60 permanent staff to cover their duties. Workers said they would remain on strike until they are paid in full for their July, August and September wages.

### **Kerala taxi drivers strike**

Around 3,500 registered online taxi drivers in Kerala's two largest cities, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram, stopped work for 24 hours on Monday to demand guaranteed work and employee recognition.

The All Kerala Online Taxi Drivers Union is demanding that each vehicle be given at least 20 trip requests on each 12-hour shift or drivers paid a guaranteed minimum wage and recognised as permanent employees of the online taxi company. They have also called for a limit on the number of drivers registered in order to ensure adequate trip requests.

### **Rajasthan nurses walk out**

Hundreds of nurses from five government hospitals and the department of psychiatry in Jaipur walked off the job and demonstrated for two hours outside the Sawai Man Singh (SMS) Hospital on Tuesday to protest a government decision to abolish over 6,800 jobs. A spokesman from the Rajasthan Nurses Association told the media that if the government did not reverse its decision nurses would hold an indefinite sit-down protest at the SMS hospital gates.

### **Odisha contract coal miners strike**

Thousands of Private Contract Workers Association members in the Talcher coalfields struck work on Monday to demand annual bonuses equal to those paid to permanent workers. There are about 10,000 contract workers employed by about 200 private companies in the Talcher coalfield. Operations are managed by Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL), one of eight subsidiaries of state-owned Coal India Limited. The strike stopped coal production at all MCL mines and no coal was distributed to NTPC and Nalco power plants.

The contract workers demanded bonuses on time, double pay for working on Sundays and free medical facilities on par with permanent workers. An Indian National Trade Union Congress spokesman accused the private contract companies of withholding bonuses, which are provided paid contract employers by the MCL.

### **Pakistan: Islamabad teachers continue boycott**

Hundreds of daily wage teachers and non-teaching staff at Islamabad government schools are continuing to boycott duties begun on October 5. They are demanding the payment of four months of unpaid salaries and job permanency. Over 350 workers, including teachers, held a sit-down demonstration on Monday outside the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE), blocking road traffic.

Thousands of education employees, who work in over 400 model

schools and colleges in Islamabad, are kept on a daily wage basis and denied the right to a permanent job and other benefits despite the fact that many have served up to 10 years in their positions.

### **Retired Rawalpindi government workers demand pensions**

Retired government workers in Rawalpindi threatened to block main city roads on October 20 if the government failed to pay eight months' outstanding pensions. The retirees, who are former employees of the Municipal Corporation, District Council, Education Department, Health Department and other government services, are members by the Municipal Workers League. They have threatened to "lock down" the city and also stop all sanitary work.

### **Queensland coal miners strike in eighth week**

Workers at Anglo-American's German Creek coal mine in the Bowen Basin, central Queensland have been on strike since August 22 in a dispute over a proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). The previous EBA, covering 140 workers, expired in early April 2014. The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) has held 17 meetings with the company since then.

The CFMEU has called for an end to casualisation of the workforce, an improved redundancy process, accident pay on par with industry standards and the maintenance of current wage rates. The miners have already suffered a considerable reduction in income due to roster changes implemented last year.

The union has also called for the company to comply with the Coal Mining Safety and Health Act and Regulations regarding physical and psychological impairment, which has been a requirement since 2001. It claims that Anglo is using the current enterprise agreement as an industrial tool to terminate employees suffering from work-related and non-work injuries.

### **New Zealand government hospital doctors strike**

Junior doctors at government hospitals of 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) across New Zealand walked out for 48 hours on Tuesday after ten months of negotiations for "safer rosters and safer hours." DHBs hired senior doctors in an attempt to minimise the effect of the strike.

Doctors claimed that patients were at risk of misdiagnosis if they continued to work strenuous hours, which can extend beyond 60 hours a week. The New Zealand Resident Doctors Association (NZRDA), representing 3,200 doctors, wants major changes to rosters. It wants the seven nights in a row roster changed to a maximum of four nights in a row, followed by three days off, and a move from 12 days in a row, followed by two days off, to rosters with a maximum of 10 days in a row and four days off.

A previous mediation meeting collapsed on September 13 when DHBs offered minimal changes that would take two years to implement. A government spokesman confirmed that resident doctors work an average of 53 hours a week but put forward the excuse for not implementing safer working hours saying that if their demands were met it would cost \$60

million and require the recruitment of another 160 junior doctors.

### **New Zealand ambulance workers issue strike notice**

Ambulance Professionals First, representing over 1,000 workers of St John Ambulance NZ, has issued a strike notice to management in a dispute for a new work agreement. They intend to begin limited action on November 1 with work bans that include a ban on paperwork, disrupting St John's ability to invoice patients. Front line officers will continue to respond to call-outs.

Workers rejected St John's latest offer of a one percent pay rise in return for axing of time-and-a-half for extra work they do due to understaffing. They are also demanding cuts to unsafe extended working hours. St John management offered to resume negotiations.

### **Papua New Guinea hotel workers walk out**

Over 30 internal security personnel at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Port Moresby walked off the job on Tuesday after they were issued termination notices without warning. A spokesman for the strikers said they were notified of work changes two weeks ago but there was no mention of terminations. The workers have organised a meeting with management to resolve the issue.



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