

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

1 July 2017

Indonesia: Strike at Freeport mine extended again

The Chemical, Energy and Mining Workers Union (SP-KEP) representing striking workers at PT Freeport's Grasberg mine in Papua, Indonesia announced last week that the eight-week strike at the mine would be extended for another month. More than 8,000 permanent and contract workers at the mine struck on May 1 after Freeport laid off around 10 percent of its 32,000 workforce while it negotiated a new mining permit with the government.

Freeport claims that the industrial action is illegal and that strikers are absent without leave. The company has issued "voluntary resignation" notices to striking workers, in effect sacking 3,000 full-time employees and 1,000 contractors.

Under new government rules, the company has to obtain a new mining permit, divest a 51 percent stake, build a second copper smelter, relinquish arbitration rights and pay new taxes and royalties. Freeport claims that production at Grasberg could be reduced by 60 percent. Due to the cutback in production several hundred workers have been dismissed from PT Smelting, a joint venture between Freeport and Mitsubishi that processes copper from Grasberg.

PT Freeport Indonesia, the local subsidiary of Phoenix, USA-based Freeport-McMoRan, employs 12,000 permanent workers, and 20,000 contractors. The union accused the company of implementing the terminations as part of its negotiating strategy with the government.

Cambodian garment workers strike

Around 1,100 workers from the International Fashion Royal factory on Phnom Penh's Veng Sreng Boulevard walked out on June 21 to protest the dismissal of a union leader. The factory is 80 percent US owned and supplies garments to the retail giant K-Mart.

According to factory management, the leader of the Workers Friendship Union Federation was fired because of his "bad attitude." Workers claimed he was sacked because he was demanding that management implement an Arbitration Council ruling for workers' overtime meal allowances to be paid weekly instead of monthly, maternity leave paid to pregnant workers before they take leave, and for a day-care centre at the factory.

The garment workers said that although management had rejected the non-binding court ruling, they would remain on strike until the union leader is reinstated and the court decision implemented.

Hong Kong hospital cleaners end strike

About 300 contract cleaners from Tseung Kwan O Hospital, United Christian Hospital and Haven of Hope Hospital returned to work on June 23 after reaching a settlement with authorities over severance pay. The government contract for ISS, the firm they work for, expires at the end of the month.

ISS offered a one-off compensation payment of \$1,000 for cleaners who had worked for the company for two to five years and \$2,000 for those who worked for five years or more. This was rejected by the cleaners.

Under the settlement, cleaners will be compensated according to the number of years they worked for the company. Those with more than two years' service will be paid \$500 for each year of service. The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions has admitted that the settlement was far less than the severance payment and long service payment set by the current labour laws.

Nepalese temporary teachers end hunger strike

The United Temporary Teachers Central Struggle Committee leadership ended their week-long protest hunger strike in Nepal's capital Kathmandu on June 23 after reaching agreement with the government on making temporary teachers permanent. The hunger strikers said that over 30,000 teachers across Nepal were hired on a temporary basis, some of whom have worked in their positions for 25 years.

Under the deal, temporary teachers can sit for a performance exam with the pass mark set at 40. Those who fail, or choose not to sit for the exam, will be paid health care services and some other work entitlements. A committee will be formed to determine the number of positions to be made permanent.

Bangladesh garment workers demand pay

Hundreds of garment workers from two factories in Dhaka have been demonstrating to demand months of unpaid wages.

Around 300 workers of Arena Apparels Limited in Gazipur district, Dhaka began protesting on June 22 after arriving at work to find their factory closed. The workers claim that they are owed three months wages. Management told workers that it would settle the wages debt after selling the factory machines.

Meanwhile, over 250 workers of Monde Apparels Limited at Kalyanpur in Dhaka demonstrated on the Mirpur Road on June 25 to demand three months' wages.

Although Bangladesh's garment exports have been increasing by about 10 percent annually, competition between factories for new orders is

fierce. According to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, over 600 factories have shut down over the past three years and more than 300 more factories were facing economic difficulties.

Pakistan: Larkana municipal workers protest

Larkana District Council workers in Sindh province demonstrated outside Bhutto House on June 21 to protest the termination of 290 co-workers. The District Council Workers Union accused the local council of using a fabricated charge of “bogus appointments” against workers to justify the terminations. The sacked employees have worked for the council for at least five years and drawn a monthly wage. The council have said they would continue protesting until the terminations were reversed.

Karachi community midwifery school employees demonstrate

Employees of community midwifery schools in Karachi protested outside the Karachi Press Club on June 21 to demand the government pay wages for the past year. They also demanded permanency for all contract-based employees and to recognise their rights as government employees.

The midwives were recruited under the National Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health program. They said that local government administrators of the program only paid wages for the first few months of last year.

Sri Lankan postal workers on strike

Sri Lankan postal workers walked off the job on Tuesday on a nationwide indefinite strike to oppose the government’s plan to sell the three heritage listed Postal Department buildings in Nuwara Eliya, Kandy and Galle. The 19,000 workers, organised by the Joint Postal Trade Union Front, fear that the government is planning to privatise postal services in order to raise funds for debt repayments and in line with the privatisation program demanded by the International Monetary Fund.

Other demands included establishing a work constitution, fulfilling all vacancies, providing promotions and re-establishing the main post office at the previous prominent location in the heart of Colombo. Their action followed a 48-hour national stoppage on June 13 over the same issues.

India: East Delhi sanitation workers end strike

Sanitation workers and supervisors from East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) ended a four-day strike on Tuesday, following an assurance from management that most of workers’ demands would be met. The corporation, however, invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) on Monday which made the strike illegal, punishable with heavy fines and up to six months’ jail if workers failed to return to work.

Around 300 All Municipal Corporation Staff Union members and about

300 from the All Municipal Corporation Sanitation Supervisors’ Union walked out on June 23 to demand unpaid wages and several other claims.

Under an agreement reached on Tuesday, EDMC assured workers that two months’ wages would be paid within two days, vacant supervisory positions would be filled within 15 days, and that promotions initiated with a list released by July 15. Distribution of cashless medical facilities cards was to be resolved in future meetings.

Hero Cycles factory workers in Ludhiana protest

Around 80 laid off workers from the Hero Cycles factory in Ludhiana, Punjab demonstrated on National Highway 1 outside the factory on June 23 to demand reinstatement of 312 workers. The next day 300 people joined the protest. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) has taken control of the protest, demanded that all laid-off employees be reinstated immediately and threatened to escalate the protests if these demands are not fulfilled.

According to the company the sackings were part of a cost cutting exercise that would affect 10 percent of the factory’s 12,000 employees.

Maharashtra toy factory workers walk out

Nearly 800 contract women workers at the Prothom Industries toy factory in Pune, Maharashtra walked out on strike and demonstrated on the Bhosari-Alandi-Dighi road on Tuesday to demand three months’ unpaid wages. Protesters blocked traffic on the road for nearly six hours until police were deployed to remove them.

The strike erupted after management failed to meet a promised deadline to pay the outstanding wages by Tuesday. Factory management has promised to pay overdue wages by July 5.

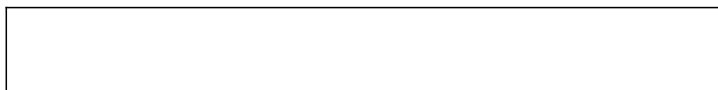
Victoria: Lockout continues at CHH plywood mill

Management of the Carter Holt Harvey plywood mill at Myrtleford in Victoria’s northeast is refusing to lift its factory lockout until workers endorse a proposed enterprise agreement.

The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Electrical Trades Union of Australia (ETU) and Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) told the company last week that they would drop their claim for a 3 percent annual pay increase over three years, accept the company’s 2 percent offer and reduce back-pay claims. CHH said the lockout would remain in place until after workers vote on the proposed agreement today.

The workers were locked out on April 19 after planning to begin rolling stoppages and overtime bans. Besides a pay increase, unions wanted one week’s annual leave allowable in the Christmas holiday period, and better access to income protection insurance.

The locked out workers who are maintaining a picket outside the plant have been isolated by the unions, whose members at CHH mills at Tumut and Morwell are still working.





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