

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

19 August 2017

South Korea: Hyundai Motor workers continue strike action

Hyundai Motor workers downed tools at its Ulsan plant for two hours at the early and late shifts on Monday in their second partial strike since negotiations failed with management over wage increases and job security. The action followed two-hour strikes during each shift on August 10. They threatened to extend the strikes to four hours each shift on Thursday and Monday.

Auto unions at Hyundai Motor and sister company Kia Motors, which are affiliated to the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU), want the monthly basic wage increased by 154,883 won (\$US136) and 30 percent of the company's 2016 full-year net profit as a bonus. On Wednesday, Hyundai offered workers a bonus of 200 percent of their monthly salary along with a reward of 1 million won.

Some 72 percent of Kia's 28,200 workforce voted to strike but have not yet taken action.

An overwhelming majority of GM Korea's 11,000-strong workforce voted in July in favour of striking. The GM union wants the same pay rise as Hyundai and Kia workers, plus 500 percent of their basic wages or 4.25 million won as a bonus. Other demands include the implementation of a salary system instead of hourly wages and an 8+8 shift schedule, with an eight-hour second shift.

Meanwhile, unionised workers at Renault Samsung Motors voted for a walkout following stalled negotiations for increases in pay and benefits.

Burmese factory workers demand higher minimum wage

About 2,000 garment workers from factories in Yangon, Bago and Thanlyin Industrial Zones demonstrated at Hlaing Thayar township on August 13 demanding the daily minimum wage be increased from 3,600 kyat (\$US2.63) to 5,600. Protesters complained that they had been asking for 5,600 kyat since 2013 but the government approved only 3,600 kyat, and then failed to review the rate in 2015 as demanded by law. Workers decided to protest after the government announced that the daily wage would be established in 2018 instead of this year.

Workers also called on the government to provide social welfare housing because they are being charged up to 60,000 kyat a month for a nine-square metre room with no facilities. They also want the right to form unions and penalties to be imposed on employers who ignore arbitration council rules and orders.

A spokesperson from the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society said that most young people chose to work in foreign countries because Burma's wages are so low. Many employers only pay 1,700 kyat per day to interns.

Cambodian garment workers strike

Over 1,000 garment workers from the Korean- and American-owned International Fashion Royal walked off the job on August 12 over the factory's alleged use of an immigration police officer to intimidate workers. They were still on strike on Monday.

A Workers Friendship Union Federation spokesman said that the strike was connected to a dispute which began in May when the Kmart supplier tried to fire the factory union delegate. Workers were demanding maternity benefits, an additional 1,000 riel (\$US0.25) for lunch allowance, and overtime meal allowances.

Workers claimed that management temporarily hired an immigration police officer who tried to break up the union by intimidating workers. The recent strike erupted after the officer was rehired as head of human resources and began sacking administration staff.

India: Nagaland paper mill workers end protest

Workers from the shuttered mill of the state-owned Nagaland Paper and Pulp Company lifted their three-day blockade of National Highway NH-61 on Sunday. The blockade ended after government officials and the mill authority gave a non-binding assurance to release pending salaries and examine workers' other demands.

The paper workers want immediate rehabilitation of the mill; payment of salaries outstanding since November, release of gratuity and terminal benefits for dead and superannuated employees, and implementation of the 2007 pay-scale currently paid to Hindustan Paper Corporation workers. The protesters said the mill was the only heavy industry in the state and the community needed work.

State and local government officials claim they need one month to arrange a meeting with the ministry to discuss workers' demands.

Jammu and Kashmir land development employees on hunger strike

Jammu Development Authority (JDA) workers have been holding a protest hunger strike since August 10 over a list of long pending demands. Over 20 workers are demonstrating outside the JDA Complex in Jammu. A spokesman for the JDA Employees Union has threatened to fast until death if the workers' demands are not met.

Workers want qualifications for daily wage workers, consolidated and sanitation workers, recruitment rules and positions for helpers who have passed the eligibility test and other demands.

India: Haryana domestic workers on strike

Around 500 domestic workers in Gurgaon, an industrial and financial hub in the National Capital Region (NCR), went on strike on August 13 for higher wages. The workers are mainly employed in new residential estates in the NCR.

The Gharelu Kamgar Union said these workers want their poverty wages increased from 1,500 to 3,500 rupees per day to bring them in line with domestic workers in other sectors in the NCR.

The union spokesperson said that domestic workers also face irregular wage payments, unscheduled extensions of working hours and arbitrary pay cuts. More domestic workers are expected to strike if their demands are not met.

JK Tyre factory workers win recognition of their union

JK Tyre factory management in Kanchipuram District, Tamil Nadu has agreed to negotiate with the worker's preferred factory union and reinstate 27 probationary workers who were dismissed during the strike.

Around 600 workers at the factory struck on July 24 to demand recognition of their union, which is affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). There are an estimated 1,500 workers in the factory, including 420 permanent workers, 250 probationary workers and 250 trainees as well as contract workers.

The workers' grievances ranged from low wages, excessive productivity demands and lack of amenities on the shop floor. They complained that even when production targets are met management demands that they continue working.

Workers with six years' experience only receive about 16,000 rupees a month, minus 400 rupees in company deductions for transport and the canteen. Workers are not paid overtime for attending management meetings at the end of shifts.

Pakistan: Faisalabad power loom workers locked out

Thousands of power loom workers from 17 industrial centres in Faisalabad have been locked out since August 7 after factory owners ignored a district commissioner's order that loom workers' wages be increased by 10 percent. The order was in response to several weeks of protests and strike action by power loom workers. Workers are also demanding health and social security benefits, better working conditions and facilities.

On Monday, factory owners told a 14-member committee meeting that they would not increase monthly wages and the factories would remain closed. Workers are protesting outside the deputy commissioner's office, demanding that the government force owners to implement the pay increase.

Pakistan: Punjab sugar workers strike

Over 400 Adam Sugar Mills workers in Chishtian, Punjab province have been on strike for four weeks for a pay rise. Workers' current monthly pay is just 8,000 rupees (\$US75.92). Strikers have accused management of forcing them to sign a 17,000-rupee pay slip—wages that they do not receive.

Police attack Bangladeshi garment workers

Police used teargas and batons against hundreds of garment workers in Gazipur while they demonstrated outside their factories on Sunday. Workers from Union Garments and Union Knitwear factories walked out after management failed to keep a promise to pay four months' outstanding wages. Factory authorities claimed they could not pay wages because of financial problems but made another promise to pay arrears on August 16.

Queensland: Glencore mine lockout extended

Multinational mining giant Glencore is continuing to lockout 190 Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at its Oaky North underground coal mine in Central Queensland. The CFMEU members have been locked out since June 9, following limited industrial action over an enterprise agreement (EA). The lockout was due to be lifted on July 28.

The workers began rolling four-hour stoppages on May 10, after rejecting the company's proposed EA. The union alleged that Glencore has stripped away 50 percent of working conditions from a version of an agreement that the Oaky North workforce previously rejected overwhelmingly. The CFMEU wants 3 percent annum pay increases but indicated it would accept a two-year pay freeze if the current enterprise agreement was rolled over.

Last month, Glencore brought in a replacement, contract-based workforce and has used staff employees to maintain production. It claimed the mine was maintaining normal production.

Newcastle port workers on strike

Maritime Workers Union (MUA) members at Qube Ports Newcastle, north of Sydney, walked off the job for 48 hours on Thursday in protest against a proposed enterprise agreement (EA) from the company, which includes a 10.5 percent wage cut.

The action, by 30 permanent and part-time workers at Qube's Kooragang Island terminal, follows the imposition of work bans earlier in the month that have been extended for another two weeks. These include working only seven-hour shifts, no extensions and no overtime.

Negotiations for a new EA began in 2015 when the current agreement expired. Qube claims that the wage cut is to bring Kooragang terminal workers into line with its main competitor, Newcastle Stevedores, which are on lower pay scales previously agreed to by the MUA.

An MUA spokesman claimed that Qube intends to terminate the existing workplace agreement and cut wages and existing entitlements by forcing workers onto the industry award. He alleged that Qube was holding secret meetings with workers, offering them permanent positions if they

accepted the 10.5 percent wage cut. If they failed to accept the “offer” they would face a 20 percent pay cut.

Victoria: Visy launches lawsuit against workers

Cardboard box manufacturer Visy is taking legal action against the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and 69 workers at the company’s Dandenong plant in Victoria. Visy is suing for compensation and seeking fines, claiming the workers took illegal strike action last month.

In late July, employees refused to work compulsory overtime after Visy announced a provocative new alcohol and drug policy. Visy claimed the overtime ban was illegal strike action and suspended two AMWU delegates. Half the plant’s workforce struck on July 31 in protest over the suspensions.

The company then secured interim orders from the Fair Work Commission and the federal court issued injunctions against the AMWU, its officials and four union delegates. The strikers returned to work on August 8 when the company threatened to sack them. At a federal court hearing on Wednesday, Visy was directed to serve a statement of claim by mid-September and for the union’s officials and workers to file a defence by October.

Queensland aged care workers protest

Workers and local residents demonstrated outside the Blue Care’s Pioneer Lodge aged care facility in Bundaberg, north of Brisbane, on Tuesday following the sacking of a number of qualified nursing staff.

Blue Care, an agency of UnitingCare Queensland, announced last month that it would sack 11 enrolled nurses, claiming it was due to federal government funding cuts.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) claimed that while Blue Care was sacking qualified nurses it was advertising for minimally trained personal care workers to replace them. The ANMF said rosters for qualified nurses at all three of Blue Care’s facilities in Bundaberg had also been cut.

South Australian truck drivers protest

Around 100 truck drivers and other transport workers demonstrated outside supermarket giant Aldi’s Adelaide distribution centre in Regent Park on Wednesday. Transport Workers Union (TWU) members accused Aldi of endangering the safety of its truck drivers. Workers chanted “Safe Rates” and pointed out that last year Aldi attempted to pay truck drivers less than their already low rate by misclassifying them in an enterprise agreement.

A TWU spokesman claimed transport workers in Aldi’s supply chain were under constant pressure from the supermarket giant, leading to trucks not being maintained, drivers forced to speed, work long hours and skip mandatory rest breaks. About 150 drivers and supporters demonstrated in Fremantle, Western Australia in May over the same issues.

Solomon Islands bridge workers protest

Fourteen workers employed by a contract company to maintain the Aimana Bridge in West Kwai set up a roadblock at the bridge on August 11 in a dispute over unpaid wages. The maintenance workers said they would not allow traffic to pass until wages outstanding since June were paid.

Vanuatu TV broadcasting workers demand entitlements

Former staff members from the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation have launched legal proceedings to recoup about \$US500,000 in salaries and benefits they allege their former employer failed to pay. The 14 workers allege that the corporation made incorrect calculations, depriving them of overtime payments and pension contributions.

Nine other employees, who are now working under a special contract for the corporation, have also made claims in court over the issue.



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