

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 September 2017

South Korea: MBC program producers on strike

Around 400 reporters, TV producers, camera journalists and announcers at public broadcaster MBC have been on strike since August 7 following revelations of an MBC “blacklist.”

Workers claim that management has categorised journalists into different groups based on their involvement in a 170-day strike in 2012, their relations with the labour union, and “loyalty” to the company. The list, they allege, is used by management for personnel matters and intimidation. MBC workers began voting on August 24 on whether to extend the strike and stop all program production.

Over 300 MBC employees struck in 2012 in a dispute over political bias by management. Six journalists who were dismissed then as a consequence of the strike are still awaiting a final court ruling.

Striking Burmese garment workers sacked

At least 280 factory workers from DJY Knitting Myanmar, in industrial zone 3 at Hlaing Tharyar, have been on strike since August 7. They are maintaining a demonstration outside the factory. Management told workers their strike was illegal and they would not be reinstated. The factory employs close to 400 workers and over half of them are on strike.

The strike erupted when the workers’ “leader” was sacked for trying to form a union and making demands on their behalf. Workers want reinstatement of the leader and the right to form a union. They have ignored a management promise that employees’ 17 demands would be met if they ended the strike. Workers said they would continue the walkout until their leader is reinstated.

Terminated Cambodian garment workers picket factory

More than 100 workers from the Nantai Garment Factory in Steung Meanchey commune are protesting outside the factory’s gates in a dispute over severance pay following a change in ownership. Workers were told that their contracts would not be renewed after September 1. Workers were only given \$60 as severance, which they claim is contrary to what they are owed under the Labour Law.

Workers suspect that the company has gone bankrupt and so they are holding a 24-hour vigil at the factory gates to prevent equipment being removed before they are paid their full entitlement.

Bangladesh: Chittagong jute mill workers attacked by police

At least five protesting jute mill workers were left injured and three hospitalised in Chittagong city on Tuesday following an attack by police. Close to 500 workers of Amin Jute Mill were demonstrating on the Hathazari-Oxygen Road outside their mill demanding seven weeks’ unpaid wages. The walkout was sparked when mill authorities failed to pay wages by Tuesday, as promised.

Workers ended the demonstration after a tri-party meeting between the mill authorities, workers and police where the authorities promised to pay 50 percent of arrears before the Eid religious festival on September 2.

Bangladeshi tannery factory workers walk out

Over 3,000 workers from several factories in the Tannery Industrial Estate in Savar, on the outskirts of Dhaka, walked off the job for two hours on Monday over wages and conditions. They demonstrated inside the estate demanding a 3,000 taka interim allowance, a hospital at the estate, a canteen at each factory and housing facilities. Their current salary is 5,400 taka (\$US68) to 8,400 a month.

Following a government directive, the Bangladesh Tanners Association has been gradually relocating tannery factories from Dhaka into the Savar estate. Workers complained because there are no housing facilities at the estate and they have to travel long distances, with some employees paying up to 2,200 taka a month in travel expenses.

There are 90 factories at the estate employing more than 10,000 workers. At least another 90 factories are to be moved into the estate from Dhaka. A total of 45,000 workers are affected.

India: Tamil Nadu anti-malaria workers on strike

Around 220 anti-malaria workers from Greater Chennai Corporation Zone 7 have been on strike since August 22 opposing their transfer to a private company as contract workers. At least 109 were arrested when they demonstrated outside the corporation’s building in Ripon on Tuesday.

The workers were initially engaged under the Indian government’s Swarna Jayanthi scheme and then under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission. They were not told of the transfer until after it happened. The workers are demanding a wage increase and that they be made government employees.

Indigo Airlines contract workers strike

Over 100 contract drivers and loaders from Indigo Airlines at Nagpur, the capital of Maharashtra, struck for 24 hours on August 29 to demand a wage increase and correction of pay irregularities. Contract workers, many employed for more than 10 years, are paid a maximum of just 8,500 rupees (\$US133). They are on contract to M/s Taurus Aviation, a private firm.

The workers also want bonus payments, name correction in Provident Fund records, as well as salary slips and appointment letters. The contractor agreed to enter negotiations on a wage increase and review the other issues.

Pakistan: Punjab teachers continue campaign over pay and privatisation

Teachers from Punjab government schools protested outside the Lahore Press Club on August 24 as part of a long running campaign over several demands. These included a pay rise, in-service promotions, teaching allowances and other incentives. Some teachers have not had a pay-scale increase for over two decades.

The teachers also protested against the government's school privatisation program. They have been holding protests since early 2016 over the issue. The Punjab government's public-private partnership deal hands management of public schools to NGOs and private operators administered by the recently created Punjab Education Foundation. It will impact on more than 5,000 schools.

The central and provincial governments have either slashed or frozen education budget allocations. The already inadequate and crumbling service is on the verge of collapse and teachers fear that privatisation will eliminate free education in Pakistan.

The United Teachers Council has threatened to hold a sit-down protest outside the Punjab Assembly on September 16. Teachers held a two-day demonstration outside the Assembly in May.

Pakistan: FATA health workers demand overdue pay

Health workers of the Maternal, New-born and Child Health program in Bajaur Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have threatened to walk out and go on a hunger strike if the government fails to pay eight months' overdue wages. More than 60 workers are affected, many of them posted to remote areas.

The workers also want better pay in place of the meagre 4,000-rupee (\$US38) monthly wage to compensate for having to work in harsh conditions in isolated regions with poor living conditions and lack basic health facilities.

Lahore gas pipeline workers protest

Several dozen contract based workers of Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd (SNGPL) protested outside the Lahore Press Club on Monday and in front of the state-run company's headquarters to demand their reinstatement.

The workers, many of them sub-engineers, alleged that their terminations were in violation of their contracts. According to their contracts, SNGPL should have made them permanent after five years.

Punjab health workers protest diversion of duties

More than 50 employees of the state-run Lady Health Workers' program demonstrated in front of the District Health Authority (DHA) in Rawalpindi on August 26 to protest against diversion of their duties from the polio vaccination drive to the anti-dengue drive.

Workers said the transfer was in violation of their contract. The government threatened to withhold wages if they ignored the directive. The protest ended after the health department CEO met workers and agreed to withdraw the directive and pay their wages.

Brisbane bus drivers strike again

Following several weeks of limited strike action and work bans, Brisbane City Council bus drivers walked off the job on Thursday in two four-hour stoppages at 10am–2pm and 6pm–10pm. Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members are opposed to the council's proposed new enterprise agreement. They were joined by other council workers from various unions in a demonstration outside the Brisbane City Town Hall during the morning strike.

The Services Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Electrical Trade Union, Professionals Australia, the Plumbers' Union, the Australian Workers Union, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, RTBU and the Transport Workers Union are all involved in the council's enterprise agreement negotiations.

The RTBU wants 3.5 percent annual pay increases, replacement of the outdated pay structure and an increase in the hourly rates for lower-ranked drivers and input into rostering schedules. The current base rate for drivers is \$23 an hour. The council has proposed a 2.5 percent pay rise each year for three years, back pay, a \$400 bonus and doubling of security guards on buses.

New South Wales: Court forces power utility workers to lift bans

Australia's largest power distribution utility Ausgrid has won legal action in the Fair Work Commission (FWC) that forces staff members to travel to India and train a replacement workforce in line with company's outsourcing of critical information technology services. The outsourcing contract with Tata Consultancy Services will make 35 full-time Ausgrid workers redundant.

Ausgrid, which was privatised last year by the state Liberal government, claimed that members of the United Services Union (USU) and Electrical Trades Union (ETU) were involved in illegal industrial action by refusing to travel overseas to train contractors who will take their jobs.

The workers affected are from Ausgrid's Geographic Information System section and responsible for developing and maintaining detailed mapping information of the electricity network. The company provides power to more than a million homes and businesses in Sydney, Newcastle, the Hunter and Central Coast.

The unions accepted the FWC directive, ordered workers to lift the ban, and claimed that they would be “looking at all available avenues” to save the 35 jobs from being sent to India. No further action has been considered.

The state Liberal government prior to privatisation of the power utility passed legislation that was supposed to protect power industry jobs by banning forced redundancies after privatisation. The intent was to make it easier for the unions to sell privatisation to their members.

Victoria: GrainCorp puts proposed new work agreement to its workers

Following nearly five months of failed negotiations, GrainCorp has bypassed the union and asked its Victorian workers to vote on its proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA). The two-day secret ballot began on Thursday. The company’s latest proposal includes annual 2 percent pay increases for three years and rollover of the current EBA.

About 80 permanent grain handlers, members of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), at sites in the Western District, Central Victoria, the North East, the Southern Mallee and the Wimmera, are refusing to work overtime or stagger their breaks in their dispute over the agreement.

Although GrainCorp has improved its pay offer—increasing it from zero to 2 percent—an AWU spokesman said workers were opposed to the company’s move to pay casuals and labour hire workers less than the permanent workforce. The union wants these workers paid the same wage as direct employees.

New Zealand fisheries officers issue strike notice

The National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), covering fisheries officers of the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) throughout New Zealand, has issued a strike notice for September. The notice was issued following failed negotiations with MPI on August 23 over a new work agreement. The main sticking point in negotiations was MPI’s refusal to pay penalty rates for weekend work.

From September 1, fisheries officers will refuse to work outside the various MPI premises, which will impact directly on patrols. They will continue to attend office work.



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