

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 September 2017

Cambodian garment workers win reinstatement

Terminated workers from the Nantai Garment Factory in Steung Meanchey commune have been told by the plant's owner that they could return to work on September 8. Over 600 workers had previously been informed by management that the factory had changed ownership and their contracts would not be renewed after September 1. Cambodia's ministry of labour said that the factory owner had closed operations and disappeared.

The workers, who were given \$60 termination pay, held a 24-hour vigil outside the factory gate to ensure plant equipment was not sold before they received their full entitlements.

The factory owner, however, was located and in a meeting with workers, supervised by a district official, he agreed to reopen the garment plant. He claimed that the manager had falsely told workers that the factory was closing.

Cambodian beverage-can factory workers protest

About 50 workers at the Cambrew beverage-can factory owned by Crown Holdings in Preah Sihanouk province are protesting the sacking of their union representative on Tuesday. He was allegedly fired for establishing a union at the end of July.

The workers established the union in order to make various demands. These included double pay if asked to work on days off, permanency for long-term contract cleaners, maternity leave and full benefits upon resigning.

Vietnamese garment workers strike

Over 6,000 workers from the S&H Vina garment factory in Thach Thanh District walked off the job on September 6 to protest "inhumane" company rules. The strike erupted after a supervisor refused to allow 2,000 workers using old cloth to sit on to relax after lunch. They walked out and were followed soon after by the rest of the workforce.

Workers refused to enter the factory the following day and presented management with 14 demands, including for a basic salary increase and the provision of child benefits, seniority bonuses, a travel allowance, adequate maternity leave, reasonable working hours and the scrapping of penalties for absence from work due to sickness or other emergencies.

The garment workers also complained about "unreasonable" regulations, including having to tell the company three days in advance if

they want to take sick or bereavement leave. They are allowed only one day paid leave per month.

In an attempt to end the strike management fired the supervisor responsible for the incident that sparked the strike and agreed to consider some of the workers' demands.

Thailand: Burmese construction workers strike

Around 100 Burmese immigrant construction workers walked off the job in Bangkok on September 8 to demand wages in compliance with Thailand's labour laws. According to the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Thailand and Burma, every worker must be paid 310 baht (\$US9.37) per day and 58 baht for each extra hour worked.

A workers' representative said female workers were only receiving about 200 baht per day and male construction workers 260 baht. They are not given time off and do not receive double wages for worked holidays or for extra hours worked.

On Monday the employer agreed to sign an agreement in the presence of AAC, the Thai-based migrant rights group, and government officials to pay wages and entitlements in accordance with the labour law.

Migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong protest

Over 450 women representing migrant domestic worker communities from the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand marched to the labour department in Hong Kong on Sunday calling for a minimum pay of \$5,500 (\$US704) per month.

The current minimum monthly wage for foreign domestic workers is \$4,310, which is well below the official minimum set for local citizens. A representative of the United Filipinos in Hong Kong group said the demand for the \$5,500 monthly wage demand was reasonable, given that in 1998 the wage was \$3,860.

India: Tamil Nadu film industry workers end strike

The Film Employees Federation of South India (FEFSI), representing 24 craft unions in Tamil Nadu's film industry ended an 11-day strike on Tuesday following talks with the Tamil Film Producers' Council (TFPC). Production resumed for over 40 movies impacted by the strike.

FEFSI members walked out for three days on August 3 and again on

September 1 in response to TFPC plans to bypass the union and recruit workers directly. The union demanded that only members of FEFSI-affiliated organisations could be employed and that film producers had to honour previous wage agreements. While the current workday is 8–9 hours, the TFPC wants it extended to 12 hours.

Full details of the final deal were not reported but producers have agreed to pay travel allowances to lighting workers and technicians and that all recruits will be FEFSI members. In response to producers' demands, the FEFSI agreed to expel the militant Technicians Union because it held wildcat strikes.

Puducherry agriculture products distribution workers strike

Over 200 workers from the Puducherry Agro Services and Industries Corporation (PASIC) on Monday marched on the Legislative Assembly in Puducherry to demand 32 months' unpaid wages and job permanency. Their demonstration was blocked by police before they reached the government buildings.

Members of the PASIC Employees' Union, which is affiliated to the Stalinist-All India Trade Union Congress, walked off the job and held a one day fast in June over wages.

Since its establishment in 1986, PASIC has been Puducherry's principal agency for the distribution of fertilisers and other agricultural goods. Workers claim that PASIC has accrued a debt of over 100 million rupees (\$US1.56 million) since it diversified into liquor sales and waste management.

Tata Motors temporary workers end strike

A four-day strike by 4,500 temporary employees at Tata Motors auto-plant in Jamshedpur was called off by the union on September 9 after it reaching a deal with management. Workers were demanding job permanency, higher wages, incentives on par with the regular workers and revision of a three-year old wage agreement. Temporary workers are only paid around 12,000 rupees a month compared to 30,000 rupees for permanent employees.

The Tata Motors Union accepted management's proposal to provide permanent positions for 200 temporary workers each year. The union had previously demanded 500 jobs be made permanent each year.

Maharashtra rural health workers hold state-wide strike

Over 2,500 members of the Maharashtra State Anganwadi Workers Committee (MSAWC) protested at n Azad Maidan in Mumbai on Tuesday. Anganwadi workers across the state walked out on Monday after the government failed to grant higher pay demands, pay wages on time, increase permanent jobs and address grievances about the poor quality of food.

The MSAWC consists of seven unions from Mumbai, Thane, Ichalkaranji, Kolhapur, Latur, and Sindhudurg and covers about 275,000 rural health workers. Anganwadi workers are paid between 2,500 and 5,000 rupees a month according to their classification. A panel of government and union representatives recommended in June that the

monthly wage of anganwadi workers be increased to between 7,500 and 10,000 rupees.

Workers at Tuesday's protest voted to maintain the strike until their demands were met.

Pakistan: Karachi police attack protesting teachers

Police attacked teachers marching from the Karachi Press Club to the chief minister's house with water cannon and batons on Tuesday. The teachers were demanding five years' of unpaid wages. Two protesters were injured and three arrested.

The Sindh government, following protests in March and July, promised to pay overdue wages before September Eid holidays. At least 7,500 teachers appointed in 2012 have been affected. The protesting teachers ignored the latest government pledge that it would soon pay overdue wages and said they would keep demonstrating until the promise is kept.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa teachers oppose privatisation

College professors and lecturers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Mansehra district demonstrated outside the Mansehra Press Club on Tuesday over government plans to privatise public educational institutions. The teachers fear that the government's "Higher Education Act" will hand over higher educational institutions to the private sector.

Sri Lankan power utility workers on strike

Around 4,000 Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) workers walked off the job at midday on Wednesday in a long-running dispute for a pay rise and the rectification of salary anomalies. The workers struck for 24 hours in April over the same issues.

The CEB Workers' Union claimed that wage disparities increased for 90 percent of workers after they won a salary increase in 2015. The union pointed out that the ratio between lower employees and management salaries is currently 1:9 but that it should be 1:6. Management has promised to correct these disparities on numerous occasions.

The government retaliated by cancelling workers' leave and holidays till September 20. The workers said they would only carry out power breakdown or repair work at government hospitals during the strike. Authorities tried to stall the strike, claiming that a committee had already been appointed to look into the CEB workers' demands.

New South Wales: Dock workers in Newcastle strike

Maritime Workers Union (MUA) members at Qube Ports Newcastle, north of Sydney, walked off the job on Tuesday in protest against a proposed enterprise agreement (EA) from the company, which includes a pay freeze. Qube had originally demanded a 10.5 percent wage cut.

The action by 30 permanent and part-time workers at Qube's Kooragang Island terminal followed a 48-hour strike on August 17 and the

imposition of work bans that 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 which could see workers' average income cut by 40 percent. If the Fair Work Commission (FWC) accepts this sort of wage-cutting ruling, which has already been used in education, the railways, timber, mining and electricity generation, it will extend to other industries.

were forced onto the inferior Black Coal award.

While the union is currently negotiating a new enterprise agreement, it has isolated the maintenance workers and diverted them into harmless protests.



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Bathurst hospital non-medical staff walk out

About 50 cleaning, linen, catering, security and allied health staff from the Bathurst Hospital in the Central Tablelands of New South Wales walked off the job for four hours on Wednesday over management "bullying and intimidation" and the lack of hospital equipment.

The Health Services Union members said they had put up with management's poor work culture and failure to provide equipment for seven years and were determined to strike. They returned to work after management agreed to undertake a review.

Cash delivery guards in South Australia and Northern Territory hold second strike

Transport Workers Union (TWU) members employed by the multinational security and cash management company Prosegur held stop work meetings on Wednesday in their dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement. Workers have placed indefinite bans on servicing automatic teller machines (ATMs).

Negotiations for a new agreement began 18 months ago. The TWU claimed that the EA offered to workers by Prosegur includes an inferior flat pay rate that attacks penalties and allowances. Workers want parity of pay and conditions with other armoured vehicle operators across Australia. Prosegur has brought in strike breakers from interstate.

Western Australian coal miners protest over pay cuts

Griffin Coal mine maintenance workers at the Collie Basin in south-west Western Australia demonstrated in Bunbury on September 8 over cuts to wages and entitlements. According to the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, 70 maintenance workers at Griffin Coal have had their wages cut by around \$26,000 a year and lost \$100,000 in accrued entitlements of long service, sick and annual leave, as the result of a Fair Work Commission decision.

In July last year the FWC accepted Griffin Coal's application to have its expired enterprise agreement cancelled after 18 months of negotiations because workers refused to accept the management's proposed new enterprise agreement. The company demanded workers take a 26 percent pay cut and work an extra seven hours a week. The maintenance workers