

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

30 September 2017

Korean Air pilots issue strike notice

Unions representing around 2,700 pilots of Korean Air Lines (KAL) issued a strike notice on Thursday in their two-year dispute for a wage rise. Korean Pilots Union and the New Korean Pilots Union members' wages have been frozen since 2014. Pilots struck for ten days in December demanding a 29 percent pay increase, down from their original demand for 37 percent.

The unions are currently asking for a 4 percent increase for 2015 and 7 percent for 2016 with an increase in the retirement allowance of one percent per service year. Pilots rejected KAL's offer of just 1.9 percent for 2015 and a 3.2 percent increase for 2016.

The average annual salary of KAL local pilots is about 100 million won (\$US81,000), far lower than Chinese airlines, which pays 200–300 million won. According to the unions, 140 pilots quit in 2015 to join other companies in China and the Middle East on salaries up to three times higher.

In 2010, the government designated KAL as an essential service and set the limit by law that 80 percent of international routes and 50 percent of domestic routes have to operate during strikes. Only 390 pilots are expected to participate in the strikes.

Filipino jeepney drivers' strike again

Hundreds of jeepney drivers in the Philippines capital Manila and surrounding cities and towns held a two-day strike on Monday over government plans to phase out passenger jeepneys 15 years or older. The strike followed national stoppages in February, May and July over the issue. The latest strike was organised by the Stop and Go Coalition, while previous strikes included PISTON and the Jeepney Phase-out Coalition.

The Duterte government claims it wants to modernise transport vehicles and make them environmentally friendly. The union groups allege that only big companies can afford the vehicle replacements demanded and called for an upgrade of their jeepneys and improved enforcement of road-worthiness rules.

Under the draft plan, a jeepney operator will be required to have 7 million pesos (\$US140,393) for a franchise, have 20 units by 2018 and double that number the following year and install GPS and wi-fi into the vehicles. The jeepney phase-out was due to begin in July and will impact over 600,000 drivers and 250,000 operators.

A drivers' representative said that while the government offered loans to drivers and operators, the repayment terms were unrealistic. He said a driver earns only an average of 600 pesos a day, which was 200 pesos short of the estimated 800 pesos daily loan payment.

Burmese garment workers on strike

Over 500 garment workers from the Solamoda Garment factory at Shwe Than Lwin industrial zone in Yangon struck work on Monday and are picketing the factory entrance. Four workers were seriously injured when security guards tried to break up the picket to allow management to enter the factory.

Workers have made 13 demands, including an additional 1,000 kyat to their daily wage. The official minimum daily wage is 3,600 kyat (\$2.64). Other demands were maintenance of the 10,000 kyat bonus for not taking leave for a month and abolition of daily quotas.

Pakistan: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government workers protest again

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government employees, including health, education and local government departments in Shangla district, stopped work and demonstrated outside district authorities' offices in Shangla on Tuesday over unpaid allowances. This was the second time in two weeks that these workers have taken action to demand a charcoal and firewood allowance due since 2016. The Class-IV Workers' Association also demanded an end to the 24-hour duty schedule.

Sindh judicial workers demand promotion

Judicial staff of lower courts in Khairpur district in Sindh province boycotted the courts in Khairpur, Badin and several other towns on Monday to protest the government's failure to upgrade their levels and provide a pay increase. Workers held street protests demanding the government implement a Sindh High court decision in 2016 to lift grades and wages.

India: Orissa power utility workers protest

About 5,000 workers from Orissa's power distribution companies demonstrated in the state's capital Bhubaneswar on September 14 to demand monthly wages be increased from the current 4,000 rupees (\$US61) to 18,000 rupees, and permanent jobs for outsourced employees.

A union spokesman said working conditions were increasingly dangerous with an average of 50 workers dying each year from

electrocution. One worker told the media that safety was an afterthought in the state's power industry. He said employees were not supplied with personal safety equipment and machinery was unreliable.

Punjab municipal sanitation workers demonstrate

Sanitation workers of the Safai Sewak Union demonstrated outside the municipal council building in Abohar on September 24 to demand overdue wages. Workers complained that they ended their ten-day strike last week after the council president falsely promised to pay wages within two days. A union spokesman said they would not return to work until wages were distributed.

Western Australia: Griffin Coal strike in seventh week

Griffin Coal mine maintenance workers at the Collie Basin in south-west Western Australia have been on strike since mid-August 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 a result of a Fair Work Commission decision. They have also been forced onto a fly-in-fly-out style roster of seven days on and three days off.

In July last year the FWC accepted Griffin Coal's application to have its expired enterprise agreement cancelled after 18 months of failed negotiations. Workers rejected the company's proposed new enterprise agreement which would mean a 26 percent pay cut and seven hours additional work a week. The maintenance workers were forced onto the inferior Black Coal award, which could cut annual pay by \$50,000.

While the union is currently negotiating a new enterprise agreement, it has isolated the maintenance workers, diverted them into harmless protests and promoted illusions in bogus promises of support from the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Queensland: Glencore mine lockout entering fifth month

Multinational mining giant Glencore is continuing its lockout of 190 Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members at its Oaky North underground coal mine in Central Queensland. CFMEU members have been locked out since June 9, following limited industrial action beginning on May 10 over an enterprise agreement. Glencore has hired a replacement, contract-based workforce and used staff employees to maintain production.

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 per annum pay increases but indicated it would accept a two-year pay freeze if the current enterprise agreement was rolled over.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, three quarters of the 45 workers at the coal wash plant attached to the Glencore Oaky North mine voted against an enterprise agreement put by the company, which would erode their rights and conditions.

Glencore's revenue from Australian coal operations jumped from

\$US1.77 billion to \$3.1 billion in the last half year. Their cash profit on every tonne of coal produced was around 41 percent.

New South Wales public hospital workers stop work

Medical and support workers at the Westmead Hospital in Sydney's west walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday to protest the wages cap introduced by the state Liberal government in 2011. The 35,000-strong NSW Health Services Union (HSU), which covers junior doctors, paramedics, security guards, caterers and linen launderers, said the action was the first of many scheduled for public hospitals throughout the state.

The wages cap bans public servants seeking a pay rise above 2.5 percent, unless they can offset the increases with work practice savings. The government recently reduced the cap to 2.25 percent claiming it is to offset the 0.25 percent increase in compulsory superannuation.

New Caledonian international airline pilots end strike

Pilots from New Caledonia's international airline New Calin ended a six-day strike on Wednesday. The pilots struck on September 21 in an ongoing dispute over pay and conditions. The stoppage by about a third of the airline's pilots mainly disrupted flights between New Caledonia's capital Noumea and New Zealand and Australia.

The pilots' union told the media that a key demand was not met but a solution was found by reorganising their work. Pilots were seeking to have cover for some of their insurance costs among other demands. Pay rates remain unchanged, with senior pilots earning a maximum of \$US20,000 a month.



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