

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

7 October 2017

South Korea's bullet trains cabin crew strike

Unionized cabin-crews on South Korea's KTX bullet trains walked off the job for 48 hours on September 29, following failed negotiations for a pay increase. The workers are employees of KORAIL Tourism Development Company, a subsidiary of the state rail operator Korea Railroad Corp (KORAIL). Around 400 workers are union members.

The union wants a 5 percent pay rise, abolition of the merit-based pay system and improvements in other working conditions. Management rejected all demands and only offered a 1.2 percent pay increase claiming that was the limit allowed by KORAIL.

On September 21, 33 KORAIL Tourism Development Company workers demonstrated at Seoul rail station demanding to be made permanent employees. Workers said they did not have the same job security or benefits of full-time KORAIL employees.

Bangladeshi garment workers protest

Walltex garment workers in Gazipur demonstrated outside the factory in the Sreepur sub-district on September 30 demanding overdue wages. Protesters spilled onto the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway blocking traffic for 30 minutes. Workers ended the protest after police said they would take up their issue with factory management.

Pakistan: Toba Tek Singh power-loom workers locked out again

Locked out power-loom workers in Kamalia, in Punjab province's Toba Tek Singh district, demonstrated outside the Kamalia Press Club on Monday. The workers demanded that owners reopen their factories and pay lost wages during the lockout. Factory owners refused, declaring that the closures would continue for eight days as "punishment" for workers not turning up for duty on Muharram 9 and 10 (Islamic days of fasting).

Hundreds of power-loom workers in the district were locked out

for five days in September after 45 factory owners rejected demands that wages be increased from 450 rupees for 12 hours' work to the government-mandated 665 rupees (\$US6.31) for eight hours' work. More than 7,000 workers are employed at 250 factories in the Toba Tek Singh district.

The September lockout ended after workers accepted a 7.14 percent increase. Kamalia factory owners, however, refused to pay the increase claiming they could not afford it.

Islamabad: PIMS medical staff end strike

Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) staff ended a three-day strike on Wednesday night after the Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD) minister promised that workers' demands would be discussed and resolved. The strike began on Monday and involved administration, para medical staff, nurses and other workers. They were demanding the government re-establish PIMS as a government hospital.

PIMS workers lost their status as civil servants, as well as government accommodation and other benefits, in 2013 when the hospital—a 1,200 bed facility—was upgraded and affiliated with the Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Shaheed Medical University. Workers want the affiliation reversed and have been holding limited rolling strikes since July 2016 over the issue.

The CADD minister claimed that he agreed with the workers' demand and said he would call a meeting in the ministry to discuss how the issue could be addressed.

India: Orissa rural health workers' strike enters fourth week

Rural health care (anganwadi) workers and helpers across Orissa have been on strike since September 12 to demand a wage rise and permanency as Class 3 government employees. Anganwadi workers want a minimum monthly wage of 18,000 rupees and 9,000 for helpers. Workers and helpers are currently paid just 4,000 (\$US61.50) and 2,000 rupees a month respectively.

The All Odisha Anganwadi Ladies Workers Association is coordinating 24-hour relay demonstrations outside government

buildings in several districts. There are around 100,000 anganwadi workers in Orissa state.

University teachers in Nepal protest

Part-time teachers from the Tribhuvan University held a sit-down demonstration at the Maitighar Mandal Square in Kathmandu on Tuesday demanding permanent contracts. The protest was part of a long campaign by these teachers for better pay and conditions.

In May, hundreds of part-time teachers from 60 constituent campuses of the Tribhuvan University walked out indefinitely. The teachers were protesting against the government and university for failing to implement an agreement signed eight years ago during a hunger strike protest.

The agreement included the formation of a working panel to establish a quota for the number of part-time teachers, preparation of criteria for contracts, appointment of contract teachers by fulfilling set standards and an increase in contract teachers' salaries.

According to the Nepal Part Time Teachers' Association, over 1,200 part-time teachers are affected. The part-timers are forced to teach up to 24 periods in a week while permanent teachers teach only 10 periods. A spokesman said they are only paid 360 rupees per period in contrast to permanent teachers who received 2,000 rupees per period and other allowances.

Australian meteorological staff resume strike action

Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) staff began another round of rolling strikes on September 29 in a dispute over the government's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members are taking protected action to strike in 30-minute blocks between 4.30 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. from until October 12. The BoM has over 1,600 staff and maintains 50 field offices.

The action follows three weeks of rolling strikes by one third of the bureau's staff in July. A CPSU representative said the bureau was determined to make major cuts to conditions targeting front-line people working shifts and in remote locations.

BoM staff have now gone more than four years without a pay rise. The bureau is one of only a handful of federal government agencies that is still without a new enterprise agreement. The majority of the 160,000 federal public servants were in dispute with the Liberal-National government for more than three years over proposed new work agreements.

The CPSU leadership divided federal public sector workers along department lines confining all industrial action to limited stoppages and protests to wear down workers' resistance. This resulted in workers at the Australian Tax Office, the Department of

the Prime Minister and Cabinet Staff, the Department of Defence, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources accepting agreements they had previously rejected.

South Australian hospital staff stop work

About 100 workers at the Repatriation General Hospital, including kitchen staff, orderlies, disability and aged carers, stopped work for one hour on Wednesday in the first of rolling stop-work meetings. United Voice (UV) said its members would hold more meetings at seven other public hospitals across the state.

The hospital workers are in dispute with the state Labor government over a proposed enterprise bargaining agreement. Negotiations began in February. A UV spokesperson alleged that the government had failed to address critical issues, and that members wanted a fair wage increase, job security and an end to hospital privatisation.

New Zealand: Wellington rail workers strike

Railway workers from Wellington's rail commuter transport provider Transdev and its subcontractor South Korea's Hyundai Rotem walked off the job for two hours on Wednesday in a dispute over a new collective agreement. Members of the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU) claimed Transdev was attempting to claw back hard-won terms and conditions. The one-year contract, covering 400 rail workers in the capital city, Wellington, expired in July.

Transdev is a private company providing public commuter transport under contract with the Greater Wellington Regional Council. In its bid to run the region's train services, the company committed to employ rail workers who transferred from KiwiRail on the same or more favourable terms and conditions.



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