

Hyundai auto workers end strike, Sri Lankan bankworkers begin national protests

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

2 December 2017

South Korea: Hyundai auto workers end strike

Hyundai Motor workers at Ulsan, south of Seoul, ended a two-day strike on Tuesday over increased production demands for the Kona model. Workers had chained up the assembly line, fearing that revised production plans would involve more automation, parts outsourcing and fewer assembly line employees.

Hyundai and its union, which is affiliated to the Korean Metal Workers' Union, have been in talks about the expansion since October but could not agree on the working hours per worker if additional vehicles were made. Management decided on Tuesday to delay the expansion and continue negotiations.

Meanwhile, Hyundai and the union were expected to resume talks on Thursday on a new wage deal after failing to reach an agreement after 32 rounds of talks since April. The union wants the basic monthly wage to be increased by 154,883 won (\$US142.50) and a 30 percent bonus of 30 percent. The company's 2016 full-year net profit for 2016 was 5.72 trillion won.

Workers rejected Hyundai's offer to raise basic salaries by 42,879 won per month and bonuses worth 200 percent of basic pay plus 1 million won. After workers rejected this offer, the company suggested bonuses of 250 percent of basic pay plus 1.5 million won in a revised offer.

Laid off Bangladeshi garment workers protest

Workers from the shuttered factory of Luxma Sweater are maintaining a daily demonstration outside the Bangladesh Garment Manufacture Employers Association building in Dhaka protesting non-payment of wages since August and severance entitlements. Workers began protesting on Sunday but riot police intervened on Wednesday and blocked a march to the labour ministry building.

Garment Workers Trade Union Centre representatives have presented a memorandum to the labour ministry calling for it to help retrieve the workers' wages and entitlements.

Sugar mill workers demonstrate in Bangladesh

Rangpur Sugar Mill workers in Gaibandha protested outside the plant on November 26 to demand a 50 percent wage rise and pay for overtime work. Chinikal Workers' Union representatives want the wages increased from the current meagre 4,200 taka (\$US50) a month to between 8,750 and 13,500, effective from July 2015.

Burmese sport equipment factory workers end strike

Over 160 workers from the Very Impressive Prospect (VIP) sports equipment factory in Shwe Pyithar Industrial Zone, Yangon ended a two-day strike on November 23 after management accepted all their demands. The negotiations were supervised by the Insein township labour department. Workers struck to demand implementation of their lawful labour rights and retention of their 10,000 kyat (\$US7.40) monthly allowance, which the firm threatened to cut.

The employer has granted leave according to law, an increase in transportation allowances, provision of medicine and medical supplies in the infirmary, safety equipment and factory uniforms and an end to the production quota system. Management also accepted a directive from the labour officials to install exhaust fans.

India: Tamil Nadu electronics factory workers on strike

Nearly 300 workers from the Sanmina electronics factory in Chennai, Tamil Nadu have been on strike since November 21 to demand a wage increase, union recognition through secret ballot and the reinstatement of 30 workers on "compulsory rest" and facing various suspensions due to a court order following earlier protests.

The electronics workers want their current 12,000-rupee (\$US186) monthly pay increased to 21,000 rupees to bring them in line with workers at the neighbouring Foxconn and Nokia Siemens factories. Management arrogantly responded to their demand by ordering them to do more overtime or face voluntary retirement. Workers alleged that at least 150 workers have been retired through this management tactic.

Tamil Nadu salt refinery workers protest against privatisation

Around 500 workers from the Tamil Nadu Salt Corporation at Valinokkam demonstrated outside the plant on Monday against the government's move toward privatisation. The workers deferred a road-block demonstration in August after management falsely assured them there would be no privatisation or retrenchments. Workers, however, recently learned that the corporation had called for fresh tenders for a private firm to operate and maintain the refinery unit.

Bathinda rural health workers continue anti-privatisation protests

About 100 rural health (anganwadi) workers have been demonstrating outside the Punjab finance minister's office in Bathinda since November 22. They are protesting the state government's plans to privatise anganwadi centres and shift pre-nursery classes to primary schools. Union leaders claim that 52,000 anganwadi workers' and helpers' jobs are at risk.

Their action is part of state-wide action organised by the All India Anganwadi Association. The rural health workers are demanding that the government recruit them for the pre-primary classes, or revive the anganwadi centres by releasing funds for extra staffing and qualifications.

The finance minister has refused to meet with workers, claiming that they were not eligible to be hired for pre-primary classes.

Dehradun municipal workers end strike

More than 1,000 Dehradun Municipal Corporation (DMC) workers in India's Uttarakhand state ended an indefinite strike on November 23 after municipal authorities agreed to their demands for a salary increase included in the seventh pay commission recommendations. The DMC workers walked out two days earlier pointing out that although other government employees across the state were receiving pay rises stipulated by the commission the DMC was stalling.

Tea plantation workers in Assam protest

Thousands of tea plantation workers demonstrated in Guwahati, the capital of Assam state, on Monday to demand a pay increase. Their current daily wage is 137 rupees (\$US2.12), well below the state minimum of 250 rupees. Plantation owners demand that tea workers pluck 24 kilos per day or face wage penalties.

The workers and their families live in appalling conditions. They lack decent housing, water or basic toilet and health facilities. They are not provided with safe equipment or training and are exposed daily to toxic agricultural chemicals.

Indian bank unions call for national strike

The All India Bank Employees' Association (AIBEA) and All India Bank Officers' Association (AIBOA) have called for a national strike by members for December 27. The two associations, the biggest unions in the

banking sector, want the payment of outstanding salary increases, due for the period from November 1, 2012 to October 31, 2017.

Bank workers held a two-day strike in October over the issue. Bank authorities offered a pay increase up to 8 percent but workers demanded 15 percent.

Sri Lankan public bank sector workers begin national protest

Workers in Sri Lanka's public banking sector began an island-wide campaign on Tuesday protesting against privatisation and new government taxes on loan payments. The national government plans to sell shares in public banks and introduce a 20 cent transaction tax per 1,000 rupees.

Demonstrations were held outside the Bank of Ceylon office building in Colombo on Tuesday with protests in front of other state sector bank head offices and area branches on Wednesday.

The banking sector employs over 15,000 people. The government, in line with International Monetary Fund orders over several years, has cut bank workers' social benefits and pensions in preparation for privatisation.

Australian airport baggage handlers strike

Hundreds of workers from the airport ground handling company Aerocare stopped work at midday on Thursday at Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide airports in a dispute over a proposed enterprise agreement (EA).

Transport Workers Union members were protesting over company attempts to introduce industry-wide split shifts, which the union says forces employees to remain at work for 17 hours a day and sleep on makeshift bedding, while being paid for just six hours. The workers say it is too expensive to return home during the split shifts.

The Fair Work Commission in August ruled against Aerocare's proposed agreement which contained below-award wages and the split shifts. The FWC ruled that the company's proposed agreement did not pass "the better off overall test" (BOOT) because of low hourly pay rates. A TWU spokesman claimed the proposed agreement would see many employees losing as much as \$1,100 a month under the award. Aerocare has appealed the decision.

Western Australia: Griffin Coal strike in fifteenth 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. The workers walked off the job after rejecting a so-called "final" agreement after 12 months by the company and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU).

The proposed agreement would have cut pay by 8 percent annually—from \$139,301, based on a 42-hour working week, to \$128,000 annually for a 49-hour week.

After workers rejected the offer, the company acted on a ruling made by the FWC on June 9 last year which authorised it to terminate the old enterprise bargaining agreement and force employees back onto the inferior industry award, resulting in pay being cut to \$113,169 for a

46-hour week.

On November 13, production staff at the mine, who are Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) members, narrowly accepted Griffin's offer which cut their pay by 35 percent.

While maintenance workers were due to vote this week on a similar offer, which was accepted by the AMWU and severely cut pay and conditions, management decided to continued negotiations in the FWC.

The union claimed it is seeking reinstatement of previously accrued entitlements, such as annual and long service leave which was slashed in August 2016, the implementation of an family friendly even-time work rosters, acceptable rates of pay and an agreement in line with the production staff agreement.

New Zealand rail union calls off strike

A planned strike by 400 rail workers in Wellington on Friday was called off on Thursday evening by the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU). A RMTU spokesman said last-minute mediation resulted in Transdev and Hyundai Rotem agreeing to withdraw their attack on penalty rates for weekend work.

The strike would have been the second 24-hour stoppage in two weeks. An initial stop-work, for two hours on November 16, was the first organised by the RMTU in the Wellington rail system for 20 years.

The RMTU called the strikes after workers voted overwhelmingly to oppose various clawbacks sought by Transdev and Hyundai Rotem during negotiations on a proposed collective agreement. These included attacks on penalty rates and sick leave and demands for workers to be available on statutory holidays.

Mediated talks are continuing but there is no word yet over a final settlement. The union is making nationalist appeals, demagogically denouncing foreign companies for the attacks and calling on Wellington's mayor not to contract out public services to multinational companies.



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