

GlaxoSmithKline workers in Bangladesh protest factory closure;
Philippines police arrest picketing workers outside NutriAsia

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

4 August 2018

Bangladesh: GlaxoSmithKline workers protest factory closure

About 500 employees of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), one of the world's leading research-based pharmaceutical and healthcare companies, formed a human chain protest against the closure of its Fouzderhat manufacturing plant in Chittagong on July 26.

The GlaxoSmithKline factory has been operating in Bangladesh for over fifty years. It employed 1,500 workers, including around a 500-strong permanent workforce. GSK will maintain its profitable consumer healthcare unit in Bangladesh, which produces Horlicks, Sensodyne and Glaxose-D.

Pakistan: Punjab school and college teachers oppose pay cut

Over 100 teachers from schools and colleges run by the Fauji Foundation demonstrated in Rawalpindi against a planned drastic pay cut. According to teachers, their monthly 50,000-rupee (\$US403.03) wage would be reduced to just 15,000 rupees.

Fauji Foundation's web site claims that "it is amongst the largest business conglomerates in Pakistan, which 'Earns To Serve' the interests of ex-servicemen."

The teachers demonstrated outside the Foundation's headquarters carrying placards with slogans demanding withdrawal of the pay cut. Teachers from 90 schools and colleges run by the foundation would be directly affected, they told the media.

India: Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation workers end two-day strike

Thousands of Rajasthan State Road Transport Corporation (RSRTC) workers began strike action on July 25 for a salary increase in line with the seventh pay commission's rulings. They also demanded RSRTC management purchase 1,000 new buses, fill 9,000 vacant posts and pay outstanding wages to 4,000 pensioners. Almost 4,700 buses were grounded by the strike.

Unions connected with the All India Trade Union Congress, Centre for Indian Trade Unions and Indian National Trade Union Congress ended the

strike on July 27 after assuring their members that their wage rise demand and the purchase of new buses would be granted. The union federations, which are affiliated with the Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India [Marxist] and the Congress party respectively, systematically defend Indian capitalism.

In August 2017, RSRTC held a two-hour strike to demand pensions for retired workers and outstanding wages for the workers.

Jawaharlal Nehru University teachers hold one-day strike

Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers Association (JNUTA) members held a one-day strike on July 31 to protest against the tertiary institution's current administration.

JNUTA members also decided to hold a two-question referendum on August 7 on removal of the JNU Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar and to reject the Higher Education Funding Authority (HEFA) loan.

A statement endorsed at a general meeting by union members prior to the walkout said "the university is being steadily pushed towards a path of destruction" by the current vice-chancellor. Both teachers and students participated in the strike with teachers holding placards and wearing black protest badges in a march around the campus.

Mass arrests of protesting Chinese workers

An ongoing dispute over sackings at the Jasic Technology Factory in Shenzhen has escalated with the arrests of 29 workers and a student on July 27.

Protests were held in support of the decision by workers to form their own union, deemed illegal by the company and state-run labor unions, and in solidarity against the fired workers. According to police from the Pingshan district, the workers were apprehended on suspicion of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble."

Taiwanese Airline workers call for protections during typhoons

About 20 union members and activists protested outside the Ministry of Labor in Taipei on Tuesday, demanding government regulations mandate leave for airline workers during typhoons. The action follows a similar protest in July led by sales clerks.

Workers shouted, "We want typhoon day law" and held placards reading "Safety is more important than profit" and "Workers have the right to choose not to die for a job."

Currently, employees have their bonuses docked and are required to do compensatory work if they miss a shift during potentially deadly typhoons.

Police arrest 19, injure dozens at Philippines picket line

Nineteen protesting NutriAsia plant workers and their supporters were arrested last Monday in the Bulacan province of the Philippines. Over a hundred police and security guards violently dispersed a protest of around 300 blocking access to the factory.

Guards used rattan sticks and threw stones to disperse the crowd. They allegedly confiscated laptops, cellphones and other paraphernalia, along with motorcycles and bikes.

Among those arrested were Anakbayan Secretary General Einstein Recedes and the League of Filipino Students (LFS) Secretary General Mark Quinto.

The altercation occurred in the midst of government mediation of a dispute over the sacking 50 NutriAsia workers over two months ago. Workers are demanding the reinstatement of the employees and an increase in full-time positions.

Australian steel workers seek pay increase at BlueScope

Workers at BlueScope's Port Kembla steelworks on the New South Wales south coast are threatening industrial action in a dispute over a new workplace agreement.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU), which covers the workers, claims to be seeking a 10 percent pay increase over three years. The company has offered only 7.5 percent. Bluescope has also ruled out reinstating a range of conditions that were axed in 2015 in a deal that was forced through by the company and the AWU under threat of closure of the plant. The 2015 agreement also included a four year pay freeze.

The AWU's stated pay claim barely covers the rise in the cost of living and in no way makes up for wages lost during the four year pay freeze.

In an attempt to get workers to accept the current deal the company said it was offering employees "a chance" to be included in a "profit sharing" scheme. Under the scheme, however, workers will only receive a bonus if financial targets, to be met through cost-cutting, are achieved.

Australia: Logan council workers strike over pay offer

More than 100 workers at the Logan City Council south of Brisbane went on strike for 24 hours last Monday. The stoppage included transport workers, plumbers along with administration, technical and advisory staff.

In negotiations for new workplace agreements, the employees are seeking an across the board 2.5 percent pay rise per annum and a three

year contract. The council is offering annual pay increases of just 2.25 percent for four years and an even lower increase for administrative workers. Some workers will receive a yearly increase of just 1 percent.

The workers, members of the Services Union, Transport Workers Union and Plumbers Union, went on strike briefly and protested outside the council building in June over the same issue. Negotiations between the three unions and the council have dragged on for twelve months.

Australian university staff hold stop-work meetings

On Thursday, staff at the University of Newcastle (UON) in New South Wales stopped work and attended meetings on negotiations for a new enterprise work agreement (EA).

As part of the dispute, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has called limited work bans, such as refusing to respond to management inquiries outside usual work hours. Thursday's stoppage lasted just several hours.

There have been over 25 meetings between the NTEU and management this year. Staff are calling for improved pay and working conditions and greater job security. The union's claims are vague and it has not even specified the pay increase it is seeking.

New Zealand primary school teachers vote for full day strike

Primary school teachers throughout New Zealand have voted in favour of extending a planned August 15 strike to a full day.

The New Zealand Educators Institute (NZEI) held meetings throughout June as their members voted to strike. During the meetings, several teachers questioned the union's decision to limit the strike to three hours, arguing that a full day strike would send a stronger message. This pressured the union to cast another ballot to extend the strike.

The strike will be the first by primary teachers in 24 years. Earlier in the year, teachers rejected a pay offer from the government that would see most salaries rise only 6.1 percent over the three years. They are demanding a 16 percent increase over two years and greatly improved working conditions to help alleviate the teacher shortage.

New Zealand: Third strike by Inland Revenue workers

Around 3,000 workers at the Inland Revenue Department (IRD) held a half-day strike throughout the country on Wednesday. This follows strikes on July 9 and July 23, which were joined by workers at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE).

Both IRD and MBIE workers are represented by the Public Services Association (PSA), which has not included MBIE in the most recent strike even though their dispute has not been resolved. The strikes have been limited to between two and four hours. IRD are in the process of cutting thousands of jobs which the PSA have not opposed.

IRD staff are demanding better pay, with a quarter of workers paid less than \$48,000. They are also protesting against frustrating changes in their computer systems, adding to their workload.

New Zealand: Workers at Maori TV to strike

Twenty-seven workers at Maori TV will strike for 24 hours on August 8. The state-owned television station primarily broadcasts programmes in the Maori language.

The E t? union has been in negotiations with Maori TV for months. E t?'s Joe Gallagher told the media the bargaining process has been undermined because non-union members have since received bonuses and wage adjustments.

New Zealand: Mine workers at Taharoa Ironsand to strike

Around 70 mine workers at Taharoa Ironsand Ltd, south of Kawhia Harbour, will strike on August 24. The workers have cited unfair wage talks as their reason for taking industrial action, which will involve a ban on loading iron slurry onto ships.

The company annually exports sand worth more than \$150 million. The E t? union says 100 percent of its membership at the mine voted in favour of a strike.



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