Thousands of Korean workers strike against government labour policies; Sri Lanka teachers walk out for better pay; Bangladesh municipal workers resume strikes

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

20 July 2019

Thousands of Korean workers strike over next year's minimum wage

Around 50,000 members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), one of the country's two largest umbrella unions, participated in multiple strikes across the country on July 18 against the labour policies of the Moon Jae-in administration.

About 5,000 rallied outside the National Assembly in Yeouido, western Seoul, as the parliamentary Environment and Labor Committee convened to review expansion of the flexible working-hours system.

The KCTU is demanding stricter corporate regulation and abolition of South Korea's two-tier labour system. The main issue of contention was the minimum hourly wage. Workers were promised that it would be raised higher than 10,000 won ($8.50) per hour, but last week the limit was increased to just 8,590 won ($7.30). This makes it the smallest increase in a decade, a raise of 2.9 percent, amidst a slump in the manufacturing and services sector.

India: Mumbai railway workers protest against privatisation

Railway workers demonstrated at all stations on Mumbai's Western Line on July 11 over the Indian government's decision to merge the Railway Colony in Matunga with the Dharavi Redevelopment Project and lease 45 acres of prime land to private entities. The protest was organised by the Western Railway Mazdoor Sangh (WRMS). Workers said the outsourcing of the railway land will endanger the safety, security and general living standards of workers and their families.

Demonstrators demanded withdrawal of the plan and said national property should not be handed over for commercial exploitation and criticised plans to corporatise production units, such as the Modern Coach Factory (MCF) in Rae Bareilly. The MCF has been identified as the first production unit to be sold off to private entrepreneurs. It has been outsourced by the Railway Land Development Authority to agencies and has left the workforce in the dark.

Railway loco running staff in Andhra Pradesh hold hunger protest over privatisation

The All India Loco Running Staff Association in Andhra Pradesh held a 24-hour hunger strike on July 15 over moves to privatise the Indian Railways and to demand an increase in the mileage rate for the running staff, in accordance with the Recruitment and Assessment Centre 1980 formula.

Loco running staff also want the New Pension Scheme scrapped and the old scheme restored, rectification of differences in the pensions of loco pilots retired before and after January 1, 2016 and improved safety for passengers and staff.

Jammu and Kashmir day care workers demonstrate over honorarium scheme

Anganwadi (day care centre) workers and helpers in India's Jammu and Kashmir state protested on July 17 to demand revocation of a new honorarium scheme which they say will not benefit them. They are demanding honorarium payments as per the Integrated Child Development Service.

Organised by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, demonstrators from various parts of Kashmir Valley assembled in Pratap Park in Sri Nagar and later marched chanting slogans such as, "Revoke the decision," "Do not drink the blood of women folk," and "We want justice."

Anheuser-Busch brewery workers remain on strike in Haryana state

Anheuser-Busch InBev (AB InBev) brewing workers have been on strike for over 500 days at the giant Belgium beverage corporation facility in Sonipat, Haryana state.

AB InBev is the world's largest brewer producing beer for Budweiser, Hoegaarden, Corona and hundreds of other labels and employing 180,000 people globally. Its Sonipat unit has 82 permanent employees and around 350 contract workers. The striking workers accuse the company of union-busting at the Sonipat facility.

The strike began after AB InBev suspended and then terminated four union members on fake charges. Over 20 workers rejected the strike and established another union which was endorsed by management.

© World Socialist Web Site

The majority of workers, however, have remained on strike, denouncing the company for denying the basic right to join the union of their choice and exercise their collective bargaining rights.

Protesting PASIC employees arrested in Puducherry

Around 100 workers from the government-run Puducherry Agro Service and Industries Corporation (PASIC) were arrested after blocking traffic at Rajiv Gandhi Square in the state capital over outstanding salary payments. Management has failed to fully pay employees, including voucher-based and daily-rated workers for the past 57 months in violation of India's labour laws.

Goa sugar factory employees strike for pay rise

Workers from the Sanjivani Co-operative Sugar Factory at Dharbandora in Goa walked out on strike on July 7 to demand salary increases in line with Maharashtra Wage Board rates. The workers were reportedly assured by the company administrator that their new salaries would be paid within a month.

The sugar workers told the media that their pay has not been increased since 2014 and that clerical staff monthly salaries were less than 25,000-rupees ($357), despite working for the company for almost 25 years. Their salary rates have been paid in accordance with the Maharashtra Sugar Factory Wage Board since 2009. Workers gave management one month's notice of the planned strike.

Former Chowel India and Dongsun autoworkers arrested in Tamil Nadu

Former employees of Chowel India and Dongsun plants were arrested on July 12 for protesting outside the Hyundai India company in Chennai. The workers were attempting to present a petition over the closure of the two companies, which are subsidiaries of the automotive giant Hyundai. About 150 workers, along with Centre of Indian Trade Unions Kanchipuram district leaders, were arrested by police but later released.

Management of Chowel India and Dongsun responded to increasing workers' opposition over the violation of their rights by closing down the plants and relocating the machinery to another Hyundai subsidiary called Hwashin Automotive India. On May 19, over 140 workers from the Chowel India factory in Sriperumbudur were arrested for attempting to stop machinery being moved from that facility.

Powercom contractual workers protest in Punjab

Powercom contract workers demonstrated on July 12 outside the company's south division office in Goniana Mandi in India's Punjab state. The workers were demanding payment of two months' outstanding salaries. The protest was organised by the Powercom Contractual Workers' Union.

Demonstrators, who allege that a private labour hire contracting firm has not been releasing workers' salaries on time, burnt an effigy of the contracting company. They also denounced Powercom officials and the Punjab state government for not granting workers long-standing demands, including the provision of insurance coverage for all contract workers and supplying required work tools, equipment and safety gear.

Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited workers rally in Tamil Nadu

Thousands of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) workers rallied in Trichy city (Tiruchirappalli) on July 13 against the national government's moves to privatise scores of major state-owned enterprises. BHEL, an engineering and manufacturing company owned by the Indian government, employs around 40,000 workers and is the country's largest manufacturer of power generation equipment.

Similar protests and rallies were held across India in opposition to the government's privatisation policies.

On the same day Salem Steel Plant workers and their family members protested to demand the central government withdraw a global tender for sale of the steel plant and two days later on July 15 Ordnance Factory Tiruchirapalli workers protested against corporatisation.

Sri Lankan Postal workers strike over pay and promotions

Central postal exchange workers held a two-day strike paralysing services in the major Colombo exchange. The workers denounced the government for delayed promotions, new recruitments and outstanding salary increments and said that a presidential commission appointed after a 16-day- strike in 2018 had done nothing to settle these issues.

The postal unions warned the government that they would organise a national strike if workers' demands are not soon resolved.

Sri Lankan teachers walk out for higher pay

Thousands of Sri Lankan government school teachers struck on July 18 and 19 to a demand salary increases and higher pensions and in protest against excessive workloads. Around 100,000 teachers, or almost one third of the teaching workforce, boycotted their duties or took sick leave on the first day of the strike.

The strike was mainly organised on social networks by the Sri Lanka Government Teachers' Association and was a continuation of protests and industrial action which began earlier in the year. Government schools were brought to a standstill when teachers took national action on March 13.

Bangladesh municipal workers resume action over wages

Several thousand municipal workers across Bangladesh held a sit-down demonstration on Sunday outside the Jatiya Press Club to demand regular salary payments and the nationalisation of municipal services. Over

© World Socialist Web Site

15,000 workers took one-day national strike action on July 2 over the same issue.

Workers want their salaries paid from state funds not by the municipalities. Only 40 to 50 of the more than 325 municipalities in Bangladesh generate enough income to regularly pay workers' wages.

According to the Bangladesh Association of Paurashava Services, as of June this year the total unpaid salaries of Bangladesh municipal workers was $US82 million (6.92 billion taka) and over 960 retired workers had not received pensions amounting to $14 million.

The workers, who are members of the Bangladesh Municipality Service Association, demonstrated in March last year over the same demands.

Cambodian garment workers continue strike

Bowker Garment Factory workers in Cambodia's Kandal province walked out on strike on July 10 over 18 demands listed in a petition drawn up by the 2,000-strong workforce.

The garment workers want improved conditions, reinstalment of sacked unionist Hean Sroeun and no discrimination against members of his Cambodian Development Union. Strikers are also demanding dismissal of the company's administration chief Yong Kong.

The Garment Manufacturers Association on Tuesday declared that the strike was illegal to pressure the workers to end the walkout and await an Arbitration Council decision on their 18-point claim.

While administrator Yong claimed that most employees had resumed work by Tuesday, a striker told the media on Wednesday that between 800 and 900 workers remained on strike and would not return until the arbitration ruling is announced.

Strikes continue into second week at DP World Australia

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), a division of the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union, has called further strike action at DP World Australia (DPWA) terminals in a dispute over the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). The action follows a series of 48-hour strikes last week at DPWA terminals by 1,800 workers in Fremantle, Brisbane, Sydney and a four-day strike in Melbourne.

The new strikes commenced on Thursday at Port Botany, Sydney with a 48-hour stoppage by 600 workers, while 350 Brisbane stevedores began a series of one-hour strikes at the start of each shift. MUA members at Fremantle, Perth will walk out for 24 hours on Saturday morning. Management has responded by announcing that it intends to axe 100 jobs at its Sydney terminal and 100 at the Melbourne terminal on top of 47 workers forced out on redundancy this week.

The current DPWA enterprise agreement expired in February and the MUA has been in negotiations for a new three-year agreement since September. DPWA wants major changes to work practices in order to slash labour costs and boost shareholder profits.

The MUA has been compelled to call strike action in response to members' concerns over the loss of jobs through automation. DPWA is seeking to emulate its competitors, which, with the crucial assistance of the unions, has automated large parts of their operations over the past two decades, and drastically reduced the size of their workforce.

The company has rejected calls for a limit on the use of casual labour and wants abolition of a union-operated income protection arrangement. It has offered to maintain the fund if the MUA drops its demands for a ban on casual labour, expanded leave provisions and other improved conditions, with a 2.6 percent cap on any annual wage increases.

In a clear sign that it is organising a sell-out deal, the MUA agreed to enforce a ban on industrial action for three months, ending in July.

In 2015, the MUA ended a week-long strike by workers at Hutchison Ports after the company sacked 97 workers via text message. The union later imposed a sell-out agreement that eliminated over 60 full-time positions, a longer working week, and lower rates of real pay.

NSW hospital workers threaten to strike over safety

Over 500 delegates from the Health Services Union (HSU) in New South Wales voted unanimously this week to hold a four-hour stop work meeting on August 1 to demand the state government act to end violence against hospital staff.

According to the HSU, the stop-work will involve 22,000 government health workers throughout the state including paramedics, catering, administration and security staff. Nurses and doctors were urged to participate. The vote comes after a series of attacks on hospital staff in emergency departments and wards. The HSU wants at least 250 more hospital security guards stationed at facilities across the state.

New Zealand psychologists vote for industrial action

More than 600 psychologists from 17 of New Zealand's 20 District Health Boards (DHBs) have voted to take industrial action for the first time and ban overtime for five weeks. The APEX union said the strike would start on July 31, and end on September 3.

APEX members voted in favour of the action after DHBs failed to present an offer in bargaining last week. The strike will include psychologists working across forensic services, community mental health, addiction and inpatient services. It will also involve those working in physical health services, including cancer, cardiac, spinal, diabetes and older persons' health.

The strike is part of an upsurge of industrial action and protests since last year, including nurses, junior doctors, midwives and ambulance paramedics, over low pay and harsh working conditions enforced by the DHBs on behalf of the Labour-led government.

Retail workers suspended over pay protest

Workers at international retail giant H&M in Auckland and Christchurch were suspended this week for wearing protest stickers on the job. The stickers were part of limited action by about 60 staff over pay, which has seen them refuse to return clothes to the sales floor from fitting rooms and other basic tasks.

One of the stickers refers to women's make-up and reads "my wages need a glow up." A spokesperson for FIRST Union said it was "a light hearted encouragement to H&M to bridge the gap between the current offer and the living wage." H&M sales staff earn $18.70 an hour, just above the minimum wage of $17.70. The Living Wage campaign, promoted by the trade unions, falsely claims that $21.15 per hour is sufficient to keep workers out of poverty.

© World Socialist Web Site

A FIRST Union bargaining team met with H&M earlier this week for mediation.

New Zealand kindergarten teachers vote on pay offer

Kindergarten teachers are to vote on whether to accept an offer from the Labour government that grants them pay parity with primary and secondary teachers. The settlement would give kindergarten teachers the same pay increases and unified pay scale pushed through by the NZ Educational Institute (NZEI) in a settlement for primary teachers after nationwide strike action.

The deal for about 5,000 kindergarten teachers allows for a lump sum payment of $1,500 and 3 percent pay increase per year for three years. An NZEI negotiator admitted the proposed settlement won’t address all their claims, “particularly around workload, expertise allowances and better career pathways.” She said it would be up to members whether to settle, “or if they want to fight on.”

The proposed settlement comes after four days of negotiations between NZEI, kindergarten operators and the Ministry of Education. As with the primary teachers’ deal, no meetings have been called so teachers can discuss it, and voting is online. The result is expected to be announced on July 26.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site