

Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

17 September 2021

Korean subway union calls off strike after accepting a vague agreement

The Korean Railway Workers' Union, which covers thousands of Seoul Metro workers, called off a strike planned for Tuesday after last minute talks with management. The strike was called to oppose Metro's restructuring plan, which planned to reduce accumulated losses of more than 1 trillion won (\$US875.81 million) by eliminating 10 percent of the company's 16,700-strong workforce, slashing benefits, freezing wages and outsourcing work to the private sector.

Following talks, Seoul Metro agreed to withdraw its plan to eliminate 1,539 jobs while the union agreed to establish a consultation body between management and the union to discuss ways of improving workplace safety and "normalising" its business. Seoul Metro CEO said the company will overcome its financial crisis by establishing a model management-union relationship. In other words, the union will assist management to slash costs and drive-up productivity.

Seoul Metro also agreed to "work towards" eliminating expanded late-night operations and transfer management of the extended route of the No7 subway line. There was no announcement on planned cuts to allowances and the freezing of wages.

Taiwan parcel delivery workers protest against wage freeze

Parcel delivery workers from Chunghwa Express, a subsidiary of Chunghwa Post, demonstrated outside the Ministry of Transportation and Communications building in Taipei on Wednesday, threatening to strike if they are not given a pay rise. Workers alleged that their pay had not been adjusted for 17 years.

According to the Chunghwa Express Union, the average monthly salary for workers in the transportation and warehousing industry last year was NT\$55,097. The basic monthly salary of an entry-level Chunghwa Express employee was less than NT\$25,000. It claimed that adding full-attendance bonuses and overtime pay would only increase that to NT\$26,000 (\$US954) a month. The union wants a 5 percent pay increase for the company's 200 ground-level workers.

Chunghwa Post holds 50 percent shares in the company while the rest is held by private investors. Chunghwa Express board members claimed that the private sector board members were blocking any wage increase.

India: Madhya Pradesh junior doctors strike indefinitely

Around 3,000 junior doctors in Madhya Pradesh began an indefinite strike on September 8 demanding that the government withdraw an order to cancel the registration of three office-bearers of the Junior Doctors

Association (JuDA). The order was a cynical act of retribution in response to the doctors' week-long strike in June for higher pay and other issues. Services at the six government-run medical colleges in Bhopal, Indore, Sagar, Gwalior, Jabalpur and Rewa were adversely impacted.

JuDA office-bearers were directed to vacate their hostels and warned of action under the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA). The doctors said they would remain on strike until the government repeals the order to de-register the three doctors.

The strike in June ended following a Madhya Pradesh high court return to work order. About 3,000 doctors resigned saying they would challenge the ruling. They returned to their posts when the state government assured them that their demands would be met. The doctors alleged the assurance was false and there has been no indication of progress on their demands.

Social health workers in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana demand permanent jobs

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) workers demonstrated in Andhra Pradesh and its neighbour state Telangana on September 13 to demand permanent jobs and a pay increase.

Around 150 ASHA workers from the Secunderabad Cantonment area, Telangana staged a silent protest outside the Picket Dispensary putting forward their demands. They also demanded three months of overdue pay and complained they were not provided with COVID-19 safety kits.

ASHA workers make up a skilled frontline workforce involved with vaccination drives and monitoring the health of home-quarantine patients and give other health support in rural areas. They alleged that despite working long hours, they are not given any insurance and job security. Their current monthly salary is just 7,000-rupees (\$US95).

Last month, 1,000 ASHA workers from Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district protested demanding a five million-rupee compensation payment to families of ASHA workers who died from COVID-19, inclusion in the state welfare scheme and a 300,000-rupee retirement benefit payment.

Tamil Nadu COVID-19 government hospital nurses protest

Around 100 contract nurses at the Government Kilpauk Medical College Hospital (GKMCH) in Chennai protested at the Directorate of Medical Education (DME) campus on Monday alleging that management had withdrawn accommodation and food.

Some 198 contract nurses were posted on COVID-19 duty at the hospital during the peak of the pandemic. They were provided accommodation and food in a hotel but management suddenly asked them to vacate the hotel from September 13. The nurses later withdrew their protest after officials at the DME promised to restore the entitlements.

Andhra Pradesh outsourced health workers protest for permanency

Outsourced health workers terminated by the Andhra Pradesh government following a supposed decline in COVID-19 cases held a sit-down protest in Visakhapatnam on September 8 demanding restoration of their jobs. Protesters said 136 outsourced employees of 26 urban Public Health Centres (PHC) in the district were terminated. State-wide around 1,800 outsourced employees were terminated.

As well as those workers recruited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, terminated workers also include Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), lab technicians, pharmacists, Class IV employees, who were all appointed through e-Vaidya (online doctor consultation) five years ago. They alleged some ANMs have been employed for 20 years.

Outsourced workers demanded permanent jobs, claiming that their services should be permanent because the number of urban Public Health Centres had increased from 222 to 560.

Punjab road commuter transport contract workers end strike

The union representing around 8,000 striking contract and outsourced workers from the state-owned Punjab Roadways and Pepsu Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) ended strike action on Tuesday after talks with the government. The workers began an indefinite strike on September 6 demanding permanent jobs, equal pay for equal work and that the bus fleet be increased from 2,500 to at least 10,000. At least 75 percent of the state-owned bus fleet was off the road.

The Contractual Employees' Union claimed it had reached a deal with the government on all workers' demands but nothing was concrete. A union leader told members that the government assured them that salaries would increase by 30 percent and then 5 percent every year. He said the government had "given its word" that the bus fleet would soon be increased by 900 buses.

The government stalled on the issue of permanent jobs saying it needed a week to decide. The union told workers it had given the government two weeks or it will call another strike.

Tamil Nadu: Ford auto plant workers in Chennai oppose closure

Workers at Fords Chennai Maraimalaiagar plant in Tamil Nadu demonstrated on September 14 opposing Ford's decision to close the plant. The protest was called by the Chennai Ford Employees Union and the Stalinist Centre for Indian Trade Unions.

In the absence of any concrete industrial action, the union leaders appealed to the government to stop the closure and begged Ford Management "not to neglect the lives of 2,700 workers in the factory."

New South Wales commuter rail workers take industrial action

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members at Sydney Trains and NSW Trains began work bans commenced on Tuesday in their dispute with the state Liberal government for an improved pay increase. Workers placed an indefinite ban on working with the New Intercity Fleet (NIF). The NIF

carries commuters between Sydney and the Central Coast, Newcastle, the Blue Mountains and the South Coast.

Over 80 percent of workers rejected the government's proposed enterprise agreement (EA) offer of a 0.3 percent pay increase in the first year, with annual increases for the following two years capped at 2.5 percent.

The RTBU and Electrical Trades Union (ETU) have formed a combined unions negotiating team. Members of the Australian Services Union (ASU) have voted for industrial action in their EA dispute with Sydney Trains. Over 600 ASU members are involved.

More than 10,200 individuals are employed by NSW Trains, including drivers, maintenance and cleaning staff, signals operators, ticket inspectors, stationmasters, and guards, while Sydney Trains employs over 11,000 people.

Sydney warehouse workers walk out over COVID-19 concerns

Over 40 workers from the Scott's Refrigerated Logistics (SRL) warehouse at Erskine Park, 42km west of Sydney, walked off the job several times in the first nine days of September over safety concerns. COVID-19 had rapidly spread throughout the facility in the past two weeks. They refused to re-enter the site until it was made safe.

Three workers tested positive on August 30. Since then, a total of 11 workers have tested positive for COVID-19, with many more identified as close contacts by NSW Health and instructed to isolate for 14 days. There are around 70 employees at the site which supplies major supermarkets such as Woolworths, Coles, IGA and ALDI.

The United Workers Union (UWU) accused SRL of being in breach of its COVID Safe Plan, adding that some workers had already passed on the infection to their families, with household contacts including children testing positive to the virus.

Workers said that a colleague seen in physical contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 was instructed by SRL to continue working. The union alleged other breaches included instructing workers from other areas to work on the dock, compromising the larger worksite by exposing workers from different sections, and workers instructed to continue shifts despite being unwell.

Striking plasterboard manufacturing workers in Sydney win pay rise

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members at the Etex plasterboard manufacturing and distribution facility in Sydney won a 9 percent pay increase over three years within hours of walking off the job. Around 40 workers represented by the ETU, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Construction Forestry Maritime Mining and Energy Union were in dispute with Etex over its proposed enterprise agreement.

Workers wanted 3 percent annual pay increases to keep pace with the cost of living and payment of the industry standard \$2 per hour Electrical Licence Allowance. Etex agreed to the demands.

Melbourne abrasives manufacturing workers take industrial action

About 35 workers at the Saint-Gobain abrasives manufacturing plant in

Melbourne have begun industrial action for an improved enterprise agreement. Action could include various work bans and strikes ranging from 4 to 24 hours for an indefinite period.

Workers are asking for 3 percent annual pay increases and to retain their superannuation contributions at 1.5 percent above the minimum requirement. The United Workers Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) claimed the company repeatedly shut-down talks, refusing to negotiate a deal.

The AMWU claimed that workers at the plant achieved a 20 percent productivity increase since the last agreement making them determined to win their demands.

Cadbury chocolate factory workers in Melbourne walk out

About 340 members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) walked out for 24 hours at two Mondelez (Cadbury) chocolate factory sites in Melbourne on Friday demanding more secure jobs and an improved pay offer in the company's proposed enterprise agreement (EA). Workers have banned weekend overtime work.

An AMWU spokesman said some workers have been in casual roles for 10 years but Mondelez International is refusing to make them permanent. Workers have rejected the company's pay increase offer of 9.75 percent over four years, which is a pay cut when compared with the projected cost of living increase.



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