

Australian textile strike enters second month

Chris Sinnema
30 January 1999

A strike by 80 workers at the Australian Dyeing Company (ADC) in Clifton Hill, Victoria is about to enter its second month. Members of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union decided to strike at the beginning of December after the company refused to continue negotiations on a new workplace agreement.

The workers were seeking a 10 percent pay increase over two years and improved redundancy provisions but ADC would not budge from its offer of 8 percent over three years.

The company reacted to the strike by imposing a lockout up to Christmas Eve and then declaring that the plant would be shut down until January 11. The locked out workers are maintaining an around-the-clock picket line outside the factory.

A deal struck in fresh negotiations last week between the union and ADC management fell apart when the company refused to guarantee that workers would not be victimised on their return to work. Neither the union nor the company will reveal the details of the failed agreement.

The company has hired a small army of security guards and spent \$100,000 on surveillance equipment, including spy cameras, in an attempt to intimidate the workers, who are have also been threatened with legal action.

The company is receiving support from the state Liberal government. At one time over 50 police with horses and dogs were mobilised to break up the picket and allow material and scabs to enter. While the company has free reign to attack the strikers, action by the pickets and their supporters is being tightly controlled by the union leaders.

A memo circulated by the union warned the strikers and other picketers, "not to obstruct or delay any person or vehicle from entering the premises or to intimidate, harass or threaten any person who wants to enter or leave the plant".

Over the past 10 years the union has overseen the elimination of jobs and conditions at the factory. The workforce has been cut from 300 to 85 but workers are expected to maintain the same levels of production. Wages are poor with workers receiving only \$11 an hour even though they are using dangerous chemicals.

The company is a commission dye house, processing both knitted and woven fabrics for industry. This process involves the use of known cancer-causing chemicals, including sulfuric acid and peroxide.

Workers on the picket said there had been an increase in cancer cases at the plant. One worker on the picket line who has cancer of the larynx was off work for six months receiving treatment but the company refused to pay compensation.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact