Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to editor@wsws.org

Software workers take industrial action

Software programmers working for Toshiba this week began a work-to-rule in opposition to being made to work excessive hours and unpaid overtime.

The workers, members of the Australian Services Union, are involved in the production of software programs used in the management of Japanese power stations.

They have been trying to reach an agreement with Toshiba for the last six months but the company insists they work a 38-hour week and that overtime is paid at the normal day rate.

Union delegate Owen Caugley said long hours are being worked throughout the industry. "Most software people do at least 45 hours a week and less than a third get paid for overtime. The biggest danger is burnout. I've seen people after weeks of crazy hours and they are like zombies."

Construction workers threaten strike

Victorian construction workers on the state government's Federation Square project in Melbourne threatened to go on strike if demands for shorter working hours, extra leave and a nine-day fortnight are not met.

But the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union, meeting with the building contractor Multiplex in the Industrial Relations Commission this week, agreed to impose a cooling off period.

Workers at the site are looking to be compensated for the large amount of night and weekend work that is required because the construction is taking place over and along the busy Flinders Street railway lines.

The workers are also pressing the company to employ one apprentice for every three tradesmen and that for every six construction workers hired, one should be over 45 years of age.

Fibreglass workers retrenched

Amatek building materials announced this week that it will close its fibreglass products operation at Dandenong, Victoria, in March, destroying 330 jobs.

The company is the country's only producer of fibreglass reinforcing yarns and woven matting. The UK-based CVC Capital Partners bought out the Amatek Group, together with Rockla concrete and Stramit steel operations, 11 months ago.

Indian bank workers strike

Over one million bank workers across India went on strike for two days on Thursday.

The workers, members of the All-Indian Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) and the United Forum of Bank Unions, are demanding an 18 percent pay increase but the Indian Banks Association has refused to budge on its offer of 10 percent.

Reports from around the country said the strike paralysed banking operations. Business at the Reserve Bank was disrupted when clerical staff stayed away in solidarity with the strikers. Over 1,500 private and commercial bank branches in Mumbai, the country's commercial capital, were closed and workers held demonstrations in the city centre.

The workers have threatened an indefinite strike from March 8 if their wage demands are not met but the union has already offered to reduce the original demand.

The AIBEA's general secretary Tarakeshwar Chakraborthy told the media this week: "We are prepared to come down from 18 percent."

Indonesian factory workers clash with police

About 600 factory workers from PT Siantar Top in Sidoarjo, East Java clashed with police last Monday. The workers planned to march to the governor's office to settle a dispute concerning their welfare. When police intervened to prevent the march interfering with freeway traffic, workers began throwing rocks and were

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chased by police. Two workers were held for questioning. On Tuesday, 250 workers from PT Rajapaksi Adhya Perkasa, also in Sidoarjo, marched to the office of DPRD Sidoarjo (the regional legislative assembly) to oppose the company's plans for mass sackings.

On the same day in Tandes, an industrial area of Surabaya, 1,300 workers from the PT Lucky Top faucet factory, joined by other workers from PT Sinar Indo Megantara and PT Palunesia, demonstrated for higher food and transportation subsidies. They demanded a rise in their food subsidy from $0.07 to $0.15 per day and in their transportation subsidy from $0.06 to $0.10.

Meanwhile, four truckloads of workers from the Electronic Unit I of PT Maspion protested at the Legal Aid Services in Surabaya against mass sackings. The company dismissed 1,110 workers after a major demonstration last Wednesday.

Korean union federation quits committee

The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, one of South Korea's peak union bodies, announced this week that it will quit the tripartite committee of unions, business and government representatives. President Kim Dae-jung set up the committee in February last year to oversee restructuring and downsizing in Korea's major industries.

The union says it plans to hold a mass rally in Seoul on the weekend. The break by the KCTU comes as workers continue to take industrial action in some of the country's major conglomerates in opposition to "big deals" or mergers that threaten thousands of jobs.

A spokesman for the KCTU said the union will request that the government sign a "job security agreement" and put an end to layoffs.

But the KCTU played a central role in breaking the resistance of workers to mass sackings last year. Major strikes and occupations in both the car and metal industries were isolated and closed down.

The other union umbrella, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions, is yet to confirm if it will remain on the tripartite committee.

Medical insurance workers strike

Over 2,800 workers, members of the National Workplace Medical Insurance Association, voted to go on strike indefinitely at a rally this week in central Seoul.

The workers have been going on strike for four hours each day since February 18 in protest against a government proposal to cut wages by 4.5 percent.

More mine deaths in China

An explosion in a coal mine in China's north-eastern province of Heilongjiang this week claimed the lives of 48 workers. The massive blast, that ripped through the Qitaihe mine in the early hours of the morning, was caused by a build-up of methane gas.

Almost 7,500 people were killed in disasters in the country's coal mines last year. Over one third of China's coal operations are run without licenses and local government officials turn a blind eye to safety abuses.

Communication workers oppose sackings

Workers at Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT) will strike to force the management to reinstate three sacked workers. Two of the workers are officials of the Union of Post and Telecommunication Officers Union.

A spokesman for the Joint Association of Telecommunication Trade Unions, which also cover workers at Telecom, said the organisation has not yet made a decision to support the strike.

The company is 35 percent owned and managed by Japan's Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp.

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