Workers Struggles: Asia and Australia

6 March 1999

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

Building union abandons site delegate

The Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) this week disowned a union delegate who had attempted to enforce the "closed shop" policy at the Hawthorn building project in Melbourne.

In a test case for the Howard government's bid to end compulsory unionism on large construction sites, the government's Employment Advocate Jonathan Hamberger personally appeared before the Federal Court this week. He told the court that site delegate Ian Williamson had breached the Workplace Relations Act when he threatened industrial action if the building company, Abigroup, continued to employ non-union painter John Lyten.

Counsel for the CFMEU told the hearing that Williamson did not have the union's authority to threaten the action and could only carry out tasks "such as enrolling workers and receiving contributions". The union refused to back the delegate even when it was revealed that Lyten had secretly tape-recorded a conversation with Williamson to gather evidence.

In what was an interim hearing, both Williamson and the union gave undertakings not to interfere with Lyten's employment. Both could still face heavy fines.

Zinc refinery workers defy court order

More than 1,000 workers are on strike at the Sun Metals Zinc Refinery south of Townsville in North Queensland, demanding improved wages and working conditions.

The workers complain that wages at the refinery are $3 below those on other major sites, they do not receive the standard $288 per week living away from home allowance and the management frequently breaches the workplace health and safety guidelines.

The strikers are also demanding that they be represented by the CFMEU and the Builders Labourers Federations who are not signatories to the current workplace agreement.

A meeting of workers on Wednesday rejected a direction from the Industrial Relations Commission to return to work. They voted to maintain a picket line at the entrance to the site.

Sun Metals is the world's biggest non-ferrous smelter and the largest single investment by a Korean company in Australia.

Electricity workers reject wage offer

Electricity workers in New South Wales employed by the state-owned Integral Energy endorsed an industrial campaign to back a 9 percent pay claim.

The workers attended stopwork meetings this week and rejected a company wage offer of 6 percent over two years tied to trade-offs, including the removal of four extra days of concession leave, in exchange for a once-off $500 payment.

A union spokesman said that after trade-offs the pay increase would "amount to only 2 percent over two years". The union had already dropped an earlier 15 percent pay demand after negotiations with Integral management broke down last month.

If work stoppages and bans go ahead Sydney's western suburbs, the Blue Mountains and the Illawarra region on the NSW south coast could face power cuts.

University teachers and staff strike

Almost 4,000 academics and general staff at two of Sydney's main universities went on strike for 24 hours this week, demanding negotiations on improved pay and working conditions.

The teachers from the University of Sydney and the University of NSW threatened to take further action later this month if the university managements do not comply with their demands.

A spokesman for the National Tertiary Education Union said the union would convene a meeting of representatives from 15 universities at the end of the month to decide on national industrial action.

© World Socialist Web Site

Miner killed

Miner David Keith Kittel, 33, was crushed to death when a wall collapsed on him at the Pasminco Elura underground mine about 50 km north of Cobar. The cave-in occurred at 5 am Tuesday while Kittel was engaged in drilling.

Canine Association staff on strike

Sixteen workers from the Victorian Canine Association went on strike when management attempted to force them to sign individual work contracts. The workers, members of the Australian Services Union (ASU), have set up a picket line outside the association's headquarters at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds.

A spokesperson for the ASU said the terms of the individual contracts failed to protect members' jobs and conditions of employment.

Sri Lanka Telecom employees to resume trade union action

A membership meeting of the Telecommunication Officers Union (TOU) held on February 27 decided to resume their trade union actions called off on February 25, because the management had not yet reinstated the three sacked employees--the President of the Telecommunication officers union, K.A. Dharmadasa, the Vice President of the union, K. Karunarathna and another employee A.J.G. Jayawardena. Accordingly, they will engage in a "sick note" campaign on March 8 and 9, and if "a solution" is not provided by the management then the union will launch a three-day strike. "If the management does not take necessary steps to reinstate the sacked employees responding to these actions, the union is ready for an all-island general strike of Telecom workers," TOU president Dharmadasa said.

When the Telecom employees launched a strike action on February 25 demanding the reinstatement of the sacked employees, Telecom management announced that they were ready to discuss the matter with the union leadership. Based on that promise the union leadership brought the strike action to an end and engaged in discussions with the management. But the talks failed. Dharmadasa said that all Telecom unions--except the union affiliated to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the dominant party of the PA regime and the union affiliated to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), a partner of the PA regime--had pledged their backing for the planned actions.

Cathay Pacific seeks pay cuts

Cathay Pacific Airways is demanding that 200 off-base pilots (those not stationed in Hong Kong) accept pay cuts that could be as high as 27 percent. Cathay management plans to ask a shareholders' meeting on March 10 to allow the company to offer stock options in exchange for the wage cut.

The airline announced that it was seeking to save HK$400 million through the salary cuts as well as HK$350 million from other areas. An airline spokesman said the cuts were needed because the airline had recorded a HK$175 million net loss in the first half of last year.

Pilots union secretary John Findlay said the union would allow pay cuts if the management could demonstrate that the company was in financial difficulty. "If the company is against the wall we would be the first to negotiate. There is no option that we have not considered but a strike would not do anyone any good," he said.

Japanese bank flags layoffs

The government-owned Nippon State Credit Bank announced a restructuring plan this week that will see 290 jobs slashed from its 2,090 workforce. In addition to the job cuts, 16 senior executives have been asked to return a portion of their retirement allowances. A bank spokesman said its aim was to slash expenditure on personnel to half of the 30 billion yen a year previously spent.

The latest statistics show that the number of unemployed in Japan hit a record high of 4.4 percent in January, with 2.98 million out of work.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site