

Indonesian garment workers suffer shocking conditions and victimisation

Terry Cook
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An appeal for support from striking Indonesian garment workers employed by the Japanese-owned Berbek sweater manufacturing company in Sidoarjo, East Java, reveals the sweatshop conditions under which they are forced to work.

"Workers are regularly intimidated, fired without proper procedures, sexually harassed, and punished without due reason," the appeal states. "Wages and bonuses do not meet workers basic needs and are often used as tools of punishment." The workers are paid only US\$19 a month.

As one form of punishment, the management assigns workers to the Manual Machines Section (MMS) where very old and worn-out machinery increases the physical and mental strain of working.

Once in this section workers are not allowed to talk or even turn their heads. An 80-watt lamp, that emits considerable heat, is placed just 20 inches above their heads. Workers complain of continuous headaches, severe leg and back pain, and stiffness in their arms and other parts of their bodies. The conditions have caused some women workers to menstruate twice in one month.

Last December nine workers were relocated to the MMS after they challenged being arbitrarily dismissed. In an attempt to force them to resign they were given excessive workloads, which required them to work almost non-stop. Of 20 workers previously sent to the MMS, 12 eventually resigned.

On March 31 this year the workers went on strike to protest these conditions and served a 10-point log of claims on the company. These include, a 50 percent wage increase, the immediate closure of the MMS, procedures to allow women to take menstruation leave, the end of all arbitrary dismissals and transfers, and the payment of a transportation allowance.

When the company refused and would not even negotiate the claims, the workers sent a delegation to the local union office but received no support. Instead local union branch officials sent a letter to the company sanctioning the suspension of 42 workers without paying redundancy entitlements. Other workers active in the strike have since been transferred out of their normal sections to the MMS.

Berbek was established in 1990 and is owned by the Japanese firm, Impian Busana and Endless. It employs 400 workers, 375 female and 25 male, producing knitted sweaters for brand names such as Pincon, Elle Alle, Queens Gate, Cynthia White and Stravin.

Letters and faxes calling for the reinstatement of all sacked workers, an end to transfers and the satisfaction of the workers' demands can be sent to:

PT Impian Busana
Berbek Industri III/1
Sidoarjo, East Java
Indonesia

Fax: 62-31-8430 506

Mr Tokyo Shimada
2495 Mujinasuka, Oura-machi
Gumma, Japan.

Fax: 81-276-89-1171

Copies of letter should be sent to:
The workers representative of PT Impian Busana
Fax: 62-31-598 1579
Email: ayun@sby.centrin.net.id



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact