

Thai garment workers appeal for support

Terry Cook
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Garment workers sacked from the German-owned Splendid garment factory on the Baangplee Industrial Estate, in Samuthprakarn, have spoken out against the appalling working conditions at the plant and have appealed for workers internationally to support their struggle for reinstatement.

The 130 workers were locked out on February 22 when they lodged a claim for a cost of living pay rise and after refusing a company directive to take extended leave on 70 percent of their pay. Their wages were only 162 Baht (US\$4.30) per day, well below what is required to provide even minimal living condition.

When the workers responded to the lockout by staging a picket outside the factory they were immediately sacked. The company refused to pay retrenchment entitlements, claiming the workers were dismissed because they had illegally gone on strike. About 80 workers and their families are continuing to attend the picket.

Established nine years ago, the company has made huge profits by paying low wages, maintaining poor working conditions and driving up production through a system of forced overtime, often requiring workers to work from early in the morning to midnight.

Amport Srijampa, 38, a union committee member at the factory, said: "Working conditions in this company are particularly bad." Workers fainted due to the "high temperatures, the cramped production lines, and large amounts of dust and foul smells".

Amport said many of the workers were allergic to the animal hair used in the production of coats and often suffered bad rashes and breathing difficulties. Even so, the factory's first aid room was "inadequate" and the company refused to employ a nurse.

Rassamee Boonchamnan, 31, a female worker, said that while most of the companies on the Bangplee estate provided free transport to and from work, Splendid demanded that its workers pay 20 Baht a day. The workers also had to pay 600-700 Baht (US\$16 to \$19) a month to rent small rooms shared by three people.

Jittapai Charin, 30, who worked on the sewing

production line, said the management constantly told them they had to "work quickly" to reach production targets. If they fell behind schedule their meal break would be reduced to only 15 minutes, until the shortfall was made up.

The workers also complained about the ruthless methods used by management to force them to work long periods of overtime to boost production. These included continuous warnings, threats of dismissal and placing the names of those who refused to work on public notice boards in order to humiliate and intimidate them.

Even when workers were ill, they were expected to work excessive hours. Ladda Laikaw, 24, said that working many days overtime in the bad conditions had undermined her health. When illness eventually forced her to refuse overtime, the management responded by posting her name and issuing her with a warning. In another case the company demanded that a woman who was pregnant continue to work long hours.

Since being locked out the workers have faced even greater hardship. The suffering is typified by the situation of Wijitta Nualsaad, a 30-year-old mother of two children, aged 10 and 12.

She said that even before the lockout she and her husband fought constantly because of the economic hardship suffered by the family due to a low income. Her husband left her when he found out that she had been dismissed and had decided to join the picket line.

Because of the lockout she can no longer pay for the small room in which she and her children live. The owner has refused to allow her to take her belongings until she pays back rent. At the moment she and her children stay on the picket line and receive a free meal. If the dispute continues Wijitta will not be able to pay school fees and the children will have to leave.

Pattana Pabu, another union committee member at the plant, said the workers had first advanced their pay claim because the collective agreement under which they had been working expired in January.

"The union was not aware that the company would take

advantage of the situation to lock out the workers and then dismiss them," he said. The company's allegation that the workers had gone on strike was "an attempt by the company to avoid their legal and moral obligations".

In a bid to intimidate the workers, the company has taken legal action against nine union committee members claiming damages caused by the dispute.

While the workers say they are determined to continue their struggle, the fighting fund they established is beginning to run low and currently stands at less than 5,000 Baht (US\$135). Workers are increasingly forced to scour the streets looking for food and vegetables to sustain themselves.

Messages of support and donations can be sent to:

The Thai Jacket Labour Union

Fax: 66-2-972 7035

Email: clist@loxinfo.co.th

Send letters and faxes demanding the immediate reinstatement of all sacked workers and the dropping of all legal action against the nine union officials to:

The Managing Director, Mr Hilmar Sauer

Splendid (Thailand) Ltd

140 Moo 17, New Town

3 Baangplee Industrial Estate

Taparaks Road

Samuthprakarn Province 10540

Thailand

Tel: 66-2-315 1007

Fax: 66-2-315 1009

Email: splbkk@mozart.inet.co.th

The Managing Director

Splendid Dusseldorf Production Ltd

Karl Arnold Str 5

47877 Willich

Muenchheide

Germany

Fax: 49-2154-941052



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact