

Laid-off garment workers end protest campaign in Thailand

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

Laid-off garment workers end protest campaign in Thailand

10 February 2001

Truck drivers strike against illegal levies in Aceh

Truck drivers and workers from the state oil company Pertamina in the Indonesian province of Aceh went on strike on February 5 to protest against illegal levies being imposed by the police and military. The strike has caused widespread fuel shortages and stopped the movement of food and other items. In West Aceh, the state electricity company PLN has been forced to impose a system of rotating power blackouts in several areas.

One of the drivers told the media: "There can be 10 to 15 [police and military] posts and the drivers are made to pay at every post. Some posts have a set price of 20,000 rupiah, but trucks with heavy equipment or logs are forced to pay 200,000 rupiah". Another driver said: "Truck owners don't want to know about our problems, but many times we have to pay the levies ourselves, not to mention that sometimes we get hit by officers if we refuse to give them money."

Police officials at first denied that any levies were being collected and alleged the drivers had been forced to go on strike by separatists from the Free Aceh Movement. On Wednesday, however, a senior police spokesman admitted that the driver's claims were true and declared that the authorities were acting to curb the practice. The truck drivers have demanded a letter from Aceh police chief Brigadier General Chaerul Rasyid guaranteeing that he will act to stamp out illegal levies.

Thai news staff victimised by leading TV station

On February 7, Thai national broadcaster iTV dismissed 23 news staff that had been campaigning against cuts to working conditions and interference in news coverage by some of the company's executives. At the end of last year, the station increased the working week from five to six days and abolished a five-level disciplinary system that prevented management disciplining workers at its own discretion.

The sacked workers have staged protests and civic and labour groups have called for a public boycott of iTV. The workers now intend to pursue an unfair dismissal case and will file a libel lawsuit against the station management on the grounds that their reputations have been damaged. However, under Thai law, the company need only show that actions taken by its employees had "caused damage to the firm" to have the sackings upheld.

Laid-off garment workers end protest campaign in Thailand

Laid-off workers from two bankrupt garment factories in Pathum Thani, Thailand, have ended a four-month protest campaign after being informed that they would be paid compensation.

Over 1,230 workers from Thai Iryo Public Company and Thai Iryo Garment factory were sacked when the factories shut down operations on October 15, claiming severe financial difficulties. Since then, the workers have been protesting outside the plants demanding severance pay and other entitlements.

In December, the Thanyaburi Labour Court ordered the firms to pay 40.3 million baht to the workers, plus 15 percent interest. Last month the Legal Execution Department began the process of seizing and selling the assets of the two companies.

Soap factory workers fight suspension in Sri Lanka

Workers at Wonderlight Consumer Producing, a soap manufacturing factory in Colombo, Sri Lanka, demonstrated outside parliament in Battaramulla on February 6 to demand the immediate reinstatement of 15 of their colleagues. Last month the company management suspended 15 casual workers after the workforce formed a union branch in the factory.

Little hope for trapped Indian miners

Rescue operations are still underway at the state-owned Bharat Coking Coal mine in the eastern Indian town of Dhanbad, where 19 miners were trapped underground on February 2 when a torrent of water poured into the mine. Over 100 men were underground at the time of the incident.

On Thursday, one of the trapped men, Salim Ansari, was brought out alive after water levels receded in one of the mine's blocks. After regaining consciousness he told relatives that he had managed to survive because he had found an air pocket and some water. The body of another miner was recovered at the same time.

Company officials say the chances of finding anyone else were remote after naval divers failed to make any contact with the remaining men. The relatives of the trapped miners have become increasingly critical of the slow pace of the rescue operation.

Indian tile workers go on indefinite strike

Workers from the Dakshina Kannada, Udipi and Uttara Kannada tile manufacturing companies in Mangalore began an indefinite strike on Monday to demand they be paid the stipulated minimum wage.

More than 6,000 workers from 39 factories in three different districts are involved in the dispute. They work in dirty, hot conditions in poorly ventilated workshops

Indian labourers demand work

Over 100 labourers and their families who relied on employment at the Food Corporation of India, protested on February 7 outside the assistant manager's office in Faridkot, near Chandigarh, to demand they be given work. They have not worked for over eight months because the company is carrying out production with a reduced workforce.

A union spokesman said that up to 80 families were facing starvation. The labourers say that the management had asked them to sign affidavits stating they had been "voluntarily" absent from work over the eight-month period. Government authorities have not intervened on their behalf despite persistent protests and requests.

Australian steelworkers strike again

Over 2,500 steelworkers from BHP's Port Kembla plant, south of Sydney, met on Monday and voted to intensify an industrial campaign against the company's plans to contract out maintenance and other in-house functions. The changes affect over 900 jobs.

The meeting endorsed a proposal by steel union delegates to strike for 24 hours and to launch a series of rolling stoppages. The workers also passed a resolution demanding the union convene a combined national steel delegates meeting to discuss the issue. Monday's strike follows a 48-hour strike by maintenance workers last month.

The move to outsource more non-core functions is part of the BHP's strategy to eventually discard its steel making assets entirely and concentrate on its more lucrative mineral and petroleum interests. This week the company released a report showing a record half-year profit for this financial year. While its overall profit hit \$1.43 billion, a 17.9 percent increase on the previous year, the return from the steel division fell by \$12 million (4.5 percent) to \$252 million.

Wentworth hotel workers strike over job losses

About 40 workers, including housekeeping staff, kitchen hands and storemen, at Sydney's Wentworth Hotel went on strike for 24 hours on February 6 over the sacking of 20 staff.

The sackings flow from the proposed \$108 million sale of the hotel by the property division of AXA, the Wentworth's current owners, to City Freeholds. An industry spokesperson said that it was common practice during such transactions that the new buyer demand cuts in staff prior to the sale going ahead.

The workers picketed the Wentworth as the Australian Hotels Association met in the hotel's conference centre. Managerial staff were forced to attempt to clean and service 431 rooms at a time when the hotel was full of tourists.

Casino workers locked out on Gold Coast

Management at Jupiter's Casino on the Queensland Gold Coast locked out all workers who turned up to work wearing union badges as part of a campaign for a pay increase. Over 100 workers were prevented from beginning their shift on the night of February 2 and another 80 the following day.

More than 500 gaming staff at Jupiter's are seeking wage parity with workers at other casinos. The hourly rate for dealers is \$13.04 as compared to \$16.54 at the Star Casino and \$16.95 at the Treasury Casino. Jupiter's is owned by the Park Place Entertainment Corporation, which operates 20 casinos in the USA, Canada, South America, South Africa and Australia.

Security guards demonstrate against wage cut

On January 30, Western Australian Premier Richard Court was met

with an angry demonstration by security guards as he attended an election function launching the Liberal-National Coalition's education policy.

The 35 security guards, employed to patrol public schools, were protesting against government contracting arrangements that would result in a substantial reduction in their wages. Security services to the public schools have been privatised and the government now calls tenders for the work. This year the Education Department awarded the contract to a new company, Prestige Protection Services.

Prestige informed the guards it would pay only \$12 an hour for a Monday to Friday shift regardless of the range of hours worked. The guards will not be paid penalty rates. The arrangement will mean a cut in take-home pay of up to \$250 a fortnight. This week the workers were being told by Prestige to sign an agreement accepting the wage cut, or face dismissal.

Government ticketing staff oppose takeover

Workers employed by BOCS, Western Australia's state-owned ticketing company, protested outside theatres on February 6 against the scheduled sale of the agency to Ticketmaster. The sell-off could lead to the loss of up to 50 jobs.

The BOCS staff work in call centres in the Perth Concert Hall, and the Burswood, Regal and Playhouse theatres, taking bookings for plays, opera, musicals and dance programs, as well as film festivals and major sporting events.

Isla Swatten from the Perth Concert Hall centre said: "We want to protect our jobs but we also want to protect the idea that the public has the best possible access to arts and culture in Western Australia."

Joondalup nurses threaten to resign

Angry nurses at the Joondalup Health Campus in Perth have threatened to impose bans or resign if management goes ahead with a plan to hire nursing assistants to takeover some of the work currently performed by registered and enrolled nurses. Over 250 nurses at the hospital signed a petition rejecting the management proposals.

Despite requests from the Australian Nurses Federation (ANF), Mayne Health, the operators of Joondalup Health Campus, has refused to elaborate what qualifications the nursing assistants would have or how they would be trained. The assistants would be expected to manage procedures involving naso-gastric tubes, patient observations, blood transfusions and intravenous lines and catheters.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact