

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

10 March 2007

Asia

Indian apparel workers on indefinite strike

Around 10,000 apparel workers in Tirupur in the south Indian state of Tamilnadu remain on indefinite strike. The workers walked out on February 26 in support of a 30 percent increase in stitching rates, which have not been revised for four years. There are around 600 stitching units in Tirupur employing between 15,000 to 18,000 workers.

Negotiations have stalled with owners now demanding a 30 percent increase from the companies that buy their finished garments. They claim that input costs, including labour charges, thread, needles, power and rent, have increased sharply. Even if the companies get the increase it would not automatically be passed on to workers.

Indian port workers strike over discriminatory work sharing

Cargo handling workers at Beypore port in Kozhikode, Kerala have been on strike since February 24. They are demanding the introduction of a system to ensure the equal division of all available cargo work.

The workers allege that Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) officials discriminate in favour of their members when sharing out work. Of the 166 workers at the port, 85 are affiliated to the CITU with the remainder belonging to Swathanthra Thozhilali Union and the Indian National Trade Union Centre.

Since the strike began, four vessels and a barge have left Beypore without unloading their cargo. Another barge from Gujarat, scheduled to berth at the port on March 4, changed course and is proceeding to Kochi. A meeting on March 1 called by the district administration to solve the dispute ended in deadlock.

Colombo council workers demand allowances

Road and health workers at the Colombo Municipal Council in Sri Lanka demonstrated in front of the council building in the city centre on March 7 over the non-payment of health allowances. Workers from fire fighting and electricity departments protesting the non-payment of a risk allowance joined them.

In a separate dispute, assistant teachers from schools in the

country's Western Province picketed the chief minister's office on the same day demanding confirmation of ongoing employment.

Strikes hit two plants in Vietnam

Strikes involving 10,000 workers have erupted at two Japanese-owned companies in Bien Hoa 2 Industrial Zone in Vietnam's southern Dong Nai Province.

On March 3, around 3,600 workers walked out at Mabuchi Motor, a wholly Japanese-owned firm. The remaining 3,500 employees at the company joined the strikers in the afternoon.

The workers, whose average monthly salary is currently just \$US62 or a little higher than the US\$52 minimum wage, are demanding more than the 8 percent annual rise normally offered by the company. They also want an improvement in the food provided at the company cafeteria.

In a separate dispute, around 3,000 workers at Viet Tuong Company went on strike on March 3, over bonuses and the repressive work regime.

There have been strikes at several companies in southern Vietnam over pay and conditions this year.

Last week, more than 3,000 workers at Vinh Tuong, a Taiwanese electronics company in Dong Nai province went on strike. In early February, 4,500 employees struck at the South Korean-owned Hansoll Vina garment factory in nearby Binh Duong province over management abuse.

Last year, strikes by tens of thousands of workers at foreign-owned factories in southern Vietnam forced the government to increase the minimum wage by at least 25 per cent.

Australia and the Pacific

Tyre workers strike for pay increase

About 500 maintenance and production workers at the Bridgestone tyre plant in Salisbury, South Australia began a campaign of four-hour rolling stoppages on March 8, after rejecting a company pay offer of 6 percent over 4 years. The workers want a four percent increase each year. For the past six years they have received annual pay rises of just 3 percent, well below the inflation rate.

The company has begun standing workers down, claiming

that they cannot be gainfully employed because of the industrial action. A spokesman for the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union said he did not know whether the company's actions were "a tactic in negotiations" but that the union wanted an urgent meeting with the company.

Ballet dancers win pay increase

Dancers with the West Australian Ballet called off a two-hour strike scheduled for March 8 after the state government agreed to provide funds for a pay rise.

The dance company has agreed to an annual 7 to 10 percent pay increase for the next two years. The deal will increase the pay of junior dancers from \$647 to \$741 per week and senior dancers' pay from \$822 to \$994 a week. The government will underwrite the WA Ballet's reserve funds by up to \$155,000.

Sixteen of the company's 21 dancers voted last week to strike. If the strike had gone ahead it would have been the first such action in West Australian Ballet's 54-year history.

Western Australian school cleaners and gardeners vote for bans

Cleaners and gardeners employed at WA state government schools voted on Wednesday to take industrial action beginning March 14. The campaign is for a wage increase to bring their pay in line with that of gardeners and cleaners at other government departments. They want an increase in their hourly rate from \$14 to \$16.50.

The workers, who are members Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU), will impose bans on cleaning classrooms, collecting rubbish and watering plants until their demand is met. An LHMU spokesman said that workers had not received a pay rise in the last 14 months.

The government has offered education assistants a 12.5 percent pay rise which the LHMU has accepted. The union, however, has said that it will not sign any agreement until the cleaners and gardeners dispute is settled.

New Zealand newspaper workers strike over pay

News workers at the APN-owned *Oamaru Mail* went on strike on March 6 in support of a 5 percent pay rise. It was the third time members of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) at the newspaper have walked out since pay negotiations broke down last month.

Workers voted to strike after APN withdrew a previous 3.5 percent offer and tried to stall attempts at mediation. A union spokesman said the workers were "fed up with being mucked around" and claimed that they were "barely making more than the minimum wage". The union said it would end the strike if the company made a "serious" offer.

The EPMU is currently pursuing legal action against the *Oamaru Mail* for using strikebreakers during last month's industrial action.

Industrial action by Papua New Guinea academics declared illegal

Papua New Guinea industrial registrar Helen Saleu ruled this week that strike action by national academic staff at the Papua New Guinea University of Technology was "illegal". The decision applied to a strike in November last year and recent industrial action.

Saleu said that demands pursued by the National Academic Staff Association (NASA) over allegations of mismanagement by senior administrators were "not part and parcel of the list of demands contained in the secret ballot of November 16, 2006."

NASA reactivated industrial action on February 19 demanding that senior management be suspended pending an investigation into mismanagement. Despite being ordered back to work by the courts, academic staff continued their strike for a week.

Fiji public sector workers face pay cut

Public Servants Association (PSA) members in Fiji will vote at the union's annual general meeting on March 16 on whether to take national strike action over a pay cut and a reduction in the retirement age.

Fiji's "interim administration", which was established following a military coup in December, wants a 5 percent, across-the-board pay cut for all public servants and the retirement age lowered from 60 to 55 years. These moves, which affect some 25,000 public employees, were endorsed by the cabinet following a submission by finance minister and Labour Party leader Mahendra Chaudhry. Chaudhry is depending on his connections with the unions to help stifle widespread opposition to the move.

While the PSA has said that strike action is "only a matter of time", the unions are trying to avoid a confrontation with the military regime and its current state of emergency. The Fiji Teachers Union is waiting for the Ministry of Labour to allow a strike ballot, while the Nurses Association has said that it would need to seek a strike mandate.

A PSA spokesman made clear, however, that even if a majority voted for a walkout it would be a "long process", with strike action "the last resort".



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact