

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

8 March 2008

Vietnam garment workers strike for higher allowances

Nearly 1,500 workers at South Korean-owned garment plant SH Vina Company in southern Long An province, struck on February 28 demanding an additional 150,000 dong (\$US9.35) monthly travel allowance to cover increasing fuel prices. At least half the strikers returned to work the same day after accepting a management offer of 80,000 dong.

In a separate dispute, more than 10,000 workers at South Korean-owned Tae Kwang Vina plant in southern Dong Nai province struck on February 27. The plant produces shoes for Nike. The workers are demanding higher pay to keep pace with inflation. The average monthly pay for workers at the factory is one million dong (\$US62). Consumer price inflation is currently running at more than 15 percent.

Last year, there were around 300 strikes for higher wages in Vietnam at foreign-owned factories. The government increased minimum wages for workers employed in foreign-owned plants by 25 percent on January 1 this year but workers have complained that the increase is inadequate.

Indian bank workers strike

Vikas Rural Bank employees went on strike and held a sit-down protest outside the bank's head office in Dharwad, Karnataka, on March 3.

The All India Rural Banks Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Welfare Association members are campaigning for several demands, including that the company rectify salary anomalies and fill all job vacancies. A memorandum containing the workers' demands was presented to the Rural Bank chairman.

In a separate dispute, the All India Reserve Bank Employees Association (AIRBEA) will call a one-day strike on March 12 to demand the recruitment of assistants, curbs on the outsourcing of important central bank functions, the opening of fully-fledged RBI offices in main cities across the country.

The AIRBEA claims that the number of Reserve Bank of India assistants has dropped to 6,000 from 19,000 employed 1995 and that the inspection and supervision of commercial banks, urban cooperative banks and foreign exchange dealings has been outsourced.

Pondicherry ministerial staff to strike over job vacancies

Pondicherry State Unified Ministerial Staff Action Committee (PSUMSAC) members will strike on March 10 to

demand all job vacancies in ministerial departments be filled.

According to the PSUMSAC there are currently 500 vacancies including for assistant superintendents and junior and senior account officers. PSUMSAC said that the positions have been vacant for years and that the Department of Administrative Reforms has failed to take any steps to fill them.

Indian plantation workers demonstrate for wage increase

Karnataka Provincial Workers Union members in Hassan district held a protest rally on March 4 and presented a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner demanding an increase in the minimum wage.

Some 500,000 workers are employed on tea, coffee, rubber and cardamom plantations in Karnataka. The current daily wage is less than 150 rupees (\$US3.73), which has not been increased for nearly a decade, making it impossible for them to cope with rises in the cost of living.

Indian day-rate workers protest for conditions

Day-rate and part-time employees at five village councils (panchayats) and one municipality in Puducherry held a sit-down protest on March 5 to demand permanency, the provision of risk allowance for conservation staff, and introduction of a shift system for pump set operators.

An All India Trade Union Congress spokesman said that the workers had presented their grievances to the chief minister, the director of local administration and municipality and panchayats authorities on several occasions but to no avail.

Sri Lankan teachers campaign over salary anomalies

Public sector teachers in Sri Lanka did not attend work on March 4 after launching a sick note campaign to demand the government rectify outstanding salary anomalies.

The teachers have held other protests over the issue and refused to mark advanced level examination papers in October last year. Education Minister Susil Premajayantha promised to resolve the wages problem before the end of last December but nothing materialised.

The teachers have threatened to take further action unless the authorities immediately address their demand.

Western Australian dental workers stop work

Hundreds of dental workers employed by the state government at dental health centres across metropolitan Perth and regional areas in Western Australia attended a stop-work meeting March 5.

The Community and Public Sector Union members voted to reject the state Labor government's latest pay offer of between 15 to 17 percent over three years.

The dental workers and other state public sector workers want a 23 percent pay rise over three years and increases in regional allowances of up to 500 percent together with increases in employer superannuation contributions of up to 13 percent.

The meeting voted to extend the walkout from a half-day stoppage to 24 hours. The workers are planning to hold another stoppage in three weeks if the state government fails meet the pay demands. The dental workers are also protesting against the deterioration of public dentistry services with patients now having to wait up to three years for basic check ups.

Melbourne building workers protest

More than 100 construction workers demonstrated outside the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) in downtown Melbourne on March 3 over the interrogation of building worker Joe Mannucci by the industry watchdog.

The ABCC, which was established by the Howard federal government to suppress strikes and industrial action in the building industry, has been retained by the new Rudd Labor government.

A spokesperson for the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) said that Mannucci was being questioned because he had called a WorkSafe Victoria inspector to the St Kilda Town Hall building site. Workers at the project were concerned because an electrical switchboard was hanging by steel tie wires at the site.

"As a result he (Mannucci) has been pulled in front of a secret hearing of the ABCC and this morning he will be threatened with six months' imprisonment if he does not cooperate with that hearing," the spokesman said. More than 50 workers have been called before the ABCC in the last 12 months.

NZ tutors continue strike over pay

Strike action by EastBay REAP (Rural Education Activities Programmes) tutors at Whakatane, Opotiki and Kawerau entered its sixth day on February 26. The workers are demanding a wage rise and claim to have widespread public support in the three towns.

An Association of Staff in Tertiary Education (ASTE) spokesperson said that it was "unheard of" for workers in this sector to take prolonged action and it reflected the seriousness with which they viewed EastBay REAP's response. Pay rates at EastBay are much lower than in other REAPs across the country.

Police break up picket in New Caledonia

French police in Nouméa moved to break up a picket by the Union of Kanak and Exploited Workers (USTKE) members outside the headquarters of public bus company Carsud in the early hours of February 29. The intervention was to allow non-striking drivers to enter the depot. No incident was reported as pickets decided to move further away from the depot entrance.

In an earlier incident on January 17, over 200 police attacked workers occupying public land adjacent to Carsud over the sacking a colleague for alleged misconduct. On that occasion police used tear gas grenades, rubber bullets and batons to disperse the occupation severely injuring numbers of workers. Around 63 strikers were arrested with at least 12 held on remand. Most were charged with armed assault on police officers and criminal damage.

French high commissioner Yves Dassonville has stated that police will continue to break up "illegal" pickets. A USTKE spokesman said its members would remain camped near the Carsud headquarters and the union will continue to organise regular demonstrations in Nouméa.

A group of workers are due to appear before a tribunal on March 25 on charges of "armed gathering" and "group violence" arising out of the January 17 incident. The union continues to demand Carsud re-employ the sacked worker but the company flatly refuses to do so.

Fiji construction workers sacked

Construction workers on the Haroon Holdings building project in Nadi were laid off without warning on February 29 after holding a meeting to discuss occupational health and safety issues at the site.

Yogendra Nair, a spokesman for the 25 laid-off workers, said that the company claimed to be facing financial constraints. The workers, who have been employed by for about a year, lodged a complaint with the Labour Department. The department responded by telling the employer to pay the workers one week's pay and comply with health and safety standards.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact