

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

16 August 2008

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

## **Indian plantation workers threaten indefinite strike**

Around 300,000 tea plantation workers in 280 tea gardens went on strike on August 11 demanding higher wages. The tea gardens are located in the Darjeeling Hills and in the Dooars and Terai regions in West Bengal. The strike brought leaf collection and production in tea-processing factories to a standstill. One worker, Orient Kavar, told the media. "We will resort to an indefinite strike from August 18 if our demands are not met."

According to the Siliguri Tea Traders' Association, the Darjeeling tea industry loses about 20 million rupees (\$US475,000) each day of a strike. The region produces about 10 million kilograms of premium teas which sell at up to six times the price of other grades.

## **Pakistani weavers attacked by police**

Around 500 weavers employed in the Bakar Mandi and Liaqatabad industrial area near Faisalabad went on strike on August 11 and demonstrated on the busy Jhang Road to demand a salary increase.

They also marched to the Sitara and Safique weaving factories where plant owners fired shots at the crowd and triggered clashes. Police wielding lathes (long bamboo sticks) disbursed the protestors.

## **Bangladeshi apparel workers fight repression**

Thousands of garment workers in Savar, Dhaka went on strike on August 9 demanding the removal of Ansars (auxiliary military forces), which are stationed inside factories. They also want payment of wage arrears.

The strike began after the Ansars attacked night-shift workers at Biswas Synthetics Limited for so-called "disciplinary" reasons. Ansars later fired shots at striking workers seriously injuring two. A large contingent of police and soldiers were later deployed against demonstrators.

Workers unrest continued on August 10, closing more than 60 factories across the area. Traffic was blocked for at least two hours on the busy Dhaka-Tangail highway by protests.

## **Casual telecom workers in India demand benefits**

Casual telecommunication workers at Bharat Sanchar

Nigam Limited (BSNL) in the Berhampur district, Orissa held a sit-down protest outside of the district general manager's office on August 12.

They were demanding payment of the minimum wage prescribed by the government public sector unit and other benefits such as social security arrangements under the Employees Provident Fund and inclusion in the Employees State Insurance scheme. Some of the casual workers have over 20 years' continuous service with BSNL.

## **Sri Lankan sugar workers strike over pay**

Around 3,200 casual and permanent workers at the Palawatte Sugar Company went on strike for one day on August 6 in support of a 5,000 rupee (\$US46) pay increase. The strikers, carrying banners and placards inscribed with their demands, gathered outside the factory and shouted slogans.

The company is headquartered in Colombo and employs over 5,700 people. It recorded revenues of 2,321 million rupees (approximately \$22.1 million) during the fiscal year ending March 2007.

## **Vietnam: three factories hit by strikes**

This month saw more than two thousand workers at three different factories strike over low wages and excessive working hours.

On August 12, workers at the Son Viet Company, a Taiwanese-owned company in the Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone (EPZ) near in Ho Chi Minh City, walked out after management increased the monthly bonus for so-called diligence to 110,000 dong (\$US6.60) instead of allotting the payment as a permanent monthly allowance. The company attempted to entice employees back to work by offering to transfer 50,000 dong of the bonus to the permanent allowance. This was rejected and the strike continued.

Thuy Bang Company's rubber processing workers in the same EPZ also walked out over unpaid wages. They claim the company has not signed employment contracts and forces them to work extra hours. Wages at the plant are below the government-stipulated minimum level.

Around 1,000 workers at Epic Designers Company (EDC)

in Bien Hoa Town, Dong Nai Province went on strike on August 10 demanding a 200,000 dong pay rise. Police were called to the factory when the strikers clashed with around 500 non-striking workers.

The Bien Hoa Town Trade Union made a proposal to the company that it offer a 100,000 dong increase but there has been no response from the holding company in India.

#### **Korean auto workers strike over wage claims**

Workers at GM Daewoo Automotive and Technology, the South Korean unit of General Motors, went on strike for three hours on day and night shifts on August 12 in support of a pay increase and improved working conditions.

The strike is the eighth in a series of rolling stoppages that began on July 8 and resulted in lost output of 9,400 vehicles. A five-day ban on overtime and working during holidays was to be imposed on August 12.

In a separate dispute, around 25,000 workers at the Kia Motors Corporation, South Korea's second largest auto maker, went on strike for four hours on August 14 after wage negotiations stalled. The workers are demanding a 9 percent wage increase and a bonus payment equivalent to three months' salary. Workers at Kia affiliate Hyundai Motors will also strike for three days from August 19 over a pay claim.

#### **Food workers continue prolonged strike**

A strike by thirteen maintenance workers at National Foods in the Melbourne suburb of Chelsea Heights entered its second week on August 11. The workers, who are picketing the plant, want a decent pay increase and are opposing roster changes that would involve additional weekend and night shifts cutting into social and family life.

A union spokesman said that negotiations with the company had broken down and claimed the workers had not had a wage increase for two years.

National Foods Limited is Australia's largest publicly listed dairy company, with milk and dairy foods brands such as Pura, Yoplait, Fruche, Farmers Union and YoGo. The Chelsea Heights plant produces fresh cream.

#### **Firemen confront NSW state treasurer**

Fire Brigade Union members and their families demonstrated this week outside the WIN Sports and Entertainment Centre in Wollongong on New South Wales' South Coast. The workers parked six fire trucks across the centre's entrance blocking access to visiting state treasurer Michael Costa.

The firemen were protesting the state government's imposition of a 2.5 percent pay ceiling on public sector pay increases. Firemen are currently involved in a statewide dispute for a wage increase and against roster changes that could lead to the closure of some fire stations.

Local South Coast firemen Darin Sullivan claimed that

Costa became abusive during the protest. "It was his usual bully-boy tactic. He was getting very aggressive, trying to intimidate people," Sullivan said.

The government has stipulated that any increase above the cap must be offset by productivity increases and demanded that firemen trade-off leave and other entitlements. A union spokesman said that the last government offer involved firemen giving up a week of annual leave.

#### **New Zealand food packers end strike**

Mount Crean Foodservice employees in Wellington ended a three-day strike on August 13 after the company agreed to a 4.5 percent pay increase. Police were called during the strike when picketing workers refused to let delivery vehicles leave. There were no arrests.

The company produces fresh, frozen and dry food products for clients such as Nosh, Subway, The Coffee Club and Eures Healthcare and has 15 branches across New Zealand.

Despite the return to work, a dispute still exists over overtime rates. Employees want to be paid time and a half for all hours worked over a 40-hour a week, bringing them in line with other company employees at Hamilton and New Plymouth.

#### **New Zealand bank workers vote to strike**

ANZ bank union members voted this week to strike on August 22 for a new collective work agreement. A Finsec union spokesperson said the workers want "fairer sales targets, better staffing levels and real wage increases that recognise the skills and values they bring to the bank". The union plans to run a public relations campaign in the lead-up to the strike.

#### **Ferry strike disrupts service**

Ships' officers on KiwiRail ferries in the Cook Strait, New Zealand struck on August 9 interrupting night-cargo ferry services and stranding trucks at the docks. The members of the Merchant Service Guild cancelled further planned strike action after the ferry operator Interislander agreed to reopen negotiations for a wage increase. The guild lodged an 11 percent wage increase claim with the company in February.



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