

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

22 March 2014

Cambodian shoe factory workers walk out

About 7,000 workers at the Wing Star Shoes plant in Kampong Speu province, in Cambodia's south, walked off the job on March 17 and have refused to return to work until their 11-point log of claims is granted. After three days of failed negotiations the dispute was forced into arbitration at Cambodia's ministry of labor. Strikers are currently maintaining a protest outside the factory.

In addition to the \$100 minimum monthly wage Wing Star employees receive a \$US20 bonus for meals and transportation. Workers are demanding a 50 percent increase in the monthly bonus, an end to compulsory overtime and monthly wage cuts during strikes and the removal of male security guards from outside female restrooms.

According to media reports, management has agreed to several demands but refused to increase the monthly bonus.

India: Tamil Nadu stainless steel workers' strike in eighth week

Stainless steel workers in the Anupparpalayam utensils manufacturing cluster in Tamil Nadu have been on strike since January 28 for a new wage accord. The last agreement expired in December. Workers want a 65 percent wage rise but the unions, which are affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, reduced this claim to 30 percent during negotiations with management and the government on March 17. The factory owners have only agreed to increase wages by 17 percent.

While a 33.5 percent wage rise was signed several weeks ago for brass and copper workers, there is no agreement for stainless steel plant employees, the main employer in the Anupparpalayam complex. Stainless steel utensil factory owners and the government are determined to suppress wages in this sector.

Toyota locks out Indian workers

Toyota, the world's largest auto manufacturer, locked out 6,400 workers at two of its factories in India, near Bangalore, on March 16. The Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) plants employ 6,000 permanent workers and 1,500 contract workers.

TKM claims that assembly line workers were disrupting production and abusing supervisors in a more than 10-month dispute for a new work agreement. A TKM Employees' Union official denied the auto company's allegations and accused management of taking advantage of slow sales to lock workers out without pay.

TKM management and the 4,100-strong TKM Employees' Union have been negotiating a new work agreement since April last year. TKM car workers took limited strike action on February 10 and 28 over the issue.

TKM has offered workers a 3,050-rupee monthly pay rise but workers want 4,000 rupees and resolution of other demands, including improved safety and limitations on the use of contract labour.

Pakistan: Punjab nurses end strike

Casual public sector nurses in Lahore ended an eight-day strike on March 17, after the Punjab government promised to address their demands. The nurses want permanency for 2,800 casual nurses, re-instatement of terminated nurses and the implementation of outstanding promotions.

Several nurses were injured after police attacked one of their demonstrations. Thousands of nurses in Punjab, including those at several private hospitals, boycotted duties in protest over the police assault. Pakistan's two main doctors' unions also condemned the attack, threatening to strike if the government failed to address the nurses' demands.

The government has offered three-year contracts and permanent appointments when these expire. Nurses were split on the decision to return to work and some have maintained a protest outside the Punjab Assembly.

Bangladeshi jute mill workers on strike

Over 50,000 workers at nine state-owned jute mills in the Khulna-Jessore industrial belt, 140 km south-west of Dhaka, stopped work on March 12 and resumed demonstrating on the Khulna-Jessore highway. Workers had previously ended daily protests along the highway after the government agreed to enter negotiations on 11 demands. These talks, however, broke down on March 11.

The Bangladesh Jute Mills Workers' Action Committee, which called the strike, wants the mill owners to make cash payments for the latest salary rise announced by the National Wages Commission. They also want the dearness allowance increased by 20 percent and enactment of a jute-packaging law making it mandatory that rice produced in Bangladesh be packaged in locally-made jute bags.

University staff in Victoria vote for strike

Staff at the La Trobe University in Melbourne have voted for protective strike action following three months of failed negotiations over a new enterprise agreement and the recent announcements that 350 jobs will be axed. A 48-hour strike, the first by National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the university, is planned for March 26.

La Trobe management has offered an 11 percent wage increase over four years—an average rise of 2.75 percent annually. Staff are demanding 3 percent annual increases and restrictions on the use of casuals.

One of the key issues in dispute is staff workloads, which will be directly affected by the 350 job cuts. The university is increasing student numbers, with 1,300 extra already this year, and larger class sizes. The NTEU, which has consistently isolated its membership across Australia and imposed separate deals at each university, has appealed to university management to consult with the union on the job cuts.

Victorian paramedics vote for industrial action

After 19 months of failed negotiations, Victorian ambulance paramedics voted on March 14 in favour of 22 new work bans in a dispute with Ambulance Victoria and the Victorian Liberal government for a new enterprise bargaining agreement. Talks have dragged on since August 2012. Around 1,700 paramedics voted in favour of the bans which could take effect from March 22.

Ambulance Employees Australia has previously imposed a series of harmless work bans and told paramedics to wear campaign T-shirts and write slogans on ambulances. The latest action could include stop-work meetings and inviting journalists to ride in ambulances as observers.

The paramedics want a 30 percent pay rise over three years. They rejected an offer of 12 percent over three years in November, warning that it would have allowed Ambulance Victoria to argue for more “workplace flexibility”, including cuts to entitlements. Ambulance Victoria claims it is bound by a public sector wage policy wage cap of only 2.5 percent a year, with additional rises paid for by productivity trade-offs.

New Zealand meat workers reject zero pay offer

At least 97 percent of meat processing workers at the Silver Fern Farms (SFF) plant in Dunedin, New Zealand have rejected the company's latest pay offer in a new work agreement.

Negotiations stalled two weeks ago when SFF rejected the Meatworkers and Related Trades Union demand for 3 percent annual pay increases over two years. Despite granting two digit pay rises to its executive staff, SFF wanted to freeze workers' pay for this year and pay a 2 percent increase next year. SFF has agreed to restart negotiations.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact