

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

12 April 2014

## Thai garment workers end strike

About one thousand Burmese workers at the Yuan Jiou Garment factory in Thailand's border town of Mae Sot ended a nine-day strike on April 4 after workers' representatives reached an agreement with management and government labour officials.

The migrant workers walked off the job over unpaid wages and long working hours—seven days a week and regularly from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. The daily minimum wage in Thailand is 300 baht (\$US9) but workers said they were not receiving this amount. Their demands included payment of the minimum wage and overtime, adequate sick leave, financial assistance for those injured at work, and shorter working hours.

The strike settlement included a miniscule daily pay increase of 20 baht (\$US0.62), up from the current 175 baht to 195 baht. Management agreed to give workers Sundays off and 30 days' sick leave annually. Overtime pay, which was previously calculated as 10 percent of workers' daily salary per hour of additional work, will rise to 12.5 percent. Pregnant women will have social and health benefits as stipulated under Thai labour law.

Officially there are about 1.7 million Burmese migrant workers employed in highly exploitative conditions in various sectors of the Thai economy, including agriculture, garments, fishing, construction and domestic work. Labour rights groups have estimated that there are 1.3 million undocumented Burmese migrant workers.

## Cambodian construction workers down tools

About 200 Banjamat Construction workers struck for 24 hours at the Kampot Cement company in Cambodia's Kampot province to demand a 90 percent pay increase and the reinstatement of fired unionists. A Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Confederation (BWTUC) official told the media that the unionists were fired in November 2012, one month after forming a union.

The BWTUC official said workers wanted their meagre monthly wage of between \$70 and \$80 increased to \$130, paid annual leave, days off on national holidays, long-term contracts and overall improvements in general working conditions.

## Pakistan: Municipal workers in Dera Ismail Khan strike

Municipal workers in Dera Ismail Khan, the capital of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan's north, have been on strike since April 3 over the non-payment of wages for three months. Municipal services like garbage collection and cleaning have ceased. The municipal workers have established a strike camp in the city and declared that they will not return to work until they are paid their outstanding wages.

## Western Australian tugboat workers apply for strike ballot

Three unions representing tugboat workers at Western Australia's Port Hedland, Australia's most

economically important port, have applied to the Fair Work Commission for a strike ballot. One of the unions, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), has already been granted permission to hold a ballot. The MUA, the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE) and the tugboat masters (represented by the Australian Maritime Officers Union) are in dispute over a new workplace agreement with Teekay Shipping Australia, which operates the tugboats.

While the demands of each union are not identical, they are all demanding improved conditions in line with increased iron ore exports over the past three years. An AIMPE spokesman said that the engineers were routinely working more than 12 hours a day.

Teekay Shipping is contracted by BHP Billiton to provide tugboat services for all mining companies using the port, including the Fortescue Metals Group and Atlas Iron. About 90 million tonnes of iron ore were shipped from Port Hedland in the March quarter, up from 67 million tonnes during the March quarter in 2013 and 56 million tonnes in the same period in 2012.

### **New Zealand university workers resume limited strike action**

On April 7, over 200 Tertiary Education Union (TEU) members held a one-day strike at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL) at the Palmerston North campus in New Zealand. Members of the academic and support staff union are demanding a 2.5 percent across-the-board wage rise. UCOL management have rejected any across-the-board increase and declared that separate negotiations would be held at its North Island campuses in Palmerston North, Wanganui and Masterton.

Teachers rejected an offer in March of an additional two days' paid leave per year and a possible 2 percent salary increase later in the year, contingent on UCOL receiving new government funding. Monday's strike follows months of tightly restricted action, including two-hour midday strikes in January and March, rallies, "Wear Red" protests and public forums. The latest action was held after UCOL announced that it was

cancelling future negotiations, pending a government-funding decision.



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