

# Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

14 March 2015

## Bangladeshi garment workers protest

On March 1, garment workers at Chunji Knit, a Korea-owned knitwear manufacturer and exporter, located at Uttar Badda in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, demonstrated outside the National Press Club to demand four months' wage arrears, from November to February. At least 2,500 workers are affected.

Their action followed a protest in front of the factory two days earlier. Workers said they were attacked by "hired goons" of the factory and that many of the protesters were injured.

A spokesman from the Chunji Knit Ltd Workers union said that talks were held with management in February but the company refused to pay outstanding wages and began laying off employees. Around 1,500 workers remain in the factory.

## India: Government insurance workers strike

Around 5,000 public sector employees at 3,000 branches of the state-owned Life Insurance Corporation walked out for the day on March 9 in a national stoppage over the government's decision to increase the limit of foreign investment from 26 to 49 percent. The insurance workers are concerned that many jobs will be lost as a result. The strike was organised by the All India Insurance Employees Association Amanulla Khan.

## Andhra Pradesh noon meal workers protest

School noon meal workers in Vishakhapatnam staged a two-day hunger strike in front of the district divisional office on March 9. They called for a minimum wage of 10,000 rupees (\$159), reduction of increased workloads and removal of the threat to reduce the number of aged workers. Workers also protested outside the district collector's office and planned for further demonstrations on March 17.

## Pondicherry state transport workers strike

Pondicherry Road Transport Corporation workers, including mechanics, conductors and drivers, walked off the job on March 10 after the union and management failed to reach agreement in a pay dispute. Workers were demanding the immediate disbursal of long pending wages. Around 120 buses stayed off the road due to the strike.

## Tamil Nadu rural postal workers on strike

Close to 700 rural postal workers in Madurai and Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu have been on strike since March 10 to demand regularisation of their services, reversal of the plan for privatisation, and a pay increase. The industrial action has stopped all rural mail deliveries in the district.

The All India Gramin Dak Sevak Union said a general delivery worker's starting salary was just 4,500 rupees (\$US72) a month and increases to only 8,000 rupees (\$US127) after 25 years' service. While the postal workers are paid for only four hours a day, they generally

work for up to eight hours.

### **Pakistan: Karachi primary school teachers protest**

On March 10, a group of primary school teachers demonstrated at the MA Jinnah Road in Karachi, the capital of Sindh province, over the non-payment of salaries for the past year. The teachers, who were appointed on a temporary basis in 2011, were made permanent last year but have not received any salaries since.

The action, called by the Teacher Action Committee, follows a similar protest over the issue in late January. At least 330 teachers are affected.

### **Cambodian rubber manufacturing workers strike**

Some 170 workers at Socfin, a rubber processing company in Mondulkiri, Pech Chreada district, stopped work on March 9 over several demands. These include the right to join a union, reversal of a recent pay cut and reinstatement of two sacked workers. Other demands are for safety equipment and paid sick and maternity leave. Socfin is a global rubber producer with plantations in Cambodia and around the world.

The rubber processing workers want their wages increased from the current \$US6.25 per day to \$7.50 per day and the reinstatement of a driver who was allegedly fired after being sick for two months and another employee who was dismissed without warning for a minor mistake. One worker accused the company of cutting some employees' salaries from \$200 to \$192 per month without reason.

### **Esso gas plant workers in Victoria to take industrial action**

Following the expiry of a one-month Fair Work Commission ban on industrial action, workers at Esso Australia's Victorian natural gas plants have launched

protected industrial action at the Longford, Long Island Point and Barry Beach sites. The industrial action by Australian Workers Union members (AWU) includes work stoppages and overtime bans.

Negotiations for a new enterprise bargaining agreement have been ongoing for over six months. An AWU spokesman claimed Esso planned to reduce the number of operators at the Longford plant from 75 to 60. Other disputed issues have not been made public.

### **Northern Territory construction workers face heavy fines**

At least 66 construction workers who allegedly held a half-day strike in October 2013 at the Inpex gas project outside the Northern Territory's capital Darwin could be fined more than \$10,000 and their union, the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), \$51,000.

The workers were taken to court by Australia's building watchdog the Fair Work Building and Construction (FWBC) agency. The work site is part of the \$50 billion Ichthys project, processing natural gas piped 889 kilometres from Browse Basin off the coast of Western Australia.

The alleged strike action was to demand pay for time travelling to and from work. The FWBC alleged the industrial action was unlawful, given an enterprise bargaining agreement was being negotiated with construction contractor Laing O'Rourke.

The Inpex gas processing construction site is on the outskirts of Darwin and workers were dissatisfied with transport arrangements and the time taken to get to and from work. On the day of the alleged industrial action, workers had a mid-morning meeting on the premises and voted not to return to work for the day to push their demand.



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