

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

25 March 2017

Burmese food factory workers on strike

More than 1,000 workers from the Ever Sunny Foods factory in Yangon region's Hlaing Tharyar Industrial Zone (2) walked out on strike on Monday over various demands. The strike erupted after management announced that it was cutting the Myanmar New Year holidays to just five days. Workers told the media that management had persuaded them to work every day, including on weekends for the past month without being paid double wages, on the promise that the factory would close for 15 days during Myanmar New Year, which falls in April.

One worker said that the strikers wanted their rights as prescribed in official labour laws. "We have to work for every Sunday. We are not allowed to take any leave. If we are absent, they cut our wages," he said.

The workers want paid leave, social welfare cards and to be allowed to form a union and that these conditions be written into a work contract. They have also complained about inadequate toilet facilities at the factory – there are only 10 toilets for the more than 2,000-strong workforce – and that the dining room was not large enough.

Meanwhile, some 500 workers at Running Tex, a Chinese-owned garment factory in Hlaing Tharyar's Ngwe Pin Lae industrial zone protested last week to demand the full 10-day New Year holiday and other labour rights.

India: Assam petroleum tanker drivers end strike

Drivers and assistants for about 4,900 petroleum tankers operating out of depots and refineries of IOC, BPCL and HPCL in Assam ended an indefinite strike on Wednesday, two days after the walkout began on Monday. The workers were demanding the mandated minimum wage and other state entitlements. The strike had the potential to stop all energy supplies to Assam and neighbouring states within days if it had continued.

After two days of meetings between representatives of the Assam Petroleum Mazdoor Union (APMU), transporters, oil companies and the government, the transporters agreed to pay the minimum wage rates stated in their contract with the oil companies. Other demands, such as the provision of a provident fund, insurance facilities and registration under the employee state insurance scheme, have only been accepted in-principle.

The APMU has said that the transporters have until April 10 to implement the minimum wage (450.62 rupees per day [\$US6.88] for

drivers and 309 rupees for assistants) or further industrial action would be taken.

Karnataka rural health workers on strike

Around 10,000 anganwadi (rural health) workers are maintaining their demonstration at Freedom Park in Bengaluru to demand wage increases. Anganwadi teachers and helpers from 25 districts of Karnataka have been sleeping overnight in the park and along Sheshadri Road since Monday.

The Karnataka State Anganwadi Workers Association said it wants the government to increase the monthly wage of anganwadi workers from 6,000 to 10,000 rupees (\$153) and that of helpers from 3,000 to 7,500 rupees. Protesters rejected a promise from the labour minister on Wednesday that the government would call a meeting on April 19 to resolve the issue. One protester said that workers were tired of false promises, adding, "This is a crisis and we are not budging."

Tamil Nadu Hyundai auto workers strike

Over 300 workers at the Hyundai Motors plant in Sriperumbudur began a sit-in demonstration on Monday to protest management's decision to deny two workers entry to the factory. According to the Hyundai Motors India Employees Union, the company suspended the two workers for instigating a strike in 2012. The protesters said that the company had reneged on a promise to present any move to suspend the workers to the Joint Labour Commissioner before enforcing it.

Pakistan: Punjab municipal workers protest

Municipal workers in the city of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab province demonstrated on Monday over the non-payment of salaries. The workers, mainly sweepers and water supply staff, said they had not received wages for four months and will resign if they are not paid soon.

In line with International Monetary Fund demands, the Pakistan government has slashed spending, forcing many institutions,

especially at local government level, to delay wage payments.

Hyderabad water workers demand wages

Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) workers in Hyderabad have been holding daily protests and rallies since March 19 to demand payment of up to six months' wages. The Hyderabad Development Authority Employees Union has threatened that if the authority did not distribute wages within 15 days the water supply and sewerage systems of all three subdivisions of Hyderabad would be shut down.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa university employees on strike

About 130 employees in pay scales 7 to 17 at the Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, boycotted duties for an indefinite period on March 12 to demand job permanency. The strike has severely affected university administration, including registrations, tests and hostel operations. The workers have also accused the university authorities of corruption in recruitment and other activities.

The All Employees Association has warned that if its demands are not met the strike would be expanded. University authorities, however, have ignored workers' demands and called in police to intimidate the protesters.

Western Australian building workers remain on strike

Asbestos removalist workers employed by building subcontractor Cape have been on strike for over three weeks following a "take-it or leave-it" pay deal from the company.

According to the workers, Cape's contract with aluminium producer Alcoa-Australia has expired, and the subcontractor is trying to impose a new enterprise agreement. Cape has told the experienced and highly skilled workers that they have to accept a 25 percent pay cut so that it can tender for a new contract with Alcoa.

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, which recently imposed wage cuts on Maryvale paper workers in Victoria, has reduced the workers' original log of claims. It has told Cape that the workers were prepared to accept a 12-month pay freeze.

Victorian insulation manufacturing workers on strike

Around 90 workers at Fletcher Insulation in Dandenong, Victoria have been on strike for more than a month after being offered an enterprise agreement that slashes working conditions and imposes a four-year pay freeze. The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) has told the media that Fletcher Insulation wants to increase working

hours—the current glass industry standard is 35 hours a week—and remove minimum manning levels from the agreement.

Workers are also concerned that Fletcher, which took over ACI Glass several years ago, wants unlimited use of casual workers and to reduce existing redundancy provisions. New Zealand-based Fletcher is part of the multi-national building products supplier Fletcher Building Group with 20,000 employees around the world.

Parmalat lifts lockout after union deal

Over 60 maintenance workers at the Parmalat dairy processing plant at Echuca in northern Victoria returned to work on Tuesday after accepting a union-negotiated pay deal with management. The maintenance workers are members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and Electrical Trades Union (ETU). They were locked out on January 18, the same day they planned to hold a four-hour strike over Parmalat's proposed new enterprise agreement.

Negotiations for a new work agreement began last August. Parmalat's offer of a 9 percent pay rise over three years for permanent workers in exchange for major cuts in the hourly pay of all new employees was rejected by workers. The unions said that Parmalat wanted to reduce new employees' wages by \$8 an hour or 20 to 30 percent less than the existing hourly rate. Production workers are paid around \$30 an hour.

Under the unions' return-to-work deal, employees will receive annual two-percent pay increases over three years, production workers will be direct employees of Parmalat and current arrangements and protections for Parmalat metal and electrical trades employees will be maintained.

New Zealand disability support workers vote on strike action

Over 3,000 disability support workers across New Zealand have begun voting on possible strike action in a dispute over pay and conditions. Members of the E Tu employed by IDEA Services, which is funded by the government through the organisation Intellectually Handicapped Children's Association, will vote at 80 different stop-work meetings, with the ballot closing on March 31.

The vote follows five months of negotiations for a pay increase for administration and support workers. The union claims that these employees are only paid a maximum of \$18 an hour, which is less than the official Living Wage. The E Tu said IDEA has made no pay offer, has ignored critical health and safety issues around current staffing levels and not agreed to job protection.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact