

Sri Lankan plantation workers support Australian Pampas workers' fight against wage-cutting agreement

Glenugie Estate Workers' Action Committee (Sri Lanka)
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The Glenugie Estate Workers' Action Committee (GEWAC) in Sri Lanka urges workers at the Pampas bread and pastry factory in Melbourne, Australia to defeat the sell-out enterprise agreement that is being pushed by management and the union.

As we have read on the WSWs, the United Workers' Union (UWU) is pushing the agreement as a "historic win," which is a fallacy. On the contrary, the agreement is for a 4.5 percent wage increase per year, as against the workers' initial demand of 8 percent and even the scaled-down demand of the UWU for 6 percent. We note that this pay increase, upheld by the UWU, is well below the official inflation rate in Australia, which has reached 7.3 percent, while essential goods, including food, have risen even higher.

We also see how workers in Australia have been hit by the deliberate policies of the Australian central bank for exorbitant interest rates which are forcing workers to cut spending to keep up with loan repayments and mortgages, while the wealthy enjoy higher yields from investments and savings. Amid these attacks, the UWU, acting on behalf of big business and the capitalist class as a whole, is trying to portray a real wage cut as a wage increase.

We would like to relate our own experience with the trade union bureaucracy in Sri Lanka, which has been much cruder, but similar in essence.

The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the biggest trade union in the plantations, has not only repeatedly betrayed workers' demands. It has also acted as an agent for management in the witch hunting of militant workers.

When Alton Estate workers went on strike to demand higher wages in February and March 2021, along with

thousands of plantation workers across the island, the police arrested 22 of them on trumped-up charges. They were accused of physically harassing the estate manager and damaging his residence during a protest near the premises. A case has been filed against these workers in the Hatton magistrate's court.

The CWC, which has a branch at the estate, collaborated directly with management and the police in the witch hunt against the workers, while the other smaller plantation unions maintained a guilty silence.

Understanding that the unions would take no action, Alton Estate management summarily sacked 38 workers over the strike action, later reinstating just four but without back pay.

We went through the harsh experiences of trade union betrayals and decided to organise our Glenugie Estate Workers' Action Committee. With the formation of the action committee, we managed to organise workers' demonstrations, and solidarity picket lines demanding reinstatement of the sacked Alton plantation workers and other burning demands. It is an ongoing struggle.

We urge our brothers and sisters in the Pampas factory to take matters into their own hands and form a rank-and-file committee, independent of the trade union apparatus which is working for corporate interests, and join us in the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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