

In Solidarity

with the struggle for justice in Kodaikanal

Solidarity actions from around the world

Australia (Melbourne)

About 30 workers protested outside the Unilever offices in Melbourne on March 7 as part of an international day of action. They were there to draw attention to the fact that Unilever have knowingly poisoned many of their workers in South India.

Members of Australia Asia worker Links (AAWL) joined supporters of Union Solidarity and representatives from many unions including the MUA, AMWU, CWU, NUW and UNITE to highlight Unilever's appalling practices.



After a few speeches two delegates from the Australian trade union movement delivered a letter of protest to Unilever management. It was noted that with the money and effort that Unilever had spent worldwide to counter the protests they could have paid for compensation to the victims of the poisoning.

By Socialist Party reporters, Melbourne

<http://www.socialistpartyaustralia.org/archives/2008/03/08/australian-workers-protest-against-unilever>

Hong Kong

In support of Unilever workers India, Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) a regional labour NGO based in Hong Kong working on Asian labour issues organised a protest outside the Unilever office in Hong Kong on March 7 which was the Global day of action against Unilever.

March 7, 2008

Global Day of Action against Unilever

Appeal from ex-workers and residents of Kodaikanal

We are workers and residents of Kodaikanal, who were exposed to toxic mercury from Hindustan Unilever's mercury thermometer factory in this beautiful hill station in Tamilnadu, South India. We are pursuing the Anglo-Dutch giant seeking compensation, long-term health rehabilitation and monitoring, and clean-up of mercury contamination of our home town and its beautiful lakes.

March 7, 2008, is the 7th anniversary of the day when we exposed Unilever's irresponsible dumping of toxic mercury wastes in a sensitive watershed forest and in a scrap yard in a crowded working class neighborhood.

The company's in-house safety practices were as lax as their environmental quality control. We were not warned of the hazards of working with mercury. Many of us unwittingly carried the toxic metal home in our clothes and hair and exposed our children to the poison. Many of us are too sick to work for a living. Faced with mounting medical expenses under the circumstances, our families are being pushed to destitution. At least 19 young workers have died till date, and hundreds, including children born to exposed parents, are sick. The company refuses to come to the aid of those poisoned by it, and is delaying clean-up to international standards.

Make Unilever fulfill its obligations to the community of ex-workers, their families and Kodaikanal residents.

Representatives from migrant, labour and human rights groups including those from the Indonesian Migrant Worker Union joined the protest.

The protestors reached the Unilever office in Tai Po District which is an industrial area situated in the New Territories of Hong Kong, and stated their demands for compensation to the workers of Unilever in Kodaikanal and demanded that Unilever should clean the environment and remove its mess. Posters, placards and big thermometers made out of plastic tubes were used in the demonstration to show solidarity to the workers, their families and community affected by mercury poisoning.

The protest letter was read out before it was handed over to the management of Unilever Hong Kong. Though the Human Resources representative was ignorant about the situation of Kodaikanal and what Unilever has done there, she promised us that they would look into the case and be in touch with their counterpart in India.

The Unilever representative also said that she would be in touch with AMRC in the future regarding the situation in Kodaikanal.



The statement of protest and demands submitted to Unilever was signed by the following organisations:

- Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC)**
- Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU)**
- Hong Kong Liaison Office of the international trade union movement (IHLO)**
- Globalization Monitor (GM)**
- Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)**
- Asian Migrant Centre (AMC)**
- Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)**
- Indonesian Migrant Worker Union (IMWU)**

India

Mumbai

Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work
March 5, 2008

A photo exhibition was arranged in the Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work for students to come and see and sign a petition addressed to Unilever. In addition, a ten minute briefing was done in every class about the issue and the Global Day of Action inviting people to join the protest in Mumbai. As an outcome 300 students have signed a petition addressed to Unilever asking Unilever to immediately meet the demands of the workers in Kodaikanal. The petition has been sent to Unilever from Nirmala Niketan.

Protest at HUL's head office is in Mumbai
March 5, 2008

The protest in Mumbai was organized by All India Council of Unilever Unions and Maharashtra Yuva Parishad (a youth group in Mumbai). 20 people visited the Unilever Research Centre at Andheri, Mumbai with placards and pamphlets.

Some volunteers put up the placards on the gate of the Unilever office, while others busied themselves with distributing pamphlets to pedestrians and motor cyclists and even shopkeepers across the road. Unilever employees from the research centre took turns to come out and see what was happening but didn't make any effort to remove the protestors from there. The demonstration went on for about an hour.

Delhi

Youth in Delhi organized a photo-exhibition of the Kodaikanal struggle & a candle light vigil at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on March 7th evening. Students & visitors of JNU keenly watched the exhibition and participated in the candle light vigil in remembrance of the dead ex-workers and children of Kodaikanal.

The youth volunteers drew parallels between the Bhopal & Kodaikanal struggles in their interactions with the public. Signatures were also collected in support of the appeal by ex-workers of Kodaikanal demanding justice.



Bangalore

March 7, 2008

St. Joseph's College of Arts and Science, Bangalore organized a candle light vigil and photo exhibition in support of the struggling ex-workers. On March 7th, a photo exhibition was arranged in the college for the students and the Global Day of Action in Bangalore ended with a candle light vigil in front of the college, remembering the 7 years of struggle for Justice.

Kodaikanal

Students from Trichy visit Kodaikanal

Feb 27, 2008

About 300 Junior Red Cross Society students from Holy cross Higher Secondary School, Musiri, Tiruchy, Tamilnadu visited Kodaikanal on February 27th, after they heard about Unilever's corporate crime in Kodaikanal.



The kids were keen to meet the ex- workers and affected children. The ex- workers shared their experience and problems with the children. After the talk was over the children walked to the Unilever factory and lighted candles and prayed for the dead ex- workers and children of ex- workers. The children requested Unilever through the media to immediately meet the needs of the ex- workers

Public meeting reiterates demands, continued struggle

March 7, 2008

The ex-workers of Unilever's now shut mercury thermometer participated in a public meeting in Kodaikanal . The meeting was organized by Ponds HLL ex- mercury Employees Welfare Association, Kodaikanal Environment Youth Service, and Tamilnadu Environment Council. The workers who came together decided that their struggle will go on until Unilever fulfill the demands of the ex-workers. Around 350 ex-workers attended the public meeting along with representatives from Unilever, Kodaikanal who stood as silent spectators at a distance.

Ghatigaon (near Gwalior)

Survivors of Bhopal Tragedy in solidarity with Kodaikanal

March 7, 2008

Survivors & supporters of the 1984 Bhopal Gas Disaster are on their second Padyatra (march on foot) from Bhopal to Delhi covering 800Kms seeking justice. Even after 23 years the demands of the Bhopalis have not been fulfilled by the Indian Government.

The padayatris, who are best placed to understand the apathy of the Government and the negligence of multinational companies extended their solidarity to the victims and survivors of the mercury pollution by Hindustan Lever in Kodaikanal.



They organized a candle light vigil in memory of the workers who had died due to mercury exposure. They also took a pledge that they would boycott at least 11 products of Hindustan Lever, including some of the popular items with the padayatris like Fair and Lovely, Lux, Surf and Sunsilk shampoo. The padayatris also took a pledge to spread the word about the boycott, and make sure that their fight against killer corporations is strengthened.

Resolution by Unilever Unions to support the struggle for justice in Kodaikanal

The office-bearers of All India Council of Unilever Unions on being informed about the present pathetic condition of the Ex-workers and their families of Kodaikanal factory discussed this issue and unanimously decided to support the struggle of Kodaikanal workers and their families and passed the following resolution.

“It is resolved that the All India Council of Unilever Unions will work jointly with the Ex-workers of Kodaikanal for getting them Justice and compensation to the mercury affected workers and their families from the Hindustan Unilever Management “

They called upon the Hindustan Unilever management to clean up all the mercury from Kodaikanal's environment, compensate the workers and their families exposed to mercury and provide assistance for long-term medical monitoring and treatment to the affected community. The resolution was signed by Mr. Rama Rao, President of the Council and Mr. Bennet D'Costa, General Secretary.

Chennai

Boycott of Unilever products by Confederation of Tamilnadu Small Merchants Association

March 3, 2008

The Confederation of Tamilnadu Small Merchants Association announced in a press conference on March 3rd that in support of the struggling ex-workers in Kodaikanal, no small merchant will sell any Unilever product on March 7th across Tamilnadu. This confederation plays an important role in taking the message of struggle across to consumers of Unilever's products

Demonstration in front of Unilever office

March 7, 2008

A delegation comprising representatives from Youth for Social Change, a youth collective, Corporate Accountability Desk, a collective that works on Environment Justice issues and Confederation of Tamilnadu Small merchants Association visited the Unilever office in Foreshore Estate, Chennai.

The delegation was a colourful affair with people dressed up as a mercury thermometer, a victim of 'Fair & Lovely' and posters, placards, banners reminding Unilever of its pending liabilities in Kodaikanal.



This Unilever office was prepared for the Global Day of action and as a result the gates that normally remain open had been closed since the previous day itself. The security along with the Police tried its best to intimidate the protestors, but backed off realizing that they were willing to get arrested.

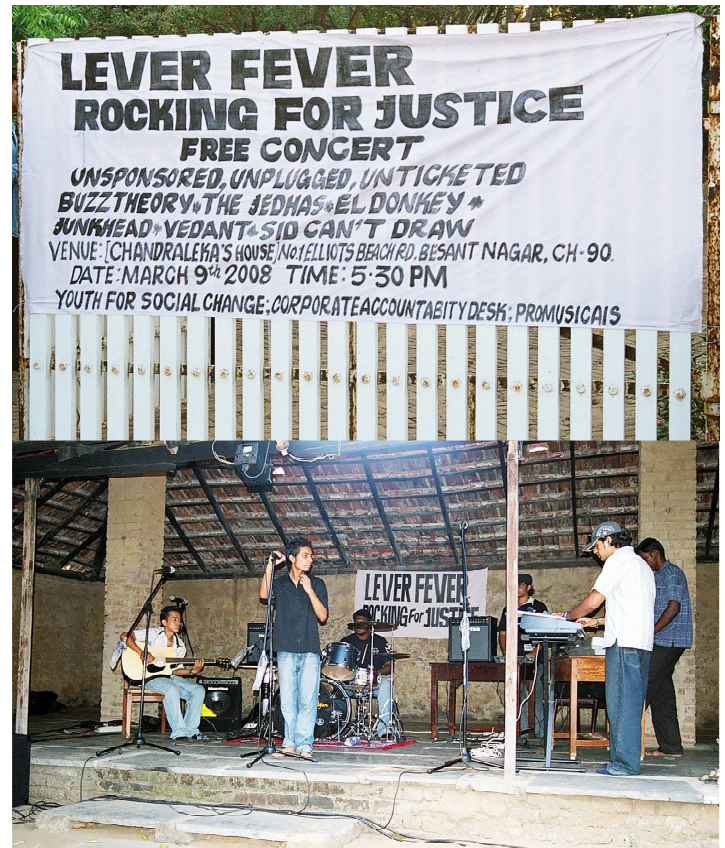
However, the protestors convinced the security and the Police to get Mr. Sethuraman (Public Relations Officer) to meet with them and collect the memorandum, which he did though with a lot of hesitation.

LEVER FEVER: Rocking for Justice

March 9, 2008

Youth for Social Change and Corporate Accountability Desk along with the help of Promusicals organised a rock concert "Lever Fever – Rocking for Justice", in Chennai on March 9th to create awareness of Unilever's track record. The event for which had a free entry for the public saw five youth bands performing in different styles which were interspersed with Unilever spoof ads and an interview with 'Mr. Unilever'

The links that Rock music has with protest don't need to be elaborated upon. It is a means of building constructive dissidence to authority, to let youngsters know that speaking up can be fun, and creative. The legacy of rock music speaking out against injustice was kept alive at Lever Fever.



Lever Fever was a low-budget event with voluntary contributions. More than 300 people attended the event which also featured a photo-exhibition on mercury with pictures from Kodaikanal and Minamata. Handouts were also given to the public that contained not only the story of HLL's irresponsibility in Kodaikanal, but also the truth behind many of Unilever's popular consumer products.

Solidarity messages

Several messages of solidarity poured in from around the world pledging support for the Global Day of Action against Unilever. Messages were sent to local Unilever offices in Sweden, Greece, Belgium, UK, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong, India and The Netherlands.

⇒ **Committee for a Workers International:** Messages from CWI's Indian section New Socialist Alternative about the Global Day of Action reached a lot of people in Europe. CWI's website www.socialistworld.net carried a story on Unilever's mercury poisoning. The website also carried an excellent article by Venkat Narasimham, New Socialist Alternative (CWI-India) examining the practice of export of 'dirty industries' by giants like Unilever to countries, the disregard for life and socialist alternatives.

The call for solidarity on the Global Day of Action triggered tremendous response from workers collectives around the world.

"If we workers take a notion,
we can stop all speeding trains.
Every bump upon the ocean,
we can tie with mighty chains.

Every wheel in the creation,
every mine and every mill.
Fleets and armies of all nations
will at our command stand still."

(Joe Hill, *Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) 1879-1915*)

⇒ Eight City Councilors in Sweden wrote to Unilever expressing their deep concerns about Unilever's deeds in Kodaikanal and question the company on its standards for providing basic security to workers and environmental footprint.

⇒ **Trina Tocco**, International Labour Rights Fund, Washington DC wrote to Patrick Cescau, CEO of Unilever PLC raising deep concerns about Unilever's practices in Kodaikanal. Strongly objecting to the irresponsible behaviour, she also points out how Unilever's record in Kodaikanal belies the message of CSR that the company keeps trumpeting about and urges Unilever to fulfill the demands of the struggling ex- workers.

⇒ **All India Council of Unilever Unions** passed a resolution supporting the demands of the Hindustan Unilever Kodaikanal ex- workers. The resolution endorses all the demands of the Kodaikanal ex- workers and also appeals to other groups to endorse the demands of the ex- workers.

⇒ **New Trade Union Initiative:** NTUI is a national federation of non-partisan left-democratic trade unions in the formal and informal sectors of work that represent workers in agriculture, forest, construction, mining, manufacturing and services. The NTUI has endorsed the resolution passed by All India Council of Unilever Unions, thereby supporting the demands of the Unilever ex – workers in Kodaikanal.

⇒ **Australia Asia Workers Links:** AAWL had been very instrumental in keeping other groups informed about Unilever's deeds and getting them to endorse their support for the Global Day of Action - March 7, 2008.

Read more solidarity messages and action updates on <http://kodaikanalstruggle.blogspot.com>

For continued solidarity with the struggle for justice in Kodaikanal, contact

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