

# asia workers organising

february 2013

## AAWL Activities Report for 2012

2012 followed on the footsteps of 2011 with workers all around the region waging hard struggles against continual assaults from capitalists. The ongoing economic crisis is continuing to put pressure on our brothers and sisters with both governments and employers trying to make us pay for their crisis.

The beginning of the year saw another massive strike in India with tens of millions of workers taking part. Solidarity actions were held all around the region, including Melbourne. We also saw the continuing heroic resistance of PALEA members against outsourcing by Philippine Airlines which continued throughout 2012.

Struggles such as these show how international solidarity can strengthen our movement. As workers in the globalised capitalist economy, organising our actions at an international level is our strength.

This is what AAWL works to achieve.

*Piergiorgio Moro, coordinator AAWL*



# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013



## AAWL Trade Union affiliates

Without our union affiliates, the solidarity work of AAWL could not continue. We thank the following unions and labour councils for their support in 2012:

AEU (NT),  
AEU (VIC),  
AMIEU (VIC),  
AMWU (VIC),  
ANF (VIC),  
ASU - VPS (VIC),  
ASU A&S (VicTas),  
Ballarat Regional TLC,  
CEPU - Communications T&S (VIC),  
CFMEU - C&G (VIC),  
CWU (Vic),  
ETU (VIC),  
Geelong Trades Hall,  
Gippsland TLC,  
MEAA (Vic),  
MUA (VIC),  
North East Border TLC,  
NTEU (VIC),  
QCU,  
RTBU (VIC),  
South West TLC,  
TCFUA (National),  
UCIW,  
Unions NSW,  
VTHC.

## The team at AAWL

Our work would not be possible without the contributions of the Executive, convenors and project co-ordinators. We would also like to thank the people who spend much volunteer time developing our campaigns and materials and distributing our news to a growing audience of labour activists globally.



## Highlights of 2012

**O**rganising a Global Day of Action against Outsourcing in the Airline industry on the 27 September 2012

**H**osting a number of visiting delegations of trade unionists, including from The Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and South Korea

**O**rganising a solidarity rally calling for the release of Somyot Pruksakasemsuk, a Thai labour activist detained under the country's infamous Article 112 - the Lese Majeste law

**O**rganising an extended solidarity and women's union leadership training visit to Melbourne by a representative from the Plantation Workers Red Flag Union of Sri Lanka

**T**he release of the trade union leader Hang San Kyun after 3 years in a South Korean jail for his part in organising protests at Ssangyong Motor Company in 2010

**A**ssisting a visiting delegation from the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of OHS laws and to understand the importance of union health and safety representatives.

## Campaigns, projects and issues for 2012



With capitalism operating at an international level, the need for workers to also organise and act at a global level is also necessary. AAWL helped to build these necessary links in a number of major areas in our region. Most of these disputes displayed the common issues that all workers are facing in their attempts to organise and not to be divided by casualisation and contracting out.

Our major campaigns are described in the following pages.

# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013







## International organising

### Airlines campaign

This campaign began in September 2011 with the sacking of 2,700 workers by Philippines Airlines. The workers were sacked so that Philippines Airlines could replace them with contract workers, at lower wages and conditions. The workers union, PALEA, has stood defiant against this and fought for the whole of 2012.

The central issue at Philippine Airlines was the outsourcing of jobs as a way to cut costs. This tactic has been used by many other airlines, including Qantas, to lower wages and weaken us.



Through our international contacts, AAWL began a process of contacting other airline unions to develop a co-ordinated, international strategy to combat this attack on workers.

This work led to a global day of action against outsourcing on 27 September. Workers and unions in 20 cities and from 13 different countries participated in this day.

The campaign is still continuing in 2013 as PALEA members are still locked out, hundreds of members of the Turkish union Hava Is are still fighting for reinstatement at Turkish Airlines, while the threat of outsourcing remains for many other workers.

### Maruti Suzuki - India and the car industry

In the second half of 2011, thousands of workers at the Maruti-Suzuki factories in the big industrial zone of Gurgaon, just outside of Delhi staged a number of strikes focused on pay, increased speed of the production line, and the right to unionise. While the workers won some concessions, 2012 saw the company and the state steadily increase the pressure on workers.

Following demonstrations in July, the police used these protest actions as an excuse to criminalise union activities. They have arrested many workers, with their families and communities also being harassed by the police. Many workers are now in jail or have fled the area.

AAWL has worked to bring solidarity to the Maruti Suzuki workers by publicising their struggle and contacting other unions in the car industry. South Korean auto workers have also had a number of struggles this year around work conditions as automakers all around the region seek to maximise profits at our expense. AAWL is in the process of developing a strategy on how best to co-ordinate and link the various struggles in the auto industry so as to maximise our strength.

# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013



## May Day and the Global Labour Movement Charter



The 1st of May is a celebration of the international labour movement and is marked all around the world by demonstrations and activities. AAWL in collaboration with regional worker organisations and trade unions also marks May Day. In 2012, we once again organised a rally in Melbourne to mark the day and to highlight the similarities of our struggles worldwide. The Global Labour Movement Charter has been produced to emphasise the common demands that workers have globally in our struggles for secure and safe jobs.

## Solidarity visits

This year AAWL hosted a number of visits by unionist from regional countries:

We had two separate visits from PALEA members, Alnem Pretencio and Benjie Velasco. Their visits focused on their dispute with Philippines Airlines and the common issues that workers in the Airline industry face in terms of outsourcing and cost cutting pressures. While the first visit was based in and

around Melbourne, the second visit also included time meeting workers in Sydney and Adelaide.

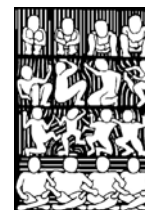
In conjunction with the Marxism 2012 Conference, AAWL had a number of productive meetings with some of the international delegates who came to this conference. Small solidarity tours were organised for them. Visitors included Chie Matsumoto from Japan, Lek Patchanee from Thailand, Ranath from Sri Lanka, and comrade Elisabeth Padillo from the Philippines.

AAWL sponsored Menaha Kandasamy from the Plantation Workers Red Flag Union of Sri Lanka to participate in the Anna Stewart Memorial Project run by the Victorian Trades Hall Council. In addition to the course, we organised a number of extra meetings for Menaha with labour contacts in Victoria. The visit was very successful not only for Menaha but also for AAWL as we were able to understand much better the issues facing workers in the plantation sector in Sri Lanka.

We hosted a delegation from the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour which came to Melbourne to specifically investigate Occupational Health and Safety legislation and procedures. This is not the first time that AAWL has hosted a delegation from Vietnam. It has allowed everyone involved to gain a deeper understanding on how best to improve OHS for workers in the region.



The last visit for the year was from a delegation of public sector trade unionists from South Korea who came to Australia to meet unions from the public transport sector and discuss privatisation and outsourcing issues. It is envisaged that further work will be developed in 2013 with these unions.



# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013





## Free our Comrades

Unfortunately many of our comrades are still in jail. The reality is that anti union laws are increasingly used to hinder, restrict and criminalise our ability to organise. This trend affects workers in every country and will need a global response.

The good news for 2012 was the release of comrade Han Sang Kyun. He was a leader of the Korean Metal Workers Union at the heroic protests at Ssangyong Motor Company in 2009. Both the strike and occupation were defeated. Sang Kyun was sentenced to 4 years in jail. He was released in early August. Han Sang Kyun is now back in the union to continue the fight for workers rights.

AAWL was also very busy during the year campaigning to stop the jailing of comrade Somyot Pruksakasemsuk in Thailand. Somyot is a labour activist and journalist. He was indicted under the repressive Article 112, otherwise known as the Lese Majeste law, for allowing the publication of articles against the monarchy. This law has been used to arrest, or force into exile, hundreds of labour and human rights activists. *(eds note - Somyot was sentenced to 11 years jail in January 2013. The campaign to free Somyot and the other Thai political prisoners continues.)*

Of particular interest is the plight of the Faisalabad 6 in Pakistan. These are six power loom trade union activists who were organisers of major protests in 2010 for better wages and conditions in the garment sector. They were charged under Pakistan anti terror laws and sentenced to 80 years of jails each.



## Communication and media

AAWL has continued to publicise workers issues in our region through a variety of platforms.

Our public meetings have featured reports back on issues that affect the workers movement in the region. The meetings are a forum for workers and activists to discuss how to develop and implement international solidarity.

AAWL hosts a weekly radio program, Asia Pacific Currents (APC), on the local radio station 3CR Radio. The program is streamed live internationally over the internet, and is available as a podcast on both the 3CR radio website as well as Rabble, a Canadian progressive news website.

AAWL continues to develop our social media presence via:

**Mini News e-bulletin** - a weekly electronic news service that is a summary of news, actions and assessments on the state of the workers movement. It has tens of thousands of subscribers and the bulletin is regularly distributed via other email lists.

**Facebook** - AAWL's page features our mini news items, our APC podcasts as well as other news that affects workers internationally

**Twitter** - is another method of distributing AAWL's information and news to a different audience

## Documents produced by AAWL

### outsourced!



More than 2000 ground staff at Philippine Airlines need our solidarity. They have spent the last six months on picket lines, having been locked out and then sacked in a major dispute over outsourcing.

The workers were required to happily for their old jobs, with "new" companies that have been contracted to supply baggage handling, catering, check in, call centre and ramp services to Philippine Airlines. - In fact these "new" companies are owned by some of the same businessmen who hold large stakes in Philippine Airlines.

Many workers for the "new", outsourced companies would see their wages cut by half or more. And under Philippines law, they would lose the protection of their union, the Philippine Airlines Employees Association (PAAEA).

On 27 September 2011, thousands of workers were brutally removed from the Philippine Airlines terminals at Manila and elsewhere. Since then they have maintained protest camps at the airports of Manila and Cebu, the two largest cities of the Philippines.

PAAEA members have maintained their protest despite multiple typhoons and attacks by armed thugs. They have had a major impact on the profits of Philippine Airlines, which has recently been forced to bring in a new major shareholder and sack many senior managers. The workers have vowed to continue their protest until they are reinstated, and negotiations are opened for a new Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Employers from Japan Airlines to Qantas to Philippine Airlines are using outsourcing to boost profits at workers' expense. Rather than being picked off one by one, we all know that we are much, much stronger if we stick together.

Support our brothers and sisters at Philippine Airlines.

More info / support / donate:  
laborpartyphilippines.org  
facebook.com/groupsolidarityphilippines2010

workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: 03 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au - aawl may 2012

AAWL routinely produces leaflets on working class issues that remain available on the AAWL website. During 2012, leaflets/statements were produced on the following topics:

- Support the biggest strike action in the world! India general strike
- Free Somyot!
- Toyota attacks workers again!
- May Day - March in solidarity with workers in struggle everywhere
- Outsourced! - Support locked out Philippine Airlines workers
- Global Day of Action for Airline Workers
- Airline workers stand together.

# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013



## Other AAWL activities:

Participating in a number of meetings and activities to strengthen workers organising and support human rights in Sri Lanka,



Presenting a workshop on international organising and dispute mapping at the Marxism 2012 conference,

Supporting the demonstration against the visit by Philippines President Aquino to Australia,

Supporting pro Choice rallies,



Supporting the visit by Australian trade unionists to the International Solidarity Affair, in the Philippines, organised by the KMU.



## General workers' issues

There were a number of major issues in our region that AAWL supported.

These have included:

The catastrophic factory fires in Karachi, Pakistan and Dhaka, Bangladesh where over 400 workers were killed. This is an indictment of the 'Race to the Bottom' that is present in many industries. The garment industry in particular is a leading exponent of this, being able to set up quickly in new countries and localities where workers are poor and union organising is weak or non-existent. Garment workers are one of the big losers of the globalised capitalist economy with low wages, high intensity of work and appalling OHS measures at all levels. There is an urgent need to organise at an international level to put a stop to these massacres.

Workers in Indonesia are once again on the offensive. This year saw a number of mobilisations around minimum wages, entitlements and against outsourcing and contracting out. A general strike in October involved almost 3 million workers. Indonesia is an important regional economy and the strengthening of the working class can only be of benefit to other workers in the region.

Workers in China have continued to fight amid a repressive environment and weak organisational structures. While the appalling working conditions at industries like Foxconn took the spotlight, the reality is that such conditions are replicated at thousands of other workplaces. It is estimated that in 2012 there were around 400 major illegal strikes in China.

Workers in South Korea have continued to fight against the onslaught of economic restructuring, casualisation and contracting out. This year we witnessed major struggles by taxi drivers, truck drivers, banking and finance workers, migrant workers, the car and automobile supply chains, furnishing and manufacturing sectors. Workers have faced increased repression and attacks by hired thugs. Workers resorted to occupying electricity pylons and other towers as a means to highlight their struggles. Unfortunately, late in the year, the pressures of this ongoing repression led to the suicide of four union organisers in separate incidents. Campaigning by South Korean workers is set to continue in 2013.

# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013





The situation for workers in Fiji has remained serious with constant harassment of union leaders, laws that make independent union organising impossible and a freeze on wages. An ILO delegation that was to check on union rights was expelled soon after they arrived in Fiji.

The popular uprisings that started in late 2010 in Tunisia have continued to evolve and develop in West Asia. What started off as mass demonstrations calling for greater freedoms and less austerity measures in Syria, has degenerated into a civil conflict that has claimed over 60,000 lives. While many workers were organised in trade unions, the conflict has seen many of these destroyed. This has left workers and their communities vulnerable to both economic deprivations and military violence by one of the many sides in the conflict. The need for the international working class to support the creation of an independent workers movement in Syria is as crucial as ever.

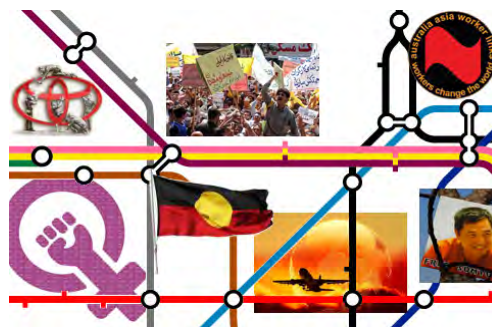
Palestinians have also continued to oppose the Israeli occupation via demonstrations, strikes and large scale hunger strikes by Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails.



In Bahrain, the situation is still very precarious for workers as the government is continuing to repress any opposition. A number of trade unionists have been jailed, such as comrade Mahdi Abu Dheeb. AAWL is actively supporting the international campaign to free our comrades from Bahraini jails.

In Yemen, the popular movement has overthrown the despotic regime of President Saleh, but as with the uprising in Tunisia and Egypt, Yemeni workers are at the forefront of the struggle for economic justice and the right to organise. In addition, Yemen is a hot spot for the 'war on terror', with many of its inhabitants having been murdered by unmanned drones of the USA military.

In Iran, many unionists remain in jail. AAWL works with international solidarity organisation to highlight these human rights abuses and to increase the political space for workers to organise.



## Thank you

This is a lot of work for an organisation without any paid staff. It all happens thanks to you: the members and affiliates of AAWL, working together to build international solidarity.

Thank you. Our struggle continues. Workers change the world.

*Piergiorgio Moro, Coordinaator, AAWL*

# workers change the world

australia asia worker links - po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia  
tel: +61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au february 2013



# we need a global labour movement charter



The right of all workers to organise collectively without being subjected to violence, intimidation or legal harassment

The right to organise unions and take collective action including industrial action and solidarity actions

Secure employment

Health & Safety at work, compensation, rehabilitation

A living wage for all workers in all industries

Decent work, with appropriate hours of work proposed by workers, paid leave and paid holidays

Full rights for women workers

Indigenous workers' rights & Land Rights

Permanent residence with full employment rights for all refugees and all migrant workers in all countries

No child labour

Education, housing, health and childcare provisions

Social security and adequate welfare benefits

**australia asia worker links - workers change the world**

**po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia**

**tel: + 61 3 9663 7277 email: [aawl@aawl.org.au](mailto:aawl@aawl.org.au) web: [aawl.org.au](http://aawl.org.au)**

**abn: 82 920 590 967 inc assn no: A1318 aawl march 2010**



# workers change the world