

# asia workers organising

february 2012



**workers  
get ready**

Report by Piergiorgio Moro, AAWL Acting Coordinator to Annual General Meeting 7 March 2012

## **2011 - Another year of struggle**

Once again we saw great struggles being fought by workers in the Asia Pacific region. The beginning of the year saw major social upheavals in West Asia, and neighbouring North Africa, finishing with major industrial struggles in East and South East Asia.

The economic crisis that began in 07-08 has continued to spread. While its impact and severity has varied across regions, workers are always the ones asked to pay the costs. This unevenness of conditions means that the responses by the working class varies according to country.

In these conditions, international workers solidarity is able to support, help and strengthen local struggles by maximising the strength of our organisations. As workers of the globalised capitalist economy, international working class solidarity is the key to strengthening our collective movement. This is what AAWL works to achieve.

## **Highlights of 2011**

The solidarity visit by Alnem Pretencio,

Vice president of PALEA - representing the 2,500 Philippines Airlines workers on strike against sub contracting

The success of the international campaign to free Mansour Osanloo, an Iranian trade union leader who spent four years in jail

The 10 month long occupation of the container crane in Busan by Kim Jin-suk as part of protests against mass layoff by the Korean Hanjin company

Having international speaking hook-ups at AAWL meetings with international labour activists participating directly with a Melbourne audience

Establishing a weekly 'mini news' e-list of regional labour news and struggles that reaches thousands of activists in the Asia Pacific region

Organising a Melbourne Fiji solidarity rally to coincide with the International Day of Action in support of Fijian workers against government repression

## **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 2011:

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AEU (NT), AEU (Vic), AMIEU (Vic), AMWU (Vic), ANF (Vic), ASU Vic A&S, ASU Vic PS, Ballarat TH, CEPU P&T (Vic), CEPU T&S (Vic), CFMEU C&G (Vic), ETU (Vic), Geelong THC, Gippsland TLC, HSU East, MUA (Vic), NTEU (Vic), QCU, RTBU (Vic) South West TLC (Vic), TCFUA (Nat), UCIW, UNSW, VIEU, VTHC

## The team at AAWL

Our work would not be possible without the contributions and leadership of the Executive, convenors and project coordinators. In particular we would 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.

## Our projects and campaigns

International organising - As capitalism continues to integrate at an international level, the need for the working class to also operate at this level increases accordingly. AAWL helped to build this solidarity in a number of major disputes 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 sub contracting out.

Maruti Suzuki, India - The big industrial zones of Gurgaon, just outside Delhi, witnessed a series of strikes during July to November that involved thousands of workers at the Maruti-Suzuki factories. The strike was not only about pay and conditions but was about the workers right to form their own union. AAWL supported their dispute by linking the Indian workers with workers in other countries, publicised their struggle repeatedly and had one of their speakers at one of AAWL's public forums.



Freeport McMoran Mine - West Papua, Indonesia. For three months until early December, anywhere up to 10,000 workers were on strike at the giant Freeport copper and gold mine in the highlands of West Papua. The significance of this strike was two-fold: Most of the workers were West Papuans, linking the strike to the issue of self determination. Also the workers set their wage demands by comparing the wage rates of other Freeport workers around the world. This attempt to create international levels of wage standards is a strong indicator for the way forward for workers.



Hanjin - South Korea. In December 2010, 400 workers were fired at the Hanjin Shipyard in Busan. The workers organised against these layoffs and in the following months were able to develop a big social movement in support of the rights of workers to secure and safe employment. A female worker, Kim Jin Seok scaled a large crane and occupied it for 309 days till the dispute was resolved to the satisfaction of the workers.

Philippines Airlines. Amid industry wide restructuring in the international aviation sector, Philippines Airlines (PAL) in September 2011 sacked 2,700 workers in order to replace them with sub contract workers, at lower wages and conditions. The workers union, PALEA, has fought back and is still organising against this attempt to destroy workers conditions and their union. AAWL organised a very successful solidarity tour for Alnem Pretencio, PALEA's vice president, in Melbourne. The tour highlighted the common struggles against casualisation and sub contracting, as well as forging links between PAL and QANTAS workers. This dispute has continued into 2012.

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**Fiji.** The military government of Fiji in 2011 stepped up the repression against workers in August by enacting a new Essential Employment decree. This, in conjunction with the existing Emergency laws, strips workers of almost all their rights. An international day of action was organised for the 2nd of September. AAWL organised the Melbourne leg of this Day of Action with a demonstration in the centre of Melbourne. Fijian unionists are still being targeted and the campaign will continue in 2012

**Malaysia.** The democratic space for workers in Malaysia to organise has often been severely restricted. In the middle of the year, many members of the 'Bersih' movement were arrested, with some charged under the draconian Internal Security Act. A Day of action against this repression was organised. AAWL helped to organise a Melbourne demonstration outside the offices of Malaysia Airlines on Tuesday the 5th of July.

## Free our comrades.

Unfortunately trade unionists and worker activists continue to be targeted for their efforts in upholding the rights of their fellow workers. AAWL calls for the release of all trade unionists in jail. Some of our major campaigns included:

**Han Sang Kyun.** Since 2009 AAWL has campaigned in support of the trade unionists who organised the heroic 2.5 months strike and occupation of Ssangyong, south Korea. The president of the KMWU, Han Sang Kyun received a four year sentence in February 2010. an Sang Kyun features in our Free the Comrades page and AAWL continued to call for his release throughout 2011. Comrade Kim Hyuk, who had also been jailed



with Han Sang Kyun was released in October.

**Somyot Pruksakasemsuk.** The crackdown against activists in Thailand did not stop with the election of a new government. Noted labour activist and journalist Somyot Pruksakasemsuk



remains in jail, facing a sentence of up to 20 years under the draconian Lèse Majesté laws. AAWL joined the international campaign for his release, organised a demonstration outside the Thai consulate in Melbourne to coincide with a

worldwide Day of Action and Somyot features on our Free the Comrades page. The campaign to free Somyot and against the Lèse Majesté laws continues.

**Mansour Osanloo.** After years of international campaigning, Mansour Osanloo of the Tehran Bus union was finally freed in June of 2011 after four years of imprisonment. Mr. Osanloo is only one of many unionists who are in jail in Iran. Throughout the year, AAWL campaigned for Mansour's release and co-hosted a public forum on union repression in Iran.

**Ly Wayang** was released after 22 years in Prison. He had originally been jailed for his involvement in building independent trade unions after the Tiananmen Square protests in China. It is a tragedy that he spent these years in prison and it is indicative of the true attitude by the Chinese government towards workers' rights.

**Faisalabad 6.** Following a major strike wave in 2010 by garment workers in the town of Faisalabad, Pakistan, a number of unionists were arrested. In October 2011, the government convicted 6 organisers under the 'Terrorism Act'. These 6 unionists received a combined sentence of 480 years. They are now known as the 'Faisalabad 6'. There is an international campaign calling for their release.

## Occupational Health and Safety

OHS is an issue that affects workers worldwide. AAWL continues to be part of the global ban asbestos campaign, supports the right of workers to safeguard and control OHS at their workplace, and publicises OHS disputes in the region. Of major significance is the ongoing effort by workers to improve OHS in the giant Hanjin shipyards located in the north of the Philippines

## West Asia and North Africa uprisings

AAWL analysis focused on the role that the workers movement played within these uprisings. AAWL always took the side of the workers movement, especially in relation to workers belonging to minority groups or migrant communities. The latter groups, in particular, were badly treated by both sides in the Libyan conflict. We have campaigned for the release of jailed workers

**FREE  
OSANLOO**



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in Bahrain and Iran, against imperialist interventions, against repression in Yemen, and produced a number of statements on the role that workers have in the ongoing uprising in countries such as Syria. Many of AAWL's statements have been translated into Arabic so as to gain a wider audience in the region.

## Communication and media

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

Meetings. Our open meetings have featured topics such as *Organising against the corporations*, *Connecting the strikes*, *Living wages not repression*, and *After the dictators - what?* The meetings are a forum for workers and activists to discuss how to develop and implement international solidarity.

Radio. AAWL hosts a weekly radio program, Asia Pacific Currents on radio station 3CR. 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.

Mini News. AAWL also supports a large email list of contacts in the Asia Pacific region that regularly receive the Mini News, which is a compendium of news, actions and assessments on the state of the workers movement. AAWL news can also be found on Facebook and followed on Twitter.

## Documents

AAWL produces leaflets on working class issues that are available on the AAWL website. During 2011, leaflets and statements were produced on the following topics:

May Day and workers control

Global Labour Movement Charter updated versions, including *Why we need to organise internationally*

Solidarity with indigenous workers

Remember Farzad and Iranian workers

Stop the killings and support a living wage in the Philippines

Global crisis workers struggle

After the dictators what?

A special edition on workers in China

## Other activities

We attended the International League for People's Struggle (ILPS) in the Philippines

We helped to organise the Climate Change - Social Change conference in Melbourne

We met with Elmer Labog, Secretary of the KMU Philippines

We met with Farooq Tariq, Secretary of the Pakistan Labour Party

We held a discussion with PAME, a Greek progressive union federation

We helped to organise the solidarity tour of Ignatius Mahendra of KASBI Indonesia

We participated in rallies for Palestinian rights, for the right to access legal abortion, for refugee rights and against the racist Australian Defence League.

We also had the pleasure to have Su-Yeon Park from South Korea Migrant Workers Centre, working extremely productively as an intern for AAWL.

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

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