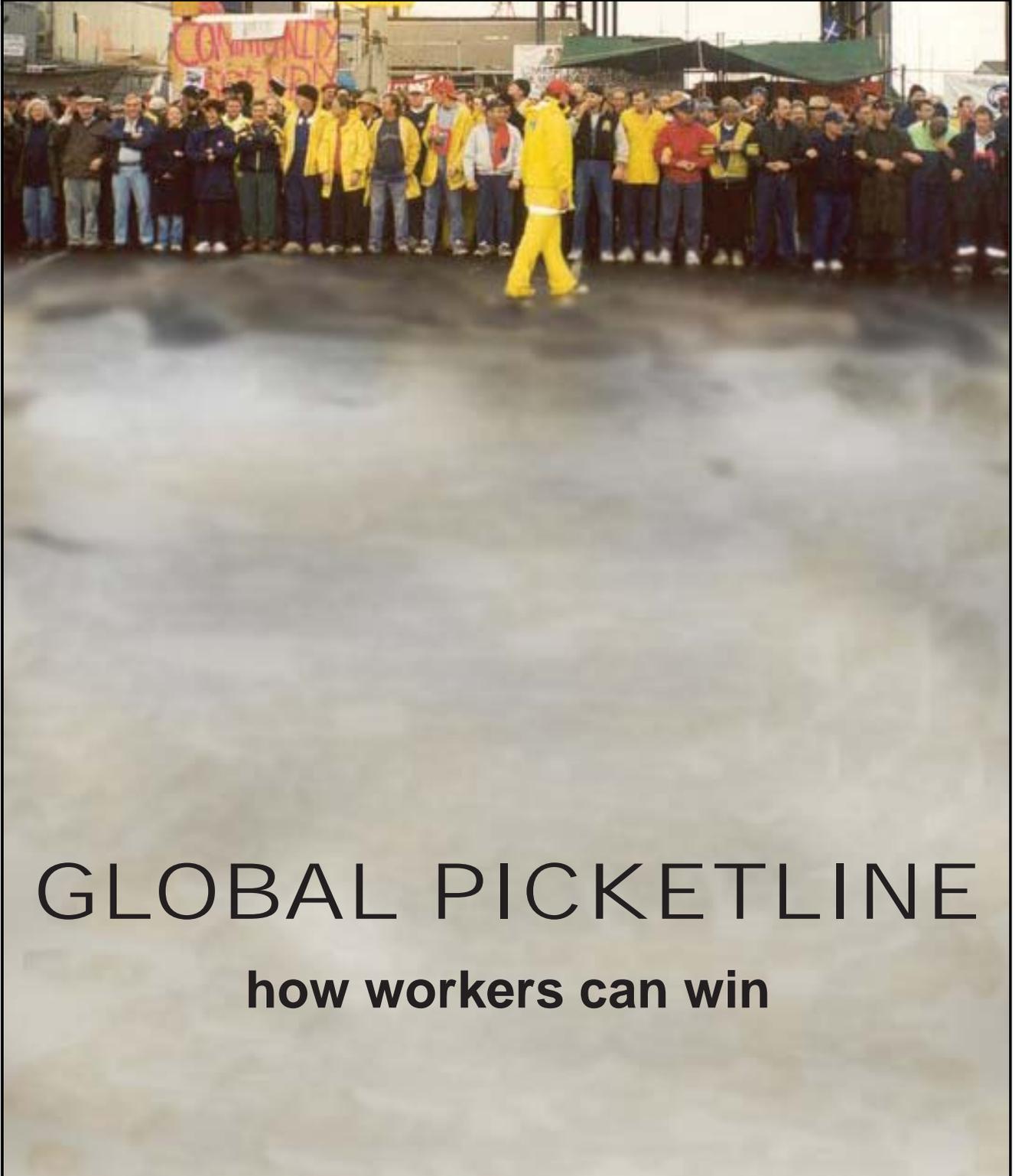


asia workers organising

may 2015



GLOBAL PICKETLINE

how workers can win



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 - may 2015



GLOBAL PICKETLINE

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Introduction

This booklet was produced by Australia Asia Worker Links (AAWL) as a result of many years of international solidarity work and discussions by labour and union activists in the Asia Pacific region.

It is intended to be a practical guide for unionists and labour activists to develop international campaigns to connect workers and win disputes internationally.

The global picketline is a concept for workers to use and adapt for their own struggles. The aim is to strengthen workers' organisations so that they are effective at a global level.

We hope that you find this booklet useful in increasing the power of your struggles by linking up with workers in other countries.



The changing global economy

We live in a globalised world.

What we eat, what we wear, what we read, what we watch, may have come from anywhere in the world. That means that no matter where we live, no matter where we work, we are part of the global economy. This has important consequences for workers and how they organise.

New communications and transport technologies

Beginning in the 1950s, the spread of containerised shipping, rapid and affordable plane travel, and reliable international phone and electronic communication revolutionised the global economy by making international production and commerce simpler and cheaper. As a result, a safety pin made in a distant country is likely to be cheaper than one made at home. The internet, advanced phone and video technologies, and the computerisation of financial markets have linked national economies together into one global economy.

Companies have global structures and global systems

Companies develop global systems to coordinate their activities - from mining and extraction, to production, to retail. More and more sectors are being added to this global system, such as health and education. National economic and political safeguards for workers are being challenged to meet the demands of a global marketplace.

Companies must compete globally in order to succeed

To expand globally, companies must also compete globally. Whether companies like it or not, markets are no longer national, they are international. To stay profitable and expand in the global marketplace, they must find ways to lower their production costs and increase efficiency. They will search the world for the cheapest raw materials and compete for access to them. They will look for the places with the cheapest labour, lowest safety and environment standards, and the friendliest governments and tax systems. They will seek new ways to reduce overall costs of transportation. They will continually be on the lookout for new markets.

Global competition between companies creates a *race to the bottom*

A company can increase profits by either increasing productivity or cutting costs. Other companies are then forced to do the same. This constant competition for profit creates a cycle where companies try to produce and sell more, while also reducing wages and conditions and intensifying and speeding production.

This is known as the *race to the bottom*.

How does the race to the bottom affect workers?

The race to the bottom means that companies globally will continually try to cut workers' wages and conditions. Companies want workers to work harder, for longer, for less money, and in less safe workplaces so they can continue to compete.



Race to the bottom: the tactics used by companies

Shifting production to lower wage countries

Companies shift production to countries where workers' organisations are weak (e.g. because of repressive governments), and where local laws don't protect workers' wages, safety and conditions. Companies make bigger profits because they pay workers far less for the same work.

In the electronics industry major companies like Samsung and Apple place their factories in East Asia in their search for lower costs and higher profits. In 2013, General Motors shifted work from South Korea to the southern United States because wages in the USA had been forced down.

Keeping workers unorganised

Workers improve their wages and conditions by organising unions and campaigning for their rights. Companies and governments want to keep workers from organising. This can be done in many ways, legally and illegally.

In December 2013, tens of thousands of Cambodian workers went on strike over their demand to double their wages from US \$80/month to US \$160/month. In response, the police and military unleashed a massive crackdown on workers, killing at least five, injuring hundreds, and arresting many union leaders.

Using contracting out and casualisation

Companies often push for their workforce to be contracted out or employed on casual or temporary contracts. This creates barriers between workers, often aggravated by legislation that prohibits contractual workers from organising together with regular workers. So companies get away with paying workers less.

In a historic fight lasting two years, PALEA, the union representing Philippine Airlines workers, was able to reverse company decisions to outsource and casualise its members. Their victory shows the power of workers uniting at a global level. See more on page 15.

Pushing workers to produce more

Besides lowering wages, companies can make higher profits by producing more. Therefore companies try to make workers work longer hours, over more days, with fewer breaks.

It is estimated that on average workers in Australia work close to 8 hours a week in unpaid overtime. In Japan, workers being pushed to the limit gave rise to a new word - Karoshi - which means 'death by overwork'. In production lines all over the world, compulsory overtime is used to push workers to produce more.

Cutting back on Occupational Health and Safety

For workers, Occupational Health and Safety is a matter of life and death. For companies it is a cost that affects their profits.

The appalling massacres of garment workers at Rana Plaza in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 2013 and of coal mine workers in Soma, Turkey in 2014 happened because profits were put before lives. In China, an estimated 6,000 workers die every year in the mining industry for the profits of mining bosses. Many hundreds of thousands more workers get sick or die every year due to chemical or toxic substances, and many other problems at work.

Importing migrant workers

Employers import migrant workers on precarious contracts and low wages. All over the world, migrant workers have often been at the forefront of worker organising, but this is made massively more difficult by the use of "temporary" visas which tie the workers' immigration status to the whim of the boss. In many countries, they are not even legally allowed to join unions. So companies and governments are able to super-exploit migrant workers.

Countries like Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia have millions of migrant workers, and they lack independent unions. In Qatar, hundreds of migrant workers have been killed while constructing the stadiums for the upcoming soccer world cup.

What can be done to counter company tactics in their global race to the bottom?

All workers have common demands

In the global race to the bottom, all workers face similar pressures every day, in every country.

Workers have the same needs and share the same demands no matter where they live and work.

These are outlined in the Global Labour Movement Charter:

- The right to organise unions and take collective action including industrial action and solidarity actions
- The right of all workers to organise collectively without being subjected to violence, intimidation or legal harassment
- 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 and 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.

**The Global Labour
Movement Charter can
be used as a starting
point when we organise
together.**

**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

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Full rights for women workers

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po box 45 carlton south victoria 3053 australia
tel: + 61 3 9663 7277 email: aawl@aawl.org.au web: aawl.org.au
abn: 82 920 590 967 inc assn no: A1318 aawl march 2010

From demands to action: the global picketline

The companies are organising internationally and they have the resources to do so. They recognise it's a life or death situation for them.

It is also a life or death situation for workers.

Workers are used to organising at the local level in the workplace. This has produced many victories.

With the changing economy workers need to adapt their strategies and organise in new ways.

They need to coordinate their efforts: locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

They need to organise and show solidarity at a global level.

If we want to shut down the factory ...



we need a picketline in front of every gate

This is a concept of international organising we have called the *global picketline*.

With a global picketline, workers have the power to win.

Workers need to create a global picketline.

How dispute mapping helps build the global picketline

Dispute mapping is a method that can be used to help us understand the global situation for a particular dispute. It can provide critical information for a campaign.

Dispute mapping is made up of three parts: a) company mapping, b) production mapping, and c) union mapping.



a) Company mapping

Company mapping shows where the company operates and where its production facilities are, worldwide.

To do the maps, you will need to look for information about the company wherever you can find it. Look for factories and other productive assets like offices, mines, warehouses and shops. Look for subsidiaries and other trading names.

You need to know how big company operations are, in terms of numbers of employees or contractors and volume of transactions.

The company map will help us target solidarity actions.

b) Production mapping

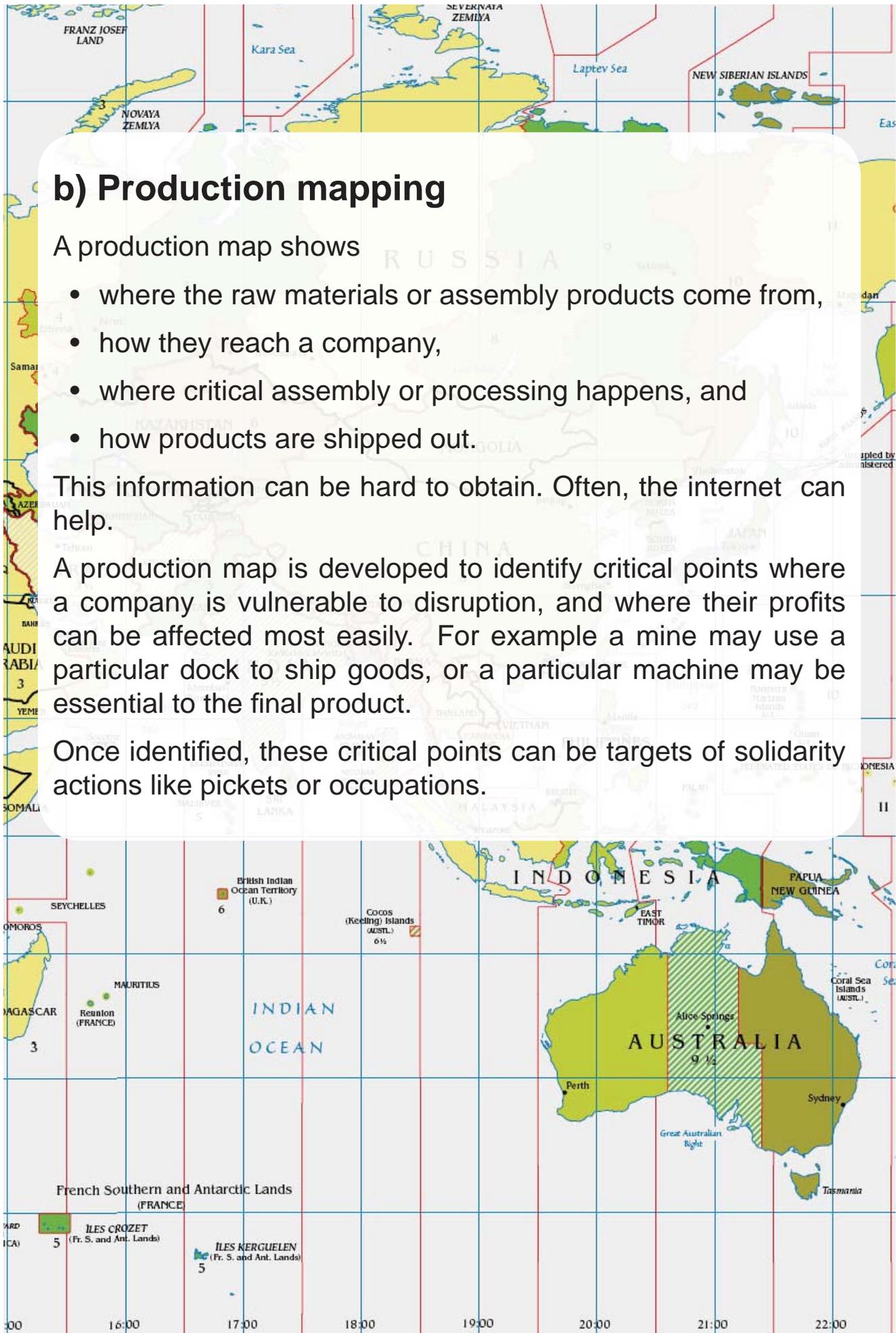
A production map shows

- where the raw materials or assembly products come from,
- how they reach a company,
- where critical assembly or processing happens, and
- how products are shipped out.

This information can be hard to obtain. Often, the internet can help.

A production map is developed to identify critical points where a company is vulnerable to disruption, and where their profits can be affected most easily. For example a mine may use a particular dock to ship goods, or a particular machine may be essential to the final product.

Once identified, these critical points can be targets of solidarity actions like pickets or occupations.



c) Union mapping

You need to find genuine unions that can help in the fight.

That's why union mapping is important.

Union mapping helps find possible friendly unions that might provide solidarity because they are close by, or connected politically or industrially or along the production chain.

Get the information wherever you can find it.

Often a company may not be fully unionised. Some worksites or branches may be better organised than others.

In some countries, the unions are government controlled and genuine unions have to operate underground.

Union mapping means finding out where workers' forces are strongest.

Union mapping also involves finding out the history of disputes in a company, who are the relevant representatives of unions and how they can be contacted.

What do we mean when we say union?

A union is the workers of one or more workplaces democratically organised to defend their rights and advance their interests. Sometimes a "union" is controlled by the government. This is not a genuine union. Sometimes a "union" is set up and controlled by an employer. This is not a genuine union. Sometimes a "union" is so undemocratic that the workers cannot make real decisions. This is not a genuine union.

How dispute mapping is used

Dispute mapping brings the three previous maps together.

When you look at the company map, the production map, and the union map, you can see where a company is vulnerable and where union action can be concentrated. This is the dispute map.

Workers can't afford long disputes with no pay, but companies can't live without profit either. Coordinated campaigns need to cause companies maximum loss of profits and prestige, so workers win disputes.

The right people around the table

At AAWL we learned that it was important to talk to the best placed comrades to achieve effective actions. We found these comrades in the course of our dispute mapping. We called them **the right people around the table**.

Who are the right people around the table? They can be:

- In genuine unions or labour movement organisations involved in the dispute, or
- Able to discuss possible solidarity campaigns with other workers in genuine unions in the same company or the same industry
- Well placed to be very effective in the dispute.



The different levels of solidarity

There are many ways workers can organise in solidarity with workers internationally. Some will have more impact than others as they are better at connecting workers and struggles.

AAWL has defined four levels of solidarity. They are not always separate from each other and more than one strategy can be used simultaneously.

The first level is the easiest to undertake. Each subsequent level needs greater organisation, but becomes more powerful by uniting workers into more strategic and co-ordinated activities.

1. **Solidarity messages**

Workers support other workers around the world by sending solidarity and protest messages for their struggles, by post, phone, email and social media. This can have a big effect on the morale of the workers who are in struggle while also helping to publicise the issues.

2. **Connecting the struggles**

Workers support another group of workers in struggle by acting in solidarity. This can be in a workplace, outside company premises, or in prominent public places. Actions in the workplace have the most power. Support can also be shown through solidarity visits by workers' representatives to workers in struggle, and participating in their activities and demonstrations.

3. **Joint actions**

Workers solidarity becomes stronger when joint actions are undertaken. These will be planned, co-ordinated activities in more than one country that target a particular company or industry directly. These protests and actions then form part of an ongoing, mutual solidarity campaign involving workers with agreed objectives in different countries.

4. **One struggle**

Workers develop a common set of demands for the whole industry, or whole company, in workplaces over many different countries. Actions are organised by workers in different countries as part of one campaign. The campaign becomes one struggle carried out at a global level. This allows workers to win disputes and increase global standards in wages and conditions for all workers collectively.

Global picketline: a recent success

Airline industry campaign 2011 - 2014



On 27 September 2011, Philippines Airlines (PAL) locked out 2,600 workers in an outsourcing dispute. Philippine Airlines Employees Association (PALEA) courageously resisted.

On 30 October 2011, QANTAS grounded all its international and domestic flights in an effort to defeat the unions in a long-running pay dispute. QANTAS declared that it was locking out members of the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers Association (ALAEA), the Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the Australian and International Pilots Association (AIPA).

In May 2012, the Turkish government introduced changes to the law that would effectively ban aviation workers from joining a union. Members of Hava Is, the union representing aviation workers in Turkey including those working for Turkish Airlines, protested this move. 305 workers were sacked as a result. While the Turkish government didn't succeed in smashing the union, Turkish Airlines (TA) still refused to negotiate with Hava Is, resulting in a 6-month strike.

With this succession of attacks in the airlines industry, international solidarity in the form of connecting the struggles and joint action seemed necessary in order to win.

Joint Organising

The first step was creating a platform for international meetings. An international airlines campaign was formed and participants met over Skype regularly.

Representatives from AAWL, PALEA, Hava Is, the Canadian Autoworkers Union, the Korean Federation of Public Services Union, and others participated over the course of the three year campaign. Other labour organisations from India, Australia, Germany and the Middle East indicated their support, but weren't able to make it onto the calls.

Solidarity messages

Throughout the campaign, workers and their unions from around the world sent solidarity greetings to each other. The solidarity messages boosted the morale of workers of PAL and TA in particular. AAWL received many reports through Skype meetings that these messages helped workers feel like they were not alone, and that the world was watching.

Connecting the struggles

Another important part of the international campaign was arranging face-to-face meetings when and where possible. When workers from one country met with workers from another country, all quickly understood conditions on the ground in other parts of the world, and they could see the similarities in each other's disputes.

Throughout the international campaign, there were many solidarity visits. PALEA visited Australian unions a number of times, and they in turn visited the solidarity camp outside PAL headquarters in Manila. Korean unions visited Australia and PALEA visited Korea.

Joint action

With a mechanism in place for joint organising and the mutual understanding gained from solidarity visits, it was time to take joint action. A number of events were organised simultaneously in multiple cities. In 2012, on the first anniversary of the PAL/PALEA lockout, an International Day of Action in support of airlines workers was organised. Some twenty cities participated in solidarity actions.

Towards the end of 2012, in response to a sharp increase in the legal pressure on PALEA members, workers took part in two days of coordinated leafleting at airports worldwide. Twelve cities participated. After that, there were another two coordinated leafleting actions involving multiple airports.

The effect of international solidarity in the struggle

After 26 months on the picket line, and nearly a year of negotiations, a settlement was reached in late 2013 which should see PALEA members returned to regular employment.

A year and a half after the 305 TA workers were sacked, Hava Is reached an agreement that saw their reinstatement on 3 January 2014.

Many factors contributed to these outstanding wins, including local organising, the tenacity of the workers, union leadership and effective strategy. The ITF participated through jointly run campaigns with Hava Is and PALEA and rallying international ITF affiliates.

The effect of international solidarity cannot be underestimated. The actions organised through the international airlines campaign connected on-the-ground union activists with one another and built the overall message that this is one struggle.

How AAWL developed the campaign

A regular forum for discussion was set up in the form of Skype meetings involving the right people around the table. For our campaign these people were unionists from the civil aviation sector (airlines and airports) in Manila, Mumbai, Istanbul, Toronto, Seoul and Melbourne. Much of the planning for the international days of action and other activities was done at these Skype meetings.

The campaign structure that was used:

Coordinator, someone to oversee the whole project

Liaison officers, people to make phone calls to solidarity partners and help organise Skype meetings.

Researchers, people to map the airline industry disputes globally and identify promising new contacts.

Union affiliates, unions affiliated to AAWL.

Union delegates, delegated to the campaign by the union affiliate.

Solidarity partners, workers, unions and labour movement organisations that join together in campaigns.

What can you do?

Join the union Workers need to build unionism in the workplace in all industries and in all countries.
Talk to your fellow union members and organisers about global organising

Map the companies Find out the global production and distribution networks of your company and industry.

Strengthen your links Look for links that will connect you internationally with workers in the same company or the same industry.

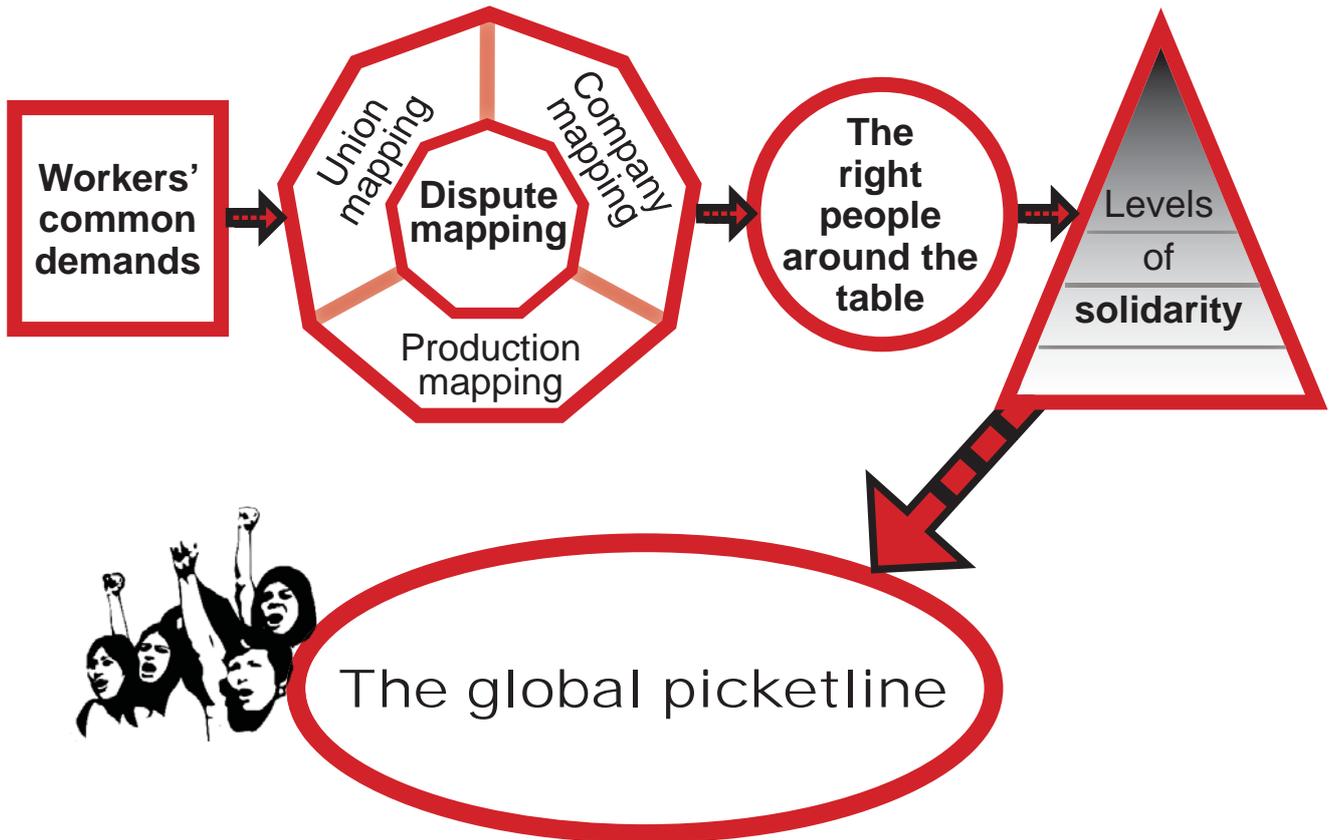
Stand together Map disputes that are happening around the world.
Draw up a list of current contacts and possible new contacts in these disputes.
Contact these workers in struggle.

Connect the struggles Discuss how to work together to improve everyone's wages and conditions.
Develop common demands.

Coordinate the actions Develop and organise a global campaign structure.
Research to find other organisations and campaigns that may already be active, and link with them
Contact the relevant global union federation to activate a global organising strategy.

These are the steps that will build the global picketline.

Putting it all together



As this booklet has shown, we live in a changing world that is increasingly interconnected.

Global competition creates a race to the bottom for companies. All over the world they use similar tactics to increase their profits.

All workers, everywhere, have common demands as outlined in the Global Labour Movement Charter, so workers need to unite.

Workers can build a global picketline to fight for their demands.

Join with workers internationally to fight for a better world.

It can be done, it is being done.

If you require assistance, information and support in developing contacts, mapping, demands and actions, AAWL may be able to help.

WORKERS CHANGE THE WORLD

GLOBAL STRUGGLE GLOBAL DEMANDS GLOBAL PICKETLINE



Australia Asia Worker Links works to build international solidarity links between workers as the best means to develop and strengthen workers' rights in the Asia Pacific region. AAWL is in Melbourne Australia.

Australia Asia Worker Links
PO Box 45 Carlton South Victoria 3053
Australia

T | +61 3 9663 7277

E | aawl@aawl.org.au

W | aawl.org.au

f | FB.com/aawl.solidarity

t | aawl

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