

AAWL Activities Report 2016

Overview

This year continued to be challenging for workers around the region, and across the world, with increasing levels of insecure and precarious employment causing downward pressures on working conditions and wages. When capitalists and governments continue the push for increased profits, workers are forced to work harder, for longer, and for less. And this is what we organise against.

Workers nevertheless continue to organise against these changes as evidenced by the major strikes and demonstrations in South Korea, the continuing push for democratic rights in Malaysia, and the historic and record breaking general strike by up to 180 million workers in India.

Unfortunately workers also faced repression by both employers and governments. In South Korea a number of trade union leaders have been jailed or fined, the new Filipino government has unleashed death squads on working class communities in a brutal campaign of repression, the Thai military has consolidated its power, Iranian labour activists continue to be jailed while the wars in West Asia are exacting a terrible toll on workers and their communities in countries such as Syria, Iraq and Turkey.

In our globalised world, struggles in one area have an effect on workers in other countries too. This is why organising and co-ordinating our actions at a regional and global level, is the way to make our strength count.

This is what AAWL works to achieve.

Without our union affiliates, the solidarity work of AAWL could not continue. We thank the following unions and labour councils for their support in 2016:

AEU (NT)	MUA (VIC)
AEU (VIC)	MUA Veterans Association (VIC)
AMIEU (VIC)	North East Border TLC
AMWU (VIC)	NTEU (VIC)
ANMF (VIC)	NUW (NSW)
ASU A&S (VIC)	QCU
ASU VPS (VIC)	RTBU (SA&NT)
CFMEU C&G (VIC)	RTBU (VIC)
CWU T&S (VIC)	Tas Unions
ETU (VIC)	UCIW
Geelong Trades Hall	Unions ACT
Gippsland TLC	Unions NSW
HACSU	Unions NT
HSU 3	VTHC

Highlights

Organising a range of activities and events for IWD with the VTHC.

Helping to organise commemorations for the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster

Presenting the Global Picket Line (GPL) concept at the Labour Start conference in Toronto, Canada.

Organising a solidarity visit to Malaysia and Indonesia.

Presenting the GPL concept to workers in their workplaces in Indonesia.

Collaborating with APHEDA on a solidarity visit by an Indonesian Asbestos activist.

Presenting our GPL concept to a New Internationalist Bookshop seminar.

Participating and contributing to various anti-fascist mobilisations in Victoria.

Supporting a solidarity visit by a Korean railway unionist to Melbourne.

Organising a solidarity visit to India in conjunction with an international anti-war conference.

Presenting the GPL concept to workers in their workplaces and at meetings throughout the India solidarity visit.

Organising an anti-racist festival and rally with the VTHC.

Organising the International Global Day to Stop the Repression Against Unionists rally.



Campaigns and projects in 2016

International organising

The globalised capitalist economy allows companies to blur state, national and continental boundaries, whilst at the same time convincing workers that these boundaries mean something, and fuelling divisions based on race, ethnicity and nationality. Capitalists obscure these borders by integrating their processes across countries and regions. This is achieved in two major ways:

By a company having production, distribution and retail sites located in many different countries, and/or

Where the production and distribution of particular items/goods is carried out by different companies over many countries.

AAWL continued to develop the GPL concept and published the 'Global Picketline: how workers can win' booklet that outlined in a concrete form the Global Picket Line concept. The aim was to foster discussions and to serve as a guide on international organising for unionists and labour activists to develop international campaigns and win disputes together.

AAWL successfully discussed these ideas and concepts with labour activists throughout 2016 during solidarity visits to Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. We also presented the Global Picket Line at conferences in Toronto - Canada, Mumbai – India, and in Melbourne, as well as to workers in Indonesia. In addition, further discussions were held through solidarity visits by labour activists to Melbourne from South Korea and Malaysia.

The CUB dispute in Melbourne provided an opportunity to engage unions and activists around the world on this issue and explore the ways that workers can better organise together within a global company. Filipino activists sought our input and experience in relation to a dispute at a garment factory in the Philippines around issues of factory relocations and the Race to the Bottom that is widespread in the global garment sector.

These activities have helped AAWL activists and labour activists around our region, to develop Global Picket Line tactics and activities that are more likely to be suited at different times and over different circumstances.

AAWL is confident that in 2017, we will build on this knowledge, and that GPL strategies will increasingly be used by workers in the region to connect struggles and increase the power and effectiveness of workers' actions across countries.

The GPL publication has no copyright, is available at no cost, and is freely downloadable from AAWL's website.

Solidarity visits

Solidarity visits by labour activists to other countries to meet and discuss issues with other workers are an essential activity towards increasing understanding between workers and to develop solidarity and organisational links between individuals and organisations across different countries.

In 2016 we went to:

Malaysia – collaboration with labour activists in Malaysia go back over 20 years. This year the focus of the visit was on the continuing struggle for democratic rights in Malaysia, fighting back against government repression, organising migrant workers and developing labour activists' skills

Indonesia – The labour movement in Indonesia is very dynamic and has been very active in the last few years. This visit provided a great opportunity to meet and deepen our knowledge of labour organisations, their activities and how best to connect their struggles with other regional labour movements

India – On the back of the historic general strike of 180 million workers, the visit coincided with our participation at a major anti-war conference in Mumbai. The visit focused on the big industrial areas in and around New Delhi and Mumbai, where visits to workplaces and meetings with labour activists led to a strengthening of the ties with the Indian labour movement.

AAWL also collaborated and supported an extended visit by a Korean railway unionist in Melbourne. This engagement allowed us to understand better the dynamics of South Korean society and the pressures that the labour movement is currently under.



General strike, India, 2016



International Women's Day

March 8 is the international day of women's struggle and is often used as a day to acknowledge the many gains of the women's movement and the struggles that remain for women's rights and an end to sexism. AAWL has been very involved in working with the VTHC in organising IWD activities that were closer to the original demands of the first IWD in 1911 that focused on the rights of women workers.

May Day

May 1 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.

Free our comrades

The jailing of labour activists is one of the ways that employers and governments repress and weaken our movement. Even if workers are not jailed, the reality is that workers all around the world face the threat of fines, dismissals, beatings, rapes or even murder. By weakening our movement and restricting our right to organise, employers are able to extract more profit from our labour.

AAWL also continued to campaign for the release of specific people, like Somyot Pruksakasemsuk and Reza Shahabi. This year saw Hang Sang Gyun, the militant President of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, jailed once again.

We once again marked the Global Day of Action Against the Repression of Trade Unionists on the 16 November with an action at the 8 Hour monument in Melbourne.



13 Maruti Suzuki autoworkers given life sentences



Racism and fascism

This year, far right parties around the world have continued to grow. In each country, these groups exhibit different characteristics in line with that country's economic and social terrain, but they all exploit economic and social issues to push a racist and xenophobic political agenda targeting minorities and vulnerable groups.

Australia has not been immune to this trend, and a variety of far right and populist groups have continued to organise. This year, we witnessed the return of the One Nation Party to Federal Parliament. While 20 years ago, One Nation achieved electoral success on a platform of anti-Asian racism, this year they used Islam and Muslims as their scapegoat.

AAWL initiated a major project with a number of unions and with the Victorian Trades Hall Council to organise an anti-racist festival and rally in early December to coincide with International Human Rights Day.

The historical and regional experience clearly shows the danger that far right and fascist groups pose to workers and their organisations such as unions. For this reason, AAWL will continue to be active in the mobilisations against these racist and fascist groups.

Communication and media

AAWL hosts a variety of platforms that range from publishing written documents and leaflets, to organising public meetings on issues that affect the workers' movement in the region, to using electronic media.

AAWL continued to produce its long running weekly radio program, Asia Pacific Currents (APC), on the local radio station 3CR Radio. The program is available by livestreaming over the internet and also as a podcast, making it available to international audiences. The popularity of APC podcasts continue to increase and they are accessed by hundreds of people each week.

AAWL social media includes:

- mini news – a weekly electronic news service that is a summary of news, actions and assessments on the state of the workers' movement. The service has over 20,000 subscribers.

- Facebook – AAWL’s page features our mini news items, our APC podcasts as well as other news that affect workers internationally.
- Twitter – is another platform for AAWL to distribute information and news.

Other events and activities

- We supported the commemoration event of the massacre of workers from the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka Bangladesh.
- We took part in refugee rallies and events in Melbourne as well as continuing to publicise the plight of migrant workers around the world.
- We held a meeting in Melbourne with activists from the Malaysian Socialist Party on their labour organising work and the fight against repression in Malaysia.

- We continued working on indigenous issues including supporting the protest actions on Invasion Day and publicising the continuing issue of the Stolen Wages.
- We supported 3CR Radio in their activities to celebrate their 40th year.

Thank you

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

Our struggle continues. Workers change the world.

we need a global labour movement charter

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

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

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THE GLOBAL PICKETLINE

Today, there is one worldwide economy. Companies compete globally for profit. They search the world for the cheapest labour and materials and the friendliest governments. Companies shift factories to lower wage countries. They stop workers organising. They casualise or contract out workers. They push workers to produce more and work longer. They cut back on Occupational Health and Safety. They import workers. They encourage racism and nationalism that divide workers. In every country, every day, workers face these same pressures. Everywhere, all workers need a living wage, secure work and a safe workplace. This is a life and death struggle for all workers. To win, workers need to unite across borders and across social divides. Companies are global, so workers' resistance must be global. Division between workers helps companies because it stops workers organising together. Resist racism, sexism, nationalism and religious conflict. Join the worldwide struggle. When workers are united, they can never be defeated.

MAKE A GLOBAL PICKETLINE!

The global picketline in action
Starting from late 2011 there was a succession of attacks on airline industry workers in Australia, the Philippines, Turkey and elsewhere. International solidarity to correct the struggles was necessary in order to win. Workers linked up, sent messages of solidarity, talked over the phone and face to face, and organised joint action. Unions included the ASU & AMWU (Australia), the Philippines Airlines Employees Association, Hava Is (Turkey), and the Canadian Auto Workers. After more than two years of struggle, workers in the Philippines and Turkey won many of their demands. The fight continues.

JOIN THE UNION JOIN THE FIGHT JOIN THE PICKETS

Workers unite and win
Resist racism, sexism, nationalism and division.

WORKERS CHANGE THE WORLD

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*For full award pamphlet on the Global Picketline, go to this web site.

Australia Asia Worker Links believes international solidarity is the best way to win workers' struggles. AAWL is in Melbourne Australia.

To close the whole factory down, let's picket every gate.

United, workers can win. Workers start where they are. They start with what they are already doing well. They demand living wages and good conditions. They work together to build local actions. Then workers can broaden their struggle. This increases their strength. They can link up with workers with similar demands at other sites and other countries.

Workers can make a global picketline. They look for the right workers to talk around the table. They discuss their struggles together. Workers map where in the world actions will hurt their company the most with the least damage to workers. These "choke points" can be thought of as factory gates. Where does the company operate and where are its facilities? Where do its raw materials come from? How are they transported? Where does critical assembly and processing happen? Where are workers the strongest?

Workers plan actions and place pickets wherever they will have the most affect. They build one worldwide struggle.

The workers, united, will never be defeated.

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