

# asia workers organising

march 2016

## AAWL Activities Report for 2015

Workers continue to face the ongoing crisis of the global economy with constant pressure to work harder, longer and for less. This year workers in many countries took action to defend their wages and conditions amid constant attacks by companies and governments. Of note were the general strikes in India, where over 50 million workers went on strike, and Indonesia where for the fourth year in a row workers staged a general strike involving millions of workers throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

Unfortunately in many other parts of the region workers were facing massive attacks whether in the war zones of Syria, Iraq and Yemen, or via government repression in other countries in West Asia. Migrant workers and asylum seekers continue to face some of the most brutal exploitation throughout the region, from Saudi Arabia to Australia. The military dictatorship in Thailand consolidated its rule this year, continuing to arrest and harass activists, while towards the end of the year, the government of South Korea unleashed a fierce wave of repression against unionists, arresting scores of labour organisers.

Nevertheless, workers everywhere continue to fight for their rights. 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.



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## Highlights in 2015 for AAWL work

**S**ending two OHS trainers to a OHS training workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**H**elping to organise the Rana Plaza photo exhibition

**H**elping to organise commemorations for the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster

**H**osting two different solidarity visits by Cambodian unionists to Melbourne

**S**ending a delegate to the Philippines for the KMU - ISA conferences

**P**articipating and supporting the Sri Lanka Ansell solidarity demonstration in Melbourne

**S**ending a delegate to the ASEAN Peoples' Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**P**articipating and contributing to various anti-fascist mobilisations in Victoria

**P**ublishing and distributing our Global Picketline organising model

**O**rganising the International Global Day to Stop the Repression Against Unionists rally

**O**rganising a rally for the International Day of Action for Cambodian garment workers.

## 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 2015:

AEU (NT)	HACSU
AEU (VIC)	IEU (Vic/Tas)
ALAEA	MUA (VIC)
AMIEU (VIC)	MUA (VIC) Veterans
AMWU	North East Border TLC
ANMF (VIC)	NTEU (VIC)
ASU - VPS (VIC)	QCU
ASU A&S (VIC/TAS)	RTBU (SA & NT)
Ballarat Regional TLC	RTBU (VIC)
CFMEU - C&G (VIC)	UCIw
CWU - Vic T&S	Unions ACT
ETU (VIC)	Unions NSW
Geelong Trades Hall	Unions NT
Gippsland TLC	VTHC

## The team at AAWL

Our work would not be possible without the contributions of the Committee of Management, campaign 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.



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# Some campaigns, projects and issues for 2015

## International organising

In our globalised capitalist economy, companies continue to blur state, national and continental boundaries 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.

Increasingly workers realise that they are all facing common problems at their workplaces around issues of wages, security of employment, and OH&S. In addition, workers are connected across countries by being employed by the same company or being part of the same globalised industry.

The long involvement of AAWL with the labour movements in the Asian region means that AAWL is one of the organisations at the forefront of developing new ways and thinking around workers organising globally. From this ongoing work and collaboration, AAWL produced a short publication titled '**Global Picketline: how workers can win**'. This booklet was the result of many years of international solidarity work and discussions by labour and union activists in the Asia Pacific region.

The booklet is not a theoretical or a research paper, but a practical guide for unionists and labour activists to connect workers. to develop international campaigns and win disputes together. The aim of the 'global picketline' is for workers to use, apply, and adapt these concepts for their own struggles in order to increase their effectiveness at a global level.

AAWL sees the 'global picketline' as a concept that will continue to evolve and develop as workers start to implement the ideas and strategies to their own struggles and their organisations.

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

## Industry campaigns

AAWL continued to work on the garment, airlines and car industry campaigns and build on the work of previous years.

All these industries operate on a global scale where wages and conditions for workers in one country will impact on workers in other countries. AAWL continued to work with our solidarity partners and contacts to increase and strengthen solidarity links.

The importance of global organising is being increasingly recognised by workers as seen this year by the actions of the dismissed Ssangyong car workers in South Korea and garment workers in Cambodia.

A delegation of Ssangyong workers travelled to India to meet with local labour activists and organisations, including representatives of the jailed Maruti-Suzuki workers, to discuss strategies on how best pressure the new Indian owner of Ssangyong in order to get their jobs back.

In Cambodia, garment workers have been very proactive in seeking out and building alliances with other labour groups in the region. Their continuing struggle for a living wage is closely followed by garment workers in other countries as they seek to internationalise their struggles via co-ordinated global days of action.

Through AAWL's ongoing contacts with labour activists in Bangladesh, the massacre of workers due to the collapse of the Rana Plaza building was remembered in Melbourne via a commemoration event on the day, and a photo exhibition on the impact of the disaster on workers and their families.



*"They haunt me, as do hundreds of others, they whisper in my ear, 'we are not numbers, we are not cheap labour'." - Melbourne Rana Plaza exhibition, 2015.*

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## Solidarity visits

AAWL sees solidarity visits as one of the best ways to increase understanding between workers in different countries and to develop solidarity and organisational links between individuals and organisations.

This year they have included:

- Sending two OHS trainers to a OHS training workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia that had participants from a number of different countries. This was very successful and invitations have been received for this training to be run in other countries
- On two separate occasions, AAWL hosted and organised solidarity visits from Cambodian unionists from the hospitality sector. While in Melbourne, Sar Mora and Yon Sineat had meetings with many unions, and other pro labour organisations groups. This allowed them to understand the situation for unions in Australia and publicise their work to Australian workers. A number of projects and ongoing collaborations came out of these visits.
- AAWL has had a long relationship with unions in Sri Lanka and we were able to support the visit to Melbourne of Anton Marcus and the rally against union busting at Ansell head office.
- AAWL sent delegates to both the KMU - ISA conferences in Manila, the Philippines, and the ASEAN Peoples' Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This allowed our delegates to network with many other labour delegates in the region and discuss ongoing issues and projects.



## May Day



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 2015, there was a strong recognition of Indigenous issues with a major demonstration on May Day by our Indigenous brothers and sisters.

## Free our comrades



The jailing of labour activists is one of the ways that employers and governments use to restrict our right to organise so that they can make more profit from our labour. The unfortunate reality is that workers all around the world face the threat of fines, dismissals, beatings, rapes or even murder.

For a number of years AAWL has campaigned to free jailed labour activists. This year we once again marked the Global Day of Action to stop the repression against unionists and labour activists on the 16th of November. AAWL also continued to campaign for the release of specific people, like Somyot Pruksakasemsuk and Reza Shahabi.

This year significant number of arrests of labour activists occurred in South Korea, India and Indonesia. While some have been released, some are facing very long sentences. Campaigns in support of these comrades have been established.

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## Racism and fascism

Both in our region and globally, there has been an increase in far right parties that exploit economic and social issues to push a racist and xenophobic political agendas targeting minorities and vulnerable groups. In 2015, Australia was not immune to this trend, and a number of new far right groups have been active in trying divide the working class along racial, religious and national grounds.

This rise of far right parties has occurred previously, and history shows how dangerous these groups are to workers and their organisations such as unions. For this reason, AAWL has been active in the mobilisations against these racist and fascists groups.

AAWL has worked to increase the involvement of organised labour organisations in this fight as the working class movement has the social and political power to counter and defeat these far right organisations.



## 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 streamed live internationally over the internet, and is available as a podcast on both the 3CR radio website as well as Rabble, a Canadian independent news website.

AAWL social media includes:

- 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. The service has over 15,000 subscribers
- Facebook - AAWL's page features our mini news items, our APC podcasts as well as other news that affects workers internationally
- Twitter - is another platform for AAWL to distribute information and news

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## General workers' issues

In West Asia, armed conflicts and increasing government repression in countries such as Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, Bahrain and Yemen continue to take an incredible toll on workers and their families. Nevertheless, this year also saw major working class mobilisations in Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon. These actions reflect the reality that while weakened, the working class movement has not been totally defeated and is still able to fight.

In our region, the military regime in Thailand has consolidated its rule and has instituted a climate of fear through a policy of censorship, harassment and arrests. Thai workers are increasingly finding that their space to organise has also been limited, with labour activists also target of military repression.

In both China and South Korea, the labour movement has been very active with increasing number of actions in both countries. Unfortunately, both movements have encountered greater repression, with more union and labour activists been arrested.

In Indonesia, the working class movement is still showing great resilience and for the fourth year in a row, has been able to mount a general strike of millions of workers across the country.



## Internal changes

This year was one of change and consolidation at AAWL, with an office move and an internal restructure of our work areas and decision making processes.

AAWL moved offices within the Trades Hall building in Melbourne due to an internal relocation of office space. This has resulted in higher rent costs that AAWL is addressing by focusing on increasing our income.

AAWL has been operating since 1979, and as the region has evolved and changed politically and economically, AAWL has sought to reflect these changes in its work, orientation and structures. Thus, this year, a series of meetings were held to evaluate AAWL's internal structure that was mainly based around geographic areas.

This structure had been in place for over ten years. It was decided that with the increasing globalisation of the world economy and the interconnectedness of struggles, a change was needed to reflect the new realities. The outcome resulted in an update of AAWL's constitution, solidarity activities now centred on specific campaign and project areas, and creating a Committee of Management to oversee the organisation.

AAWL believes that the new structure better reflects our ongoing work while also providing greater flexibility to our solidarity work to better suit new social and political landscapes.



*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 organising and solidarity.*

*Thank you. Our struggle continues.*

*Workers change the world.*

*Piergiorgio Moro  
AAWL Co-ordinator.*

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