



Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links

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Protesters at the Melbourne March on November 15 2005

More than half a million Australian workers took to the streets on November 15 2005 to defend their rights at work and to oppose the Howard Government's attack on unions.

The Federal Howard Government has begun its move to abolish an industrial relations system that protected many workers' rights for more than 100 years. The new laws seek to remove protection against unfair sackings from workers in most businesses; reduce minimum wages; introduce many difficulties and requirements for unions seeking to enter workplaces, including giving unnecessarily detailed information in written notice; lifetime bans from visiting workplaces for union officers who infringe the law's strict requirements; a limit to just twice a year on the right to visit workplaces to sign up new union members; and allowing employers to determine when and where discussions between employers and employees occur.

Trade Union Councils across the country had been building this rally since the last mobilisations on June 30 this year, culminating in some of the biggest rallies ever seen in Australia on November 15.

The Melbourne rally was by far the largest in the nation with more than 210,000 people attending. Workers, activists, community groups, and many minority political parties opposing the changes flooded city streets, with the march stretching more than eighteen city blocks and taking more than one and

a half hours to pass. A further 50,000 people attended rallies and events in other parts of Victoria.

In New South Wales, around 45,000 people attended Sydney rallies with a further 100,000 people in more than two hundred packed venues and locations around the State. In Queensland, 25,000 people attended the Brisbane rally and 35,000 rallied in other parts of the State. Around 30,000 people rallied in Perth with a further 10,000 in other parts of In Western Australia. Unions estimate up to 40,000 attended the Adelaide rally with a further 10,000 in other parts of South Australia. In Darwin 3,000 people attended a protest meeting and a further 2,000 in other Northern Territory towns. In Canberra 5,000 people attended a protest meeting and more than 10,000 workers protested in Tasmania. Messages of solidarity were received from unions around the Asia Pacific region and around the world. Solidarity rallies were held in the Philippines, New Zealand and Pakistan.

Despite such wide and vocal dissent on industrial relations reforms, on December 2 2005, the Howard Government rammed the Work Choices Bill through Parliament, 35 votes for, and 33 against.

This marks only the start of the struggle, and Australian unions and workers will continue the fight for their union rights and their workplace rights. All workers in the Asia Pacific region will be proud to support this fight.

Pakistan Earthquake

On 8 October 2005, a massive earthquake struck Pakistan and neighbouring India and Afghanistan. The most severe damage occurred near the earthquake's epicentre, approximately 60 miles north-east of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. An estimated 140,000 people died, three million people are now homeless, and 1.1 million are jobless as a result of the earthquake.

A three-member health team has been sent to Darbang and Nariola villages to evaluate the situation and more teams were expected to arrive from Islamabad.

Medical facilities, medicines, warm clothing and proper shelter are still immediate needs required in the worst hit area of Bagh, Kashmir. Since most of the hospitals and dispensaries were demolished in the earthquake, and survivors are isolated in inaccessible

The highest priority now is ensuring that survivors of the earthquake have adequate shelter, clean water and warm clothing as winter sets in. The delivery of humanitarian assistance has been constricted by the mountainous area, cold weather, and damaged or collapsed infrastructure. Police say the first major snowfall in Kashmir has cut off one of two areas hard hit by the earthquake.



Muzaffarabad after the earthquake

mountainous regions, there is a growing need to dispense medication and medical services to patients at their doorstep, particularly in the winter weather.

With such limited resources, priority is being given to the very seriously injured, but there have been reports of a number of new births where birthing mothers have had little if any medical support. Given the level of dysentery, skin conditions and spread of disease because of the lack of clean water some women's organisations in Pakistan are calling on medical teams to turn their attention to pregnant women. The All Pakistan Trade Union Federation is running an appeal to assist the survivors of the earthquake and rebuild the country. If you want to make donations of money, tents, clothes, food, medicine or blankets, please contact:

The first deaths from the winter weather of earthquake survivors in northern Pakistan have already been reported. A three-month-old boy and a young girl have both died of pneumonia and a middle-aged man has died of hypothermia. More than 100 others have been taken to hospitals or field clinics suffering from hypothermia and respiratory diseases.

Children are contracting pneumonia and dysentery because of inadequate shelter and warm clothing. In one tent city of Bagh in Kashmir, more than 60 children were severely ill with pneumonia and dysentery because of cold and dirty water.

Health officials in Pakistan have said that hundreds of people, most of them children, had contracted pneumonia.

APTUF Earthquake Relief Fund

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Pakistan Earthquake

Stop the Killings of Filipino Workers, Unionists & Activists!

The Macapagal-Arroyo administration has stepped up its campaign of political repression throughout 2005. Arroyo is committed to stifling political debate and is silent about the killings of dissenters. The unabated murders and assassinations in broad daylight, abductions and attempted killings that have victimized scores of individuals must end. Trade Unionists, activists, progressive journalists and lawyers, progressive religious groups and any sympathisers with the Left have all been targets of this suppression. The government is complicit in this drive to silence progressive leaders and organizations that continues to this day.

After the Hacienda Luisita Massacre that resulted in the politically motivated murders of November 16 2004, peasant leader and Anakpawis vice-chairman for Tarlac Marcelino Beltran was shot dead by soldiers outside his home on December 8, 2004. Beltran was a key witness to the massacre.

On March 7, 2005, unidentified gunmen attempted to assassinate Romeo T. Capulong, President of the Public Interest Law Center and ad litem judge of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. He had been serving as counsel to the striking workers at Hacienda Luisita.

Another attack almost killed Bayan Muna vice-mayoral candidate, and respected human rights lawyer Charles Juloya. He survived six gunshot wounds from a lone assassin on March 22.

On February 18, Pamalakaya-Bulacan vice chairman, Roger Viray, was killed in Masantol, Pampanga, Central Luzon Aeta Association members Rodel Pelayo and Joey Abraham were slaughtered in Balanga, Bataan, and Anakpawis-Pampanga member Renato Espino was murdered in Mexico, Pampanga. Rodrigo Lampa, Bayan Muna coordinator in Guagua, Pampanga, was killed on February 16 along with Noel and Nicanor Garcia, both members of the KMU.

On September 13, Dante Teotino of Schneider Packaging Workers Union was shot dead at the picket line of their factory while they were preparing for a symposium. On September 22, Diosdado "Ka Fort" Fortuna, President of Nestle Workers' Union and PAMANTIK-KMU was shot dead in front of Sagara Plastics Manufacturing Co. A day after Ka Fort's burial on September 29, Victoria "Vicky" Samonte, president of the Andres Soriano College Employees Union and vice-president of KMU-CARAGA was stabbed to death.

On October 7, Rolando Mariano, former President of the Tarlac Electric Co. Employees Union and Bayan Muna Municipal Coordinator, was gunned down. On October 10, Tony Cuison, former KMU National Council member and President of the Atlas Mining Corporation employees union in Cebu was shot by still unidentified assailants.

An initial investigations by the National Coalition for the Protection of Workers' Rights has reported that these brutal killings and attacks against workers are committed with the collusion of members of the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines. This situation is taking the Philippines back to the time when Marcos was president and death squads terrorised activists. This is a situation that must be stopped.

Protest against the killings in the Philippines!

Many labour groups are organising a Global Day of Action in support of Filipino Workers



Diosdado "Ka Fort" Fortuna

Diosdado "Ka Fort" Fortuna 1955 - 2005

On 22 September, Diosdado Fortuna, a trade union leader at the large Nestlé factory in Cabuyao in the Philippines, was shot by unidentified gunmen while he was on his way home from the factory picket line. Fortuna was 50 years old and was an active member of KMU National Council and served the militant labour movement for 29 years. He is survived by his wife Luz Fortuna and their three children.

Fortuna left the Nestle picket line in Cabuyao, Laguna at around 5 pm on the Sunday he was killed. Ka Fort was supposed to visit his ailing grandson and was on board a motorcycle on his way home to Barangay Paciano when he was attacked by still unidentified assailants. He sustained two fatal caliber 45 gunshot wounds in the chest. He was rushed by bystanders to the Calamba Doctors Hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. According to eye witnesses, motorcycle riders fired shots at Fortuna.

APWSL Secretariat Meeting and Australian Solidarity Visit

Australia Asia Worker Links (APWSL Australia) hosted a solidarity visit to Melbourne in October 2005. The visit was from October 22 to October 29, and included Parat Na Nakorn, recently elected APWSL coordinator from Thailand; Reverend Jang Chang Weon APWSL convenor from Korea; Yamasaki Seiichi from Japan, and Irene Xavier, TIE Asia Coordinator from Malaysia. On the first day of the visit these keynote speakers were welcomed to the Open Day held at the Victorian Trades Hall. by Gwynnyth Evans, APWSL Convenor, and by Len Cooper, Chairperson of Australia Asia Worker Links (AAWL). The day was one of workshops and practical discussions about how to fight against the global race to the bottom. Workshop topics included: Organising for Health and Safety, Casualisation and Contracts, Aboriginal Struggle for Justice - Stolen Wages, Land Rights and Treaty, Refugees are Workers - Cutting the Razor Wire, among others.

The following day was taken up with intense but constructive discussions in the APWSL Secretariat meeting. These included the role of the coordinator and two convenors, and when to call the next APWSL Regional Coordinating Team meeting. The meeting will be held in Bangkok on Sunday 7 May 2006. Following this APWSL will participate in the labour movement events which will be held to commemorate the anniversary of the Kader Fire.



Parat Na Nakorn - APWSL Co-ordinator



Rev. Jang Chang Woen - APWSL Convenor



Workshop during AAWL Open Day



Irene Xavier - TIE Asia and Sahabat Wanita



Yamasaki Seiichi - APWSL Japan

During the rest of the week, we visited the Australian Services Union, the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the Communications, the Electrical and Plumbing Union, the Maritime Union of Australia, the Rail Tram and Bus Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Electrical Trades Union as well as the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Victorian Trades Hall Council. On Wednesday 26 October, Victoria Trades Hall Council held its annual Health and Safety Day which included around 2000 Health and Safety Officers from

workplaces right across the state. Each of the guests participated in this event.

We also visited refugees at the Maribyrnong Detention Centre; We

met the Aboriginal activist group Black GST (Genocide, Sovereignty, Treaty) who are organising a mobilisation during the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in March

2006. We met with the Fairwear Campaign, which focuses on workers in the informal textiles sector, and Union Solidarity, a militant unionists group which was formed in opposition to the new attacks on workers and unions in Australia.

AAWL thanks the international guests for their hard work during their week in Australia, We are sure that the work that was done will be continued in Bangkok to build a stronger APWSL and workers solidarity.