AMWU opposes Iemma’s privatisation

AMWU NSW Secretary Paul Bastian said that the community had consistently opposed privatisation of public assets and infrastructure services.

“It’s difficult to understand why the Premier is pushing ahead with this when there is evidence to show that privatisation is an expensive failure for everyone except the private businesses that buy them.”

An emergency Caucus meeting of NSW Labor parliamentarians on Monday approved the Premier’s plan. Since that time all pretence at ‘negotiations’ with the affected unions have broken down in the face of the Treasurer Michael Costa’s provocative media statements and his refusal to give commitments on job security or conditions of employment for workers in the power industry.

Mr Bastian said the New South Wales Government tried and failed to privatised the power industry in 1997.

“It was a spectacular failure, but since that time, privatisation has always been on the radar.

“Morris Iemma’s State Labor Government didn’t seek a mandate to privatise power or any other NSW public asset. Privatisation was a point of major difference between the ALP and the Coalition during the State election campaign.

“Yet since winning a fourth term at the State election in March, it has been clear that the treasurer has made moves to do whatever necessary to privatise a range of state owned infrastructure and services.”

“While the Government claims it to be a sign of ‘economic responsibility’, we see it for what it is: an attempt to hide public debt which effectively results in the transfer of public wealth to private profit.”

New York Times on power privatisation

The United States, the foremost advocate of privatisation, is beginning to rethink this policy.

The New York Times recently reported that more than a decade after the drive began to convert electricity from a regulated industry into a competitive one, many states are rolling back their initiatives or returning money to individuals and businesses.

“The main reason behind the effort to return to a more regulated market is price”

“Recent Energy Department data shows that the cost of power in states that embraced competition has risen faster than in states that had retained traditional rate regulation.”
Unions are opposed to plans to sell off electricity retailers and lease power generators to the private sector, saying the move puts hundreds of jobs in doubt.

Delegates representing 10,000 building workers from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) voted to support a campaign against privatisation.

Workers at three Hunter Valley power stations have also held stop-work meetings.

CFMEU secretary Andrew Ferguson says the issue is important for all members.

“There’s no secondary boycott at this point in time. We’re simply expressing our support - we’re opposing the plans of Treasurer Michael Costa.”

Costa boasts: it’s all over

Mr Costa says it is too late to negotiate and the unions need to move on.

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The PSA represents administrative staff in the power generation plants. Members have asked the Union if they should provide highly paid consultants with information about the business operations of the Delta and Macquarie generators.

It appears the Government is attempting to gag debate in relation to their intention to sell off your jobs.

All members should encourage non-members to join. With your support and the support of all other Union members from across the industry, we are confident that we can achieve the best possible outcome for the Energy Industry.

Let’s keep Energy in the public hands.

The USU calls on all Trade Unionists (from all trade unions) and employees of all State-Owned electricity companies to fight for your jobs, because this is only the beginning of the sell-off.

It is premature and offensive for the Iemma Government and your employer to announce transfer proposals for employees, when a debate on the Governments position is yet to occur.

The USU has, on every occasion that we have met with the Iemma Government, adamantly opposed any proposition that includes the sale of State Owned electricity assets. In every available forum the USU has made it quite clear that we do not condone the sale of retail, or the leasing of generators.

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Unions have urged the remaining of Australia’s major banks not to raise interest rates.

National Australia Bank (NAB) and ANZ Banking Group were the first to raise their variable home loan rates last week ignoring the rate set by the Reserve Bank of Australia.

The ACTU wants the remaining banks to put working families ahead of annual profits.

“ANZ and NAB’s decisions to raise interest rates were simply greedy,” ACTU president Sharan Burrow said in a statement.

“The top five Australian banks combined made nearly $18 billion in profit last financial year, and NAB alone made $4.4 billion in profit.”

Ms Burrows said an increase in bank rates will further stress family budgets.

“Working families are struggling with increased petrol and food costs and many are already experiencing housing stress,” she said.

“There were a record number of mortgage defaults last year and any further increases to interest rates will only make it harder for people to meet payments.”

The newly elected Rudd Government has made good on its pledge to unions and local ship owners to reinvigorate Australian shipping and put a stop to rampant exploitation of third world crew by rogue shipping operators in Australian waters.

There will be a clamp down on overuse of foreign-owned ships to transport freight around the nation’s coastline in a bid to bolster the shipping industry.

There will be a review of coastal shipping laws to uncover ways to lift the domestic shipping fleet’s share of the domestic freight market from its current level of about 80 per cent.

Foreign vessels in Australian waters will be required to observe an International Labour Organisation Convention guaranteeing fair pay and conditions for all seafarers.

The Maritime Union of Australia met with the minister after the election calling on Labor to deliver on its policy platform, requiring stronger laws to protect cabotage - the principle that nations should protect domestic shipping routes for domestic shipping fleets.

MUA National Secretary Paddy Crumlin accepted the need for foreign ships to ply domestic freight routes as long as no Australian vessels were available.

“But there should be a transparent process to how those permits are awarded,” he said.

“Under the Howard government, permits were issued without due diligence. We’ve met with Anthony Albanese. He said that we’d be going back to the (Labor) platform.”

In a letter to the International Transport Workers’ Federation he thanked international colleagues for their support in the protracted battle to secure rights for both Australian and world seafarers.

“It could not have been achieved without the constant support of the ITF and it’s many affiliates through hard times,” he said.

“We are working hard on our work plan for the new government in maritime policy areas and all responses have been very supportive. What a difference a government makes. There is plenty to be done and as we all know political work can be frustrating, but after 12 years of criminal conspiracy and harassment, every day is a bright one!”
The bystander was a mild-mannered academic from the University of Melbourne. Passing a building site on the Yarra’s south bank, he witnessed a confrontation between a union official and a building manager. No punches were thrown but the two men pushed each other and grabbed at each other’s shirts.

But agents of the federal building industry watchdog soon tracked the witness down and hauled him in for several hours of secret questioning, under powers that rival those of Australia’s national security services.

The man cannot be named and cannot discuss the details of his interrogation for fear of imprisonment.

Building unions say the innocent citizen’s experience proves the Australian Building and Construction Commission is out of control, wielding powers greater than the police and equal to those of anti-terrorism bodies such as ASIO.

The right-wing putsch against the trade unions failed for much the same reasons as it failed in 1929, when the Bruce government lost the election on the issue of abolishing the Arbitration Court and Stanley Bruce, like John Howard, lost his seat.

It is an inconvenient truth that unionised workforces can contribute to labour productivity by driving up wages faster than non-unionised workforces and this provides a stimulus to innovation, as employers will be motivated to economise on the use of labour by capital substitution. Studies in the US have shown that unionised workers also promote productivity because strong unions foster a culture where workers are less inhibited about pointing out problems as they emerge on the shop floor because they feel the union will protect their employment security.

As US economist and author Robert Kuttner puts it, there are allocative efficiencies to be gained as labour markets become more like spot markets and pay scales are matched with marginal productivity. But there are major mechanisms such as stronger unions, fair trade, wage subsidies and social incomes and education and training that can combine equity with efficiency. The analogy is the old paradox that brakes allow the car to go faster, according to Kuttner.

Employees are less likely to point out management mistakes when they don’t enjoy the protection of unions or unfair dismissal rules.

A spokeswoman for the commission confirmed it was the first time a bystander, not connected with a building company or a union, has been subjected to these powers.

Howard’s legislation gives the commission the authority to question people - with or without a lawyer present - and overrides the right to silence. Witnesses cannot reveal the contents of the interview, even to their spouses, and risk up to six months in jail if they breach the law.

Howard legacy: ABCC out of control

Howard on IR Laws

Before his historic defeat John Howard told business leaders:

If the Government is returned, then I confidently predict that the reforms that have been made over the last few years will never be dismantled.

Because by the time of the next and subsequent elections, they will have become so much part of the economic and industrial fabric of this country, that will be quite impossible.

No issue will be more keenly argued in that campaign than the fate of the Government’s reforms to Australia’s workplace system.

Let us understand without any ambiguity and without any polite words, but there is a very clear choice. If the Government is defeated and the reforms are over-turned, I do not believe a future government of my persuasion will again be able to reintroduce those reforms.