

Rights at Work

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New AWAs banned

Unions welcome the ban on new Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) that took effect on Friday 28 March but plan to continue the campaign to scrap Work Choices in its entirety.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said:

"The law to ban new AWAs is an important first step in restoring the rights of Australian workers that were taken away by the former Liberal Government's Work Choices IR laws.

"But the job is not over yet. This is not the end of WorkChoices. Unions will continue to campaign for the complete dismantling of WorkChoices and for the establishment of a fair and balanced IR system that fully protects workers' rights.

"Unions are determined to achieve laws that give workers:

- Protection from being dismissed unfairly.
- The right to bargain collectively to improve our workplaces and an obligation for employers to negotiate in good faith.
- The right to join and be collectively represented by a union, to access advice and information from unions in their workplace and to have a say about decisions that affect their work.
- A strong safety net of awards and minimum standards that maintain safe workplaces and a decent standard of living for all workers.
- A genuinely independent umpire that has the power to resolve disputes and grievances.

"Today is an historic day in the campaign to restore workers' rights.

"For more than ten years the Liberals and Nationals promoted AWAs as a means to attack workers' rights and drive down their pay and conditions — from today this is no longer possible.

"A recent Senate Report confirmed that thousands of Australian workers lost pay and conditions under Work Choices AWAs through the loss of public holiday pay, annual leave loading, shift allowances, overtime pay, penalty rates, redundancy pay & other conditions.

"Unions now call on employers to respect the will of the Australian people and allow workers to get off a lower paid or substandard Work Choices AWA and go onto a union collective agreement that properly protects their wages, conditions and rights," said Ms Burrow.

NO! Power privatisation rejected 7 to 1

Delegates at the New South Wales Labor Party Conference in Sydney overwhelmingly rejected a State Government proposal to privatise the electricity sector.

Premier Morris Iemma wants to sell electricity retailers and lease power generators, but an amendment to Labor Party policy moved at the conference which rejected privatisation was supported.

The final vote was 702 against electricity privatisation and 107 for it. The vote came after a lengthy debate where speakers, including union officials and Government ministers, outlined their positions on the proposed power sector reforms.

Treasurer Michael Costa, argued the Government's case:

"This policy is sensible, we shouldn't allow a bunch of egos and a bunch of people that are

looking at their future careers to de-rail a Premier that won the unwinnable election," he said.

Mr Iemma earlier told the conference that private sector involvement was necessary because the Government on its own could either fund electricity or services - not both.

AMWU NSW Secretary Paul Bastian said:

"The sale means that there is no public control or scrutiny over crucial issues whether they be social, industrial and environmental.

"It means that everything is left up to the market. There is no commitment to deliver new base load power, there is no commitment to environmental considerations and nothing about keeping a cap on costs to the consumer."

Mr Bastian said that the AMWU along side other unions in NSW are committed to keep fighting.

"All the unions are united in their opposition to this and we know we have the support of the public. Eighty five per cent of the people of NSW are opposed to this sale."

In an address to the conference on the weekend, Mr Bastian called on all ALP Members of Parliament to respect the vote of the conference.

"This is only the second time in history that an ALP Premier has openly defied the wish of the conference. The first time was over the issue of conscription in World War 1.

"People know that this sale is not a good idea. The evidence from places where it's already happened like Victoria is that it has destroyed communities, cost jobs, raised prices and compromised service to the community.

"There's nothing in it for the workers, for the community and in the long run, for the government."

Future of Your Rights at Work Campaign

Your Rights at Work is a community campaign spearheaded by unions and the ACTU.

The campaign began in earnest in 2005 when the Howard Government revealed, for the first time, the full extent of its proposed workplace changes. The decent system of workplace laws fought for by unions for over a hundred years - fair take home pay, job security, and conditions like leave and penalty rates - are all under unprecedented attack.

On Saturday November 24 2007, Australians rejected a political coalition that viciously attacked our rights at work - and we elected a party that promises to protect them.

The union and community campaign against WorkChoices made all the difference.

ALP campaign director Tim Gartrell said: "There are a number of reasons for this result. The first big reason was the Government's betrayal of voters over WorkChoices. They didn't say they were going to bring WorkChoices in. They got control of the senate and they got arrogant."

Liberal campaign director Brian Loughnane said: "There is no doubt at all that there was significant concern in parts of the Australian community... with WorkChoices, and that is something that we do have to accept and we do have to face up to."

Election 2007 showed that politicians mess with our rights at work at their peril.

There were thousands of supporters handing out Rights at Work How to Votes in marginal seats around the country. Email campaigns, petitions, fundraising to get our message out there and keep the pressure up on all politicians. Forwarding Rights at Work emails to friends and family to give people the facts about the IR laws, and supporting people affected by them. The 180,000 people on the Rights at Work email list did this, for over two years.

The campaign we built together was new, it was groundbreaking, and it worked.

2008 will be a big year for the Rights at Work campaign: achieving a decent legal framework restoring our rights, making sure Labor's IR laws get through the Senate without the Liberals changing them, and keeping an eye on companies who seek to attack workers' rights.

Rights at Work worth fighting for!

visit: <http://www.rightsatwork.com.au/>

New Employment Standards

All Australians will be able to look forward to a more secure working future under the 10 new employment standards proposed by the Rudd Government, says ACTU President Sharan Burrow.

"These 10 minimum standards combined with a modernised award system will restore rights

stripped away by the previous government and create a stronger, more humane safety net in all workplaces," says Ms Burrow.

The ACTU president says extended parental leave and the right for parents to request more flexible work arrangements recognise the needs of working families in the 21st century.

"These new standards reflect the modern pressures of life and the real need of people to be able to balance work, life and family commitments."

The 10 standards also call for consistent long service leave entitlements across all states and territories as well as basic termination and redundancy payments for employees.

"This means the most vulnerable in our workforce can expect a basic level of security and certainty, particularly in an uncertain economic climate."

The ACTU welcomes the consultative approach. This should ensure the new regulations can be readily implemented by employers and provide an effective and enforceable set of standards for all workers.

The 10 standards include:

1. Hours of work
2. Parental leave
3. Flexible work for parents
4. Annual leave
5. Personal, carers and compassionate leave
6. Community service leave
7. Long service leave
8. Public holidays
9. Termination of employment and redundancy
10. Fair Work information statement

Senators' threat to block Labor's IR laws will resurrect Work Choices says ACTU

The threat by two Senators to join with the Coalition and block the next stage of Rudd Government's industrial relations laws are an affront to the majority of Australians who voted to scrap Work Choices at the last election says the ACTU.

A report in The Australian newspaper on 10 May reveals that the Coalition is 'working with the independent Senators' to change the Rudd Government's second piece of industrial relations legislation which is due in Parliament later this year.

Two Senators who will hold the balance of power after July -- anti-pokies campaigner Nick Xenophon and Family First's Steve Fielding -- are reported to support a new form of AWA-style individual statutory contracts.

"This is a major threat to the Rudd Government's election commitment to introduce a fair and balanced industrial relations system.

"It would resurrect a key aspect of Work Choices and hand power back to employers despite the Australian public overwhelmingly voting for fairer IR laws at the last election," said ACTU President Ms Sharan Burrow.

Unions, Government and climate change

Dr Carla Lipsig-Mummi
The Age 25 February 2008

Governments and unions must work together to meet the global warming challenge.

In the European Union, 11 countries are studying the impact of climate change on future employment and training needs. Their strategies for new climate policy focus on "employment transitions", government investment and social partnership — with the unions as essential partners.

They believe that jobs growth will take place principally in the clean energy industries, but will only occur if there is significant government investment in training and employment transition programs for displaced workers.

Unions in Argentina, Belgium, Britain and Spain are incorporating environmental responsibility into collective bargaining and legislation to train workers as environment representatives, revising employment protection laws to recognise these responsibilities.

As Tony Maher of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union said in his address to the United Nations Climate Change Convention in Bali last year: "We are here to help. You need our help."

In Canada, the railway workers of the United Transportation Union obtained government funding to train environmental stewards to spread environmental know-how throughout their membership, but the funding was put on hold when the Conservatives came to power. And the Canadian Union of Public Employees endorsed a national policy of workplace energy auditing by its members: a bottom-up engagement.

And it makes sense to turn to the trade unions. As the largest membership-based, public interest organisations, they are already examining the impact of warming on work, both in terms of the jobs of their members and in the public interest.

If we begin now to ask these questions as a society, and involve the public actively in finding answers, we have a fighting chance of constructing a fairer work world in the near future.

Save Our Nurses

Our nurses are at breaking point. Exhausting workloads, long hours, and unfair pay. Soon, our State Government will have a chance to save these nurses, and that means saving our hospitals. If our nurses get the fair pay and fair conditions they deserve, they will stay. If they are ignored, thousands could leave.

more at <http://saveournurses.com.au/>

GMCU members hold firm and reap 16% reward

FSU Thursday, 1 May 2008

It's taken a year but members at Goulburn Murray Credit Union have held firm in their resolve for better pay and conditions and are now reaping the rewards.

With conditions frozen under the Credit Union Award, FSU members at GMCU were keen to update their conditions in a collective agreement.

Although initially resisted by credit union management, FSU industrial staff and reps persisted and have secured a better deal for GMCU staff.

The proposed agreement was overwhelmingly endorsed by a staff ballot in April.

The main features of the agreement are:

immediate increase of at least 4%;

new classification scales with higher rates of base pay guaranteed for all staff on transfer to the new structure. For the great majority of staff in Grades 1 and 2 the minimum on transfer to the new scale is 4% - some get more;

three year agreement with three more pay increases of 4% in July 2008, 2009 and 2010; removal of junior rates of pay;

introduction of 4 weeks' paid maternity leave and 5 days' paid paternity leave;

other current award provisions transferred into agreement.

Welfare to Work: need for overhaul

A new report into welfare to work is calling on the Federal Government to make urgent changes to the policy in the May Budget.

The report was funded by the New South Wales Department for Women and looks at 70 single parent mothers and how they coped with the introduction of the policy in 2006 and 2007.

It found women were being forced to leave their careers and move into low-paid, unskilled work to meet the policy's requirement of working 15 hours a week, or having welfare payments cut off.

One of the report's author's, Eva Cox, says the Federal Government needs to make core changes to the system.

"I think what we should be looking at is not a 'one size fits all', not a rigidity - about 15 hours - but looking at people who can earn a reasonable amount of money in the time they're working, regardless of whether that's 10 hours or 15, or even eight in some cases," she said.

International solidarity stops Mugabe arms shipment

International Transport Federation affiliates MUA and RTBU in solidarity with South African dockers and truck workers ban on arms to Zimbabwe as reports of violence and repression under the Mugabe regime increase

Bans by South African dock workers in Durban have forced the Chinese ship An Yue Jiang to sail from the South African port of Durban without unloading.

The bans which have the support of the International Transport Workers' Federation have now spread to other African nations. The ship is reported to have bypassed Maputu where local unions were also mobilising against the weapons transfer.

Global union federation the ITF reports that the ship has switched off its transponder (which broadcasts its exact location), but is believed to be heading for Luanda, Angola next, and may be running low on fuel.

As well as mobilising workers in the region the ITF is calling on Cosco, the Chinese Government, the officially approved All China Federation of Trade Unions, and the Chinese Seamen's and Construction Workers' union to think of the safety of the ship's crew and return to its home port.

SATAWU, last week declared its port members would not unload the weapons from the ship. It also declared that none of its members in the trucking sector would move the cargo to Harare by road.

SATAWU, a member of the COSATU trade union national centre says a peaceful solution must be sought to the political instability in Zimbabwe.

Both ITF Australia affiliates Paddy Crumlin, MUA and Greg Harvey, RTBU have written letters of solidarity to SATAWU in support of the SA workers' stand.

Abolish the ABCC

Why do workers who build this nation have less rights than other Australians?

Construction workers fought hard to remove the Howard Government and its extreme WorkChoices laws at last year's election. However, more needs to be done for a fair workplace relations system for our own industry.

Right across Australia, construction workers are still under attack from Howard's IR laws, as the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner (ABCC) continues to use its draconian powers.

Over 50 ordinary men and women have been forced to attend secret interrogations by Howard's ABCC enforcers. If they refuse to answer questions - about issues like what happened at a union meeting - they can be jailed for six months.

Many more are being threatened with \$22,000 fines and loss of pay if they stop work for any reason - even over safety, in what is one of Australia's most dangerous industries. These powers are bad for construction workers and bad for the industry.

Howard-employer scare tactic

Labor Party leaders were panicked by Howard's and employer scare campaigns during the election and pledged to keep the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) until January 31, 2010.

So, 150 enforcers are employed, and 33 million taxpayers' dollars are spent annually, to continue this intimidation of ordinary construction workers.

ABCC inspectors have no qualms about the tactics they use. Their aim is Howard's agenda - to reduce support for unions and union membership on construction sites. They harass construction workers at their job sites and with phone-calls and notices at their homes.

Howard's construction laws have been condemned by the International Labour Organisation five times, for breaking conventions Australia has ratified. They offend every principle of fairness for working people.

The Rudd Government should not wait until 2010. They should give construction workers and their families back the same rights as other Australians by abolishing the ABCC and the laws that support it now.

Howard 'waterfront strategy' exposed

A cabinet document reveals that the Howard government plotted the 1998 confrontation on Australia's waterfront.

The document urges an "interventionist approach", in which the government would provoke a strike on the nation's docks, allowing stevedores to replace unionised workers with non-union labour.

University of NSW historian Christopher Shiel has identified it as the first of two papers written by the consulting firm ACIL in 1997 and supposedly kept confidential.

The document was initially mistaken as advice from bureaucrats in the Department of Workplace Relations. But Dr Shiel, who has analysed the report for a book to be released this year, said its content had not been generated by public servants.

Dr Shiel said the document: "defines the terms of the activist strategy that the cabinet signed off on. It canvassed the prospect of industrial action that would give the stevedores the option of dismissing their employees. That means cabinet approved provoking a national strike and that is sensational."

Betty Con Walker and Bob Walker
 Sydney Morning Herald 26 March 2008

If the Government does sell the state's electricity assets, lucrative returns will be lost. As might be expected from a natural monopoly, the three generators and three distributors slated for privatisation are extremely profitable. Net profits for the year ended June 30 last were \$1.542 billion. That is an average rate of return on equity of 25.2 per cent per annum. Even that figure is conservative. If private sector accounting methods were used, returns could nudge 30 per cent. These profits will hardly be compensated by the fees the Government can charge for the use of poles and wires that are supposedly to be left in government hands.

There are other elements of the electricity privatisation inquiries that need questioning. Neither the Owen nor the Unsworth report presented a hard-nosed analysis of how much more electricity capacity the state would need, and when.

Instead they outlined a crude wish-list based on even cruder estimates of investment costs. For example, the Owen report cited the scary figure of \$15 billion as the amount of extra investment needed, but if you look closely, this figure covered the cost of building no less than eight new power stations, retrofitting coal-fired generators and investing \$2 billion in gas, yet the same report emphasised the need for only one more power station by 2013-14. It is clearly within the capacity of the state-owned energy agencies to fund the construction of one new power station. Indeed, they invested \$1.8 billion in new plant and equipment in 2006-07.

By endorsing the sale of money-spinning investments, Owen and Unsworth have helped the Government avoid the hard work of ranking competing demands for investment and exploring how they might be funded. This is a cop-out.

It makes no commercial sense to sell off profitable businesses to fund other projects such as schools, hospitals and public transport. It may make political sense: governments have justified past privatisations on the basis that the proceeds will fund new initiatives that they hope will help them get re-elected.

So what are we to make of the sudden announcement that the Iemma Government plans a new metro rail system? Reports on how this initiative will be funded are conflicting. It has been variously stated that it will be funded by the capital works program, if electricity is privatised, or through public-private partnerships. It seems unlikely that private investors would be anxious to invest in a long-term

construction project like the metro, offering uncertain returns. All the more reason for the Government to retain its profitable money-spinning businesses so that its investments stay diversified and include some that produce stable, positive cash flows - particularly when public utilities like water and electricity provide basic services to the community.

Costa loses plot!

Enraged by the dramatic loss of support of the ALP conference NSW Treasurer Micheal Costa stormed across the room - his face flushed, his hands clenched - towards John Robertson, the secretary of Unions NSW. "You blokes can get f--ed," he screamed. "You're going to look like dickheads on Monday morning."

If any other delegate had behaved in such a manner no doubt they would have been ejected from the conference ... special license for upset ministers?

What Costa's behavior clearly shows is how much his ego is tied up with the proposed sell-off of NSW electricity. Having lost support of the unions, the NSW electorate (80% oppose the plan) the majority of ALP branches and now the ALP conference (85% oppose the plan), it appears that Costa now imagines that the belated support of newspaper editorials writers and various business leaders (who would be the main beneficiaries of the privatisation) will somehow help the plan get through.

Is Costa's behaviour a signal that he knows the plan is done for? Or did he swallow one too many hamburgers?

NSW Teachers vote to strike May 22

NSW Teachers Federation members at Sky Channel meetings voted overwhelmingly in favour of a 24-hour strike on May 22.

More than 20,000 members attended the meetings across the state on April 8, with 99 per cent voting in favour of the recommendation.

Members voted to condemn the Department of Education and Training "for casting aside an industrial agreement and imposing changes to the statewide schools staffing system, and engaging in cost-cutting attacks on TAFE, AMES and in the directorates of the Department".

Members vowed to continue to campaign for a new staffing agreement and declared their readiness "to engage in sustained and significant action" as authorised by Federation.

"In the event that there is no negotiated industrial agreement about staffing", the Sky Channel meetings called for "the next action in the statewide campaign" to be a 24 hour strike on May 22 "with rallies to be held at appropriate locations across the state".

The Songs of Henry Lawson: Second Ed.

In 1989 Chris Kempster published "The Songs of Henry Lawson", which was at the time a comprehensive anthology of tune settings for Lawson poetry.

After two years of gathering new material the Second Edition has been published. It was launched at the 2008 Port Fairy Folk Festival with a very successful concert (audience 1500) and at the National Folk Festival in Canberra over the Easter weekend. The New edition adds forty pages to the original collection with the new tunes that have been written for Lawson verse over the past 29 years.

Blue Mountains Union Council

Objects and Aims

Act to advance unionism, living standards, social justice and employment.

Organise regular "Politics in the Pub" sessions that invite speakers to address the Blue Mountains community on appropriate issues.

Assist in the protection of rights for all wage and salary workers.

In solidarity with other community groups formulate policy that protects the environment and community assets.

Support the election of people at the local, state and national level who will serve the best interests of wage and salary earners and the Blue Mountains Unions Council.

Publicise Blue Mountains Unions Council activities and views in the media.

Publish a newsletter for regular dissemination within the Blue Mountains community of Blue Mountains Unions Council views.

Act in concert with Unions for the purpose of recruitment.

JOIN BMUC

Blue Mountains residents can become BMUC members if they support our Aims and Objects. Membership is open to union members, to retired unionists and to those who are unemployed or unwaged.

Membership Fees
 Waged \$15.00 pa
 Unwaged \$5.00 pa

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