

DEFEND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE - DON'T BUY RUDD & GILLARD'S "WORKCHOICES LITE"! SMASH THE ABCC - INDUSTRIAL ACTION CAN DO THE JOB!



Anti-ABCC rally in Sydney, December 2 2008.

On April 3 Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard released the Wilcox report into the transition to Fair Work Australia for the building and construction industry. In her media release she shamefully vowed that the notorious work of the ABCC would continue under the auspices of a Specialist Division of the Inspectorate of Fair Work Australia stating, "It is the intention of the Rudd Labor Government to always have a tough cop on the beat in the building and construction industry." Like all cops, we know that this one will *exclusively* serve the interests of the capitalist ruling class, the bosses, targetting the toiling worker with intimidation, fines, jail and worse. The following is a leaflet produced by Trotskyist Platform for the anti-ABCC rally in Sydney that was held on December 2 last year.

November 26 - Every proud worker hates them. Those "ex"-cops who go snooping around and threatening to jail construction workers. The Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC.)

Victorian CFMEU union official Noel Washington was facing jail because he rightly refused to do in his union comrades to the ABCC. The CFMEU and other trade unions called rallies for December 2 to support Noel Washington with tens of thousands of workers set to participate. Today, in the face of this imminent demonstration, the DPP dropped all charges against Noel Washington. But the December 2 rallies against the ABCC are set and definitely ought to still go ahead - certainly the threat of the ABCC has not gone away. The Sydney demonstration starts at 11.45 am at Town Hall Square. Trotskyist Platform (TP) calls on all our supporters and readers to support this protest that has been called by the construction unions.

Over a hundred workers have been dragged to appear before the ABCC. The dropping of charges against Noel Washington is indeed a great victory but to smash the ABCC is going to take a lot more than just one rally. It is high time to unleash the power of industrial action! Such action would be very popular. Thinking unionists across industries know that the ABCC is not only a threat to construction workers. It is a precedent for repression against all who stand up for workers rights.

But why has the union movement not already used its industrial power to strike down the ABCC? Well let's go back three years. Then there were massive union stopworks. There was much potential to really smash *Workchoices* and to begin to rollback 25 years of assaults on the union movement. But pro-ALP union leaders then chose to demobilise the industrial campaign. The likes of Greg Combet and John Robertson said that everything should be geared to electing a (supposedly) worker-friendly ALP government. Many committed union activists, albeit with misgivings, followed up by devoting much energy to getting Labor voted in. Critically, to the slogan *Your Rights at Work Worth Fighting For*, was added the slogan *Your Rights at Work Worth **Voting** For* (emphasis added.) And most left groups (like Socialist Alternative, Solidarity, the CPA and Socialist Alliance) while unhappy about the curbing of the industrial struggle also campaigned for Rudd and proclaimed the election result as "a victory for the labour movement." But today not only have Rudd and Gillard chosen to maintain the ABCC until 2010, they have vowed to run a sequel to this Howard regime horror story even after that. True, they have placed restrictions on the hated AWAs and some hardline corporate heads are unhappy about that. But most of the bosses are not too upset because the Labor government continues to uphold those anti-worker (and far more widespread than AWAs) common law individual contracts. Most significantly, Rudd and Gillard are reaffirming the Howard government's draconian measures against the right to strike. Overall the new Industrial Relations bill does little more than put a dent in *Workchoices* let alone write off the previous 10 years of Coalition anti-union laws which began with the itself notorious 1996 *Workplace Relations Act*. No wonder that even the Liberals may vote for the "new" IR bill. Despite ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence's assertions to the contrary, the Rudd/Gillard IR package truly has the flavour of a "Workchoices Lite."

This whole experience has to be honestly studied within the workers movement if we are to go forward. Union activists will have to assert the truth that Rudd's ALP was never going to be able to defend workers interests. The reason behind all these attacks on workers' rights is the fact that the industrial, construction and transport enterprises are owned by a corporate class whose wealth depends on how much they exploit their employees. Rudd's team was always committed to this system and was never interested in supporting workers' struggles to win

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concessions from their exploiters. That is why in a leaflet issued 6 months before last year's elections, TP not only headlined "Smash the Bosses/Howard's Anti-Union Laws!" but emphasised that there should be "No endorsement of the ALP and its Platform to Restrict the Right to Strike!" Arguing that strike action was the way to defeat *Workchoices*, the statement warned that: "Electioneering for a Labor government, when the ALP has an openly anti-strike program, and trying to mobilise a strike campaign are **completely counterposed**."

If a year ago it was true that Rudd would not get off the Howard road to an ever more exploited workforce then that is even truer today! With the capitalist system in global economic collapse, the corporate elite will try to leach even more out of workers. And that means their agencies in government will use more ABCC-style thuggery to hold back workers' resistance. Still pro-ALP union officials continue to argue that if industrial action is taken against Labor regimes it will allow the Right wing back into government. Worker militants must respond to this by pointing out that if the unions do not use their industrial muscle to stop the greedy bosses from slashing workers' jobs and rights then non-unionised workers and the middle class will soon be driven back into the arms of the conservatives. This is what just happened in New Zealand. Anyway, is there any solace in a Labor government implementing conservative policies? Like the way that successive ALP administrations in NSW - from the Carr and Iemma "ALP Rights" to the Rees "ALP Left" - have tried to privatise electricity generation?

DEFEND ALL PERSECUTED OPPONENTS OF EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION!

It is not only trade unionists who are under attack around the world today. All working class people and all of the poor are facing hardships. In East Timor the impoverished masses are having their oil wealth stolen by the Australian-owned corporations BHP and Woodside. Back home, greedy landlords are hitting the poor with rising rents while ruthless bosses bully and sack at will desperate workers toiling away in the "black market economy." To divert attention from all this robbery of the poor that they commit, the rich ruling class whips up all sorts of racist stigmas about ethnic communities. Meanwhile, they subject Aboriginal people to the most intense oppression. Today, while construction unionists are threatened with jail, an Aboriginal leader Lex Wotton has already become a political prisoner. A few weeks ago Wotton was sentenced in Townsville to six years jail.

Wotton was involved in the November 2004 mass response by the Palm Island

community to the horrific police bashing to death of a black man in custody and a series of earlier unpunished acts by racist police. The Palm Island community response shut down the centres of racist brutality on the island: the police station and courthouse. The upper class authorities responded by trying to jail Wotton for life because they feared that the brave defiance of those power centres by the Palm Island black community could become an example to others facing subjugation – in the first place other Aboriginal people but also the working class. But unionists have responded by joining with Aboriginal people, leftists and other anti-racists in a solidarity campaign. On November 7 in Sydney, a 150 people participated in a protest that was part of an international day of action to “Free Lex Wotton.” An MUA representative was wildly cheered at the rally when he announced that dock workers in Sydney had stopped work for a minute’s silence in support of Wotton. The Queensland legal authorities have had to take account of all this support for Wotton. He was sentenced with a scheduled parole release date of July 2010. Now is the time to strengthen support for Lex Wotton and to make it clear that as far as the workers movement is concerned the November 2004 Palm Island resistance was 100% justified. Struggle to free Lex Wotton! Struggle against all persecution of fighters for the oppressed! Struggle for those still targeted by the dreaded ABCC!

WHAT THE LIBERALS AND THE ALP LEADERS MEAN WHEN THEY TALK OF “HUMAN RIGHTS”

Although they threaten to jail construction union activists and have imprisoned Lex Wotton, the ruling elite here still has the gall to attack overseas governments over a “lack of democracy.” They especially lecture the Peoples Republic of China (PRC.) But the truth is that while there are people prosecuted in the PRC over industrial issues, unlike in Australia, most of them are not workers but are instead ... greedy private sector bosses. In China in mid-2007 45,000 police were deployed in Shanxi and Henan provinces to crack down on horrific exploitation of workers by the bosses of privately owned brickworks. Dozens of owners and managers ended up being jailed for periods of between 18 months to life imprisonment. And six days ago seven managers and supervisors in a construction company in Chongqing municipality were arrested after workers were killed in a crane accident. In contrast, here the bigwigs of companies like Bovis Lend Lease and John Holland almost always escape prosecution while it is those who stand up for workers rights who get stomped on.

Of course things are far from perfect in China. The government there has allowed too many capitalists to operate in the processing sector. But even here it is not so simple. Tens of thousands of sweatshops are now being either brought into line or are closing down as a result of a new pro-worker IR law. That law gives unions the right to veto any change in workplace conditions and makes it illegal for an employee who was once injured at a site to ever be laid off by his or her employer.

This IR law was passed by the Communist Party government in the face of much opposition by Western corporations.

The fact is that for all its problems, in the PRC the state does not ultimately answer to a capitalist elite but is tied up with the socialistic, nationally-owned enterprises that still dominate China's key sectors like banking, oil and ports. And this is what the Coalition and the likes of Rudd hate about the PRC. They see the existence of a workers state, in whatever form, in China as a threat to the global capitalist order. They, of course, must be diplomatic to China because China has been holding up the Australian economy. But they still can't help attacking the PRC. Their concern for the "human rights" of "pro-democracy" "dissidents" in China can be compared with their concern here for the "rights" of those scabby types who refuse to join a union in a closed shop. That is why we should oppose the Aussie rulers when they attack socialistic China over "human rights" in just the same way that we oppose these capitalists when they take away workers' rights at home.

WORKERS NEED A PARTY THAT WILL STAND UP TO THE EXPLOITERS

The whole ongoing saga with the ABCC has highlighted the nature of the state agencies in Australia's current political system. From the Cole Royal Commission that recommended the set up of an anti-union "industry watchdog" to the ABCC itself to the courts and police that implement the ABCC's work, the state structures have proven that they have been constructed to meet the exclusive needs of the rich capitalists. Whether it's the Liberals or the ALP in office nothing changes this! Sure the Liberals are a bosses party and Labor is made up of many who have their origins in the workers movement. But if a building is structurally defective it does not really matter who is sitting in its rooms.

Working class people deserve a real alternative. Not a party dominated by self-seekers riding the workers struggle for the sake of their own parliamentary or corporate ambitions. Nor do workers need an "honest" version of the ALP. We don't need a party of well meaning but naive people who think that workers' interests can be secured by grabbing hold of the capitalist structures. Instead, workers need an alternative that is built out of the class struggle. A party that will harness union industrial power to pull back from the bosses immediate gains. A party that will in all these struggles of today prepare the working class for their historic task. A task which the working class and its allies will eventually have to undertake for their very own survival. The task of demolishing the rapidly decaying state structures of capitalism and of constructing in their place a new socialistic structure. A new state that will be built for the interests of workers and not for the interests of a filthy few capitalists as we have here today. A state that will serve all those who are downtrodden and exploited. •