

UNION SOLIDARITY GROUP

Unionists and the community defending our rights

Now's the time for a united fightback!

JUST 200 years ago workers were flogged for complaining and daring to organise. We were called convicts then. And slaves before that. But then we began to organise. We got stronger and stronger. Those without power and privilege fought back.

We won the right to vote. We took industrial action and organised mass protests. We won the right to organise in unions. We won the right to a safer workplace. We won the right to four weeks annual leave, long service leave and sick leave. Some unions won the 36-hour week.

More recently, a massive campaign of unions and community groups forced James Hardie to pay compensation to asbestos victims. The government didn't force James Hardie to pay. It was unions which won this victory over a callous company.

None of these things were just handed over. Most of our industrial action was technically "illegal". We had to organise with our unions and community groups to win these rights.

But those who have always had the power, the employers, want it all back. They are willing to try to destroy our unions to claw it back. They don't mind if unions exist as service organisations, as long as they don't organise their members industrially.

That's why the Coalition government is planning legislation to:

- * Remove conditions in awards such as redundancy pay, penalty rates, long service leave.
- * Introduce secret ballots before industrial action.



- * Make it easier for employers to impose Australian Workplace Agreements (individual contracts) on workers.
- * End pattern bargaining.
- * Restrict the democratic right of workers to have their unions visit them in their workplaces more than twice a year.
- * Remove unfair dismissal protection for workers in small businesses.
- * Remove redundancy payment rights for workers in small businesses.
- * Restrict the right to take protected industrial action for health, education, community service, and essential service workers.
- * Specifically attack construction industry unions and leave construction workers with less rights than other workers.

This is what the government wants to do, but there's no guarantee that they can get away with this plan.

Workers got where we are by bonding together in unions.

The fact that the Howard government will control the Senate from July 1 doesn't mean it can pass any law it likes.

And it doesn't mean it can implement all of the laws that do get passed.

Anti-union laws can be stopped

FACED with a political crisis and massive public opposition, a government can be forced to back off. The Liberal Party controlled the senate before, in 1976-1983 and couldn't implement all its anti-union laws.

In 1998, the federal government thought it could destroy the Maritime Union of Australia. The MUA wasn't saved by the courts or by the senate. The battle was fought and won on the wharves, with mass pickets defying the laws and keeping the dock gates closed to containers handled by scabs.

There were mass demonstrations including one of 80,000 in Melbourne. Wherever Coalition MPs went, they were met with protests. Some workers took spontaneous strike action. The government backed off. Solidarity won. Now we need to do it again.

In 1968, the union movement responded

with massive strikes and public protests when Tramways union leader Clarrie O'Shea was jailed. The extent of the protests meant that O'Shea was released from jail and the law which sent him to jail wasn't used again.

Some say that the union movement is too weak to respond now. But opinion polls over the past eight years have consistently shown that the majority of workers would join a union if they were asked, or if there was a union in their workplace.

Whenever unions engage in popular industrial campaigns, they join new members.

A February Newspoll found that 53% of workers oppose any further restrictions on the right of unions to enter workplaces. Many of these workers were not union members but they recognised the value of unions.

If unions and community groups mobilise, it is possible to stop the government from using its anti-union laws. And it is possible to stop some of the other attacks the government has planned for working people. We have to organise now to stop this injustice.

What can I do?

* If you are not in a union, join one today. Ring Victorian Trades Hall Council or visit www.vthc.org.au.

* If you are a union member, contact your delegate or organiser and find out what your union is doing to oppose the anti-union laws. Organise a meeting with your workmates to discuss the attacks.

* Hand around copies of this leaflet. Visit our website



<www.unionsolidarity.org.au> (under construction).

* Volunteer to be part of a phone tree for picket line solidarity.

* Get involved with Union Solidarity:
Melbourne:
Dave 0412 484 094;
Judy 0418 347 374;
James 0405 309 283;
Linda 0405 356 170.

Geelong: Tim

0418 290 656. **Gippsland:** John 0419 747 756.

Join the Union Solidarity Group

NAME:

UNION/COMMUNITY GROUP:

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

EMAIL:

Return to: contact@unionsolidarity.org