On Thursday, November 30, tens of thousands of workers and their families, trade unionists and community activists are meeting and demonstrating to help defeat the Howard Government’s IR legislation and to remove the Howard Government in next years’ election.

There have already been mass demonstrations organised by the trade union movement earlier this year on June 28. And on April 22 of next year, before the Federal elections, another day of action is to take place.

These actions are the best way to defeat the IR laws and Howard

These actions are the best way to defeat the IR laws and the Howard Government. The more workers and trade unionists take part, the more effective the movement will be to stop the government in its tracks. All sections of the trade union movement irrespective of their particular political convictions have united.

The WorkChoices legislation is already beginning to bite. Many workers are having their wages reduced, their holidays, penalty rates, sick leave and other entitlements slashed as employers force them onto AWAs.

Companies are refusing to negotiate new collective agreements with trade unions. They want to exclude the trade unions from playing any role in the establishment of wages and working conditions. They want to establish their unfettered control as was the case in the black and grimy factories in Britain in the 1800s before trade unions came into existence.

This is a future that Australian workers will not accept

But this is a future that Australian workers are not prepared to accept lying down. That’s why more workers are joining their union and why more and more are prepared to show their resentment and opposition by taking to the streets and finding other ways of expressing their anger.

When workers are threatened with the sack or are sacked strike and other actions are taking place, including support from the community. The attack on conditions is beginning to bite. Many workers are having their wages reduced, their holidays, penalty rates, sick leave and other entitlements slashed as employers force them onto AWAs.

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The Liberal/National Coalition must be thrown out

The Liberal/National Coalition must be thrown out and the only alternative at present is a Labor Government. But parliament alone won’t fix Howard’s laws. The real fix to the IR laws is through the power of the people pushing whatever government is elected next year to repeal the laws and act in the interests of the working people and the community.

Let’s continue to build this movement and show the Howard Government that the trade union movement is defending the rights of workers. The movement can be strengthened by using actions on the job and by changing the government. All approaches are needed at this time. The real power is in the hands of workers acting together.

Immediately after the election of the Howard Government in 2004 the Communist Party and The Guardian said that “the Howard Government has already signalled its intention to make further savage attacks on the working class, the rights of the trade union movement, on welfare recipients, public health, public education and on the Indigenous people”. This has been completely borne out by the record of the Federal Government since its election, particularly in its WorkChoices legislation. The CPA has given its full support and our members have been involved in all the trade union and community organised demonstrations against this legislation.

If we act together and stick together it can be done

Workers make the goods, drive the trains and the delivery trucks, work in the markets and banks, nurse the sick in the hospitals and teach our children in the schools. All have a common interest in throwing out this dishonest and wretched government that legislates for the corporations, the banks, and the other money-grubbers. If we act together and stick together we can put in a government that works for the working people. It can be done.
Move Australia forward

Here are ten reasons why the Howard Government should be thrown out in next year’s Federal election: His government has:  
- Imposed the most horrendous IR legislation attacking trade union rights and the wages and conditions, of all working people. It is forcing workers onto AWAs and already has seen real wages fall;  
- Disregarded social welfare rights and benefits for pensioners and those who need health care and child care taxes.  
- Legislated away fundamental democratic rights in the name of a phoney “war on terror”, treated those coming to our shores seeking asylum the most barbaric manner and contrary to international law;  
- Cut funding to the public education system while boosting private schools and attempted to impose a school curriculum which would promote conservative values and individualism;  
- Given big corporations profits rising to record levels and high income earners huge tax breaks while increasing the tax burden on low income earners, particularly through the GST; and has wasted over $55 million a day on military spending.  
- Introduced a racist, genocidal policy of assimilation, dismantling ATSIC and taking many other measures to smash land rights and destroy the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.  
- Imposed its control on the programs of the ABC by its one-sided ABC Board appointments;  
- Sold out Australia’s independence by its subservience to the US Government; and in the process taking Australia into wars in Iraq and Afghanistan;  
- Established a government of liars – children overboard, the war in Iraq, the AWB scandal, climate change, and many other issues;  
- Neglected the urgent need to take radical steps to promote renewable energy and protect the environment. To defeat the Howard Government voters need to ensure that they are on the electoral roll and on polling day put the Liberals last on their preference lists.

At the present time the only alternative to a Liberal/National Party Coalition Government is an ALP Government. But on the issues the ALP Leadership have not clearly and forcefully differentiate the ALP from Liberal policies and there remain some scepticism because on a number of important issues, the ALP are not the real, progressive alternatives. Another option is to vote for Green candidates in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. The Greens have been unequivocally committed to all of the above-mentioned objectives. It is possible to provide decent health, education and housing for all and, thereby, give Howard for the first time, a majority in the Senate.

For a long time Australia’s electoral scene has been dominated by the two-party system in which Liberal and Labor alternate in government with many similarities in economic and many other policies. We advocate a government of left and progressive political forces – progressive members of the Labor Party, The Greens, socialists and communists – a government which gives priority to serving the interests of the working people, small business people, small farmers, teachers and intellectuals in all fields. It would not be a government giving priority to the needs of big business as the Howard Government does. It would limit their profits and oblige the corporations to meet the legitimate needs of workers in employment.

The needs of the working people will not be met merely by electing better representatives to parliament. It is also necessary that the people themselves take a hand and are directly involved and participate in government and in the running of the community. Instead of parliamentary candidates being selected in backroom party deals or by stacked branches, they would be put forward by community organisations, including trade unions. This is real democracy – not just democracy once every three or four years.

Paul Matters

In the late 19th century about 65,000 people of the Melanesian Islands were seized from their homelands, imprisoned and transported to Australia to work in Queensland’s cane fields. Australia’s sugar industry was built on the slavery of the peoples of Vanuatu, the Solomons, Fiji, Kiribati and New Caledonia. They were forced to work to indentured labour in atrocious and inhume conditions and worked for next to nothing. The word used for this shameful trade, blackbirding, was picked up from the slave trade. But Australian imperialism was blackbirding long after slavery had been officially outlawed.

Blackbirding generated vast fortunes for the flagellating Australian capitalist class and was accompanied by some of the most vicious racist laws in history to exclude workers on the basis of their ethnic origin and from living in Australia. Today, capitalist exploitation and racial prejudice not only remain but have intensified as Howard’s neo-liberal strategy turns racism as a means of dividing the working class and assisting employers in pursuit of higher profits.

Modern blackbirding

The modern variant of blackbirding is the Temporary Business (long stay) 457 visa. It is the most used common program used for Australian capitalists to exploit guest workers. Bosses are licensed by the state as “standard business sponsors” and are permitted to control a specified number of overseas workers over a two-year period. The positions nominated to be filled by the overseas workers must be certified as “genuine” vacancies, and bosses are supposed to meet minimum conditions.

The scheme has two main features. It reduces government expenditure on the education and training of labour and provides employers with a cheaper labour force. In 2004-05, a staggering number of 49,855 of these 457 visas were granted. In particular a new trade skills training visa, under which bosses claim they are unable to train trainees can sponsor fee-paying apprentices from overseas.

The importing of “ready-made” workers, nurses, doctors and trades people, saves the government the expense of providing adequate training opportunities in Australia. It also robs other, often much poorer countries, of the personnel that they need and has to train. The social costs of the so-called non-productive phase of life in childhood, adolescence and old age are shifted to the third world countries who, by the way, are paying the profits of Australian employers.

For individual capitalists the guest worker scheme is mantra from heaven. As The Guardian has documented in several articles, guest workers are denied even the minimal rights and protections of citizenship. Their right to work is completely at the mercy of the boss. Their visa can be revoked and they can be repatriated at any time.

Some propose that a simple solution is to send every guest worker home and pull up the drawbridge so that we can live behind the giant moat of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This is not only inhumane but is no solution for several reasons.

Migration is now a huge global economic force. There were an estimated 191 million migrants worldwide in 2005, up from 176 million in 2000. Migrant workers comprise 3.0 per cent of the global population, equivalent to the fifth most populous “country”. Despite the super-exploitation of migrant workers, they are extremely crucial props to the economies of many third world countries from which they migrate. Of the global total of US$223 billion sent home in remittances in 2005 about US$167 billion went to third world countries. In the Pacific Island states, remittances are the major source of income and government departments.

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H G C H V Z

1st PRIZE: 1 CPV Congress T-shirt plus 5 badges
2nd PRIZE: 1 CPV Congress T-shirt

Viva Venezuela! Congress held in July 2007

Tickets $1 each or three for $2 – Drawn on Wednesday, 13 December

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WorkChoices for nurses? A danger to all workers

Contributed by a nurse

One of the hardest-fought battles in recent decades has been the struggle by nurses to be recognised as professionals. It has taken decades of politi- cal and physical rigours related to hospital bed numbers, bed charging and the pay packet they took home each fortnight. If the poison of Howard’s WorkChoices directed to nurses was a godsend for the profit-making corporates and transnational corporations, then that health care is a human right and impossible workloads. I refuse to endanger my own life. And most significantly: nurses will have acquired a couple of years’ time.

The Downward Slide

However, when happens what Howard achieves his aim of finally destroying Medicare and the pub- lic health system – and it is handed over to the health insurance compa- nies and transnational corporations?

What if, under corporate man- age, nurses discover that their colleagues in another ward were being paid at a higher rate? What if they knew another hospital was paying their new qualification is reflected in their pay also.

The Glory of "Competition"

There is already a disparity in the services and comfort level of the "rich" suburbs and the "workers" suburbs. When people of Kerry Packer’s ilk die in hospital it is not uncommon for them to be transferred to the hospital or ward they were treated in. So what if Awards were done away with and nurses signed contracts under individual contracts? Could this mean hospitals in affluent sub-urbs, with huge budgets, could and should then "buy" the best specialist nurses from the poorer hospitals? And how, one wonders, where there be "hospital vs hospital" competition between different management cor- porations? The answer is, there be no competition between nurses.

At the moment our Award is very clear and equitable: all gradu- ates are paid the same starting wage. For each year of service the wage increases to reflect the experience gained. If the nurse chooses to undertake postgraduate study then their new qualification is reflected in their pay also.

The system is transparent, with- out threat or favour.

Exodus and Influx

Australian nurses are recognised world-wide as being amongst the best educated and highly qualified. As such they have lucrative overseas posts continuously dangled in front of them. Kuwait, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf States; even the UK and USA place advertisements offering Australian nurses hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, with free rental accommodation and return flights home.

Why bother to work under a Howard AWA when you can work overseas and save up for a house in four years?

So where do the replacement nurses come from?

Howard’s 457 Visa will be a godsend for the profit-making health system, but a potential disas- ter for the majority of Australians who can’t afford the increasingly increasing health insurance rates.

Those imported nurses will be signed up as cheap labour by oversea labour-hire companies without any knowledge of the wage and conditions that their Australian sib- lers and brothers have fought for and won over decades of struggle.

As the exodus of Australian nurses from the profession quickens the scramble to replace them – with local and overseas nurses – the quality of the replacements will have to drop.

Nurses will have to be accepted from countries where the education and testing standards are not as high.

Nurses will be accepted who do not have the excellent command of English required to communicate with patients and confer with other nurses and doctors in a way which leaves absolutely no room for error or misunderstanding that may risk a patient’s life.

Nurses will be so over-hurried and worked to ex- haustion by being overburdened with large patient loads and forced to work double shifts that mistakes will be inevitable anyway.

And most significantly: nurses may have clauses written into their 457 Visa that forbids them join- ing a union which would protect them from all the exploitation listed above.

I’m sorry... If my profession, I believe that health care is a human right and should be provided by the govern- ment free to all Australians.

But unfortunately I am not able to give you my personal guarantee to you to bring about not only a new balance to work in nurse training, but also to continue the fight with all nurses are treated with great- er respect and paid a commensurate wage.

But... But I hope, that by working with you to bring about not only a change in government and do away with these disgraceful AWAs, but to also continue the fight with all Australians to bring our public health system back to the shining international example it once was that I will still be smiling brightly and wearing sensible shoes at a hos- pital near you.

And... I hope I don’t see you soon.
Cleaners take on WorkChoices

With all the Coalition Government’s attack on trade unions and savage penalty provisions, some workers feel the situation is hopeless and are asking why they should join a trade union: what can unions do now to protect them? The Guardian put this question to Rebecca Reilly, NSW Organising Coordinator for the LHMU which represents cleaners.

Rebecca: Now more than ev- er people need to join the unions. I don’t think everything is hopeless, I think the struggle has to continue, more importantly now more than ever.

To do this I think that the union office has to change the ways in which we educate our members and we’ve got to get a lot smarter about it. In saying that I want to make the point that the union is a workers’ collective and I believe that the union office is a resource of this collective.

We have to rethink what we are doing; we have to rethink what we are doing; we need to do research; we need to need to dedicate resources to researching employers – what they care about, not necessarily about their business.

So instead of campaigning around the issues, we need to focus on a particular, maybe focus on where their per- sonal interests lie. It may be in art galleries or the horses that they own, or the opera or whatever it is. Let’s take our struggles to things that they care about. So that we are in their faces everywhere that they actually turn, and we involve other people in our struggles in a more stra- tegic way.

That’s when we’ll actually make the laws unwork- able to involve working class people in the political process.

But we are not going to be do- ing that by telling the community what they are going to do. That’s not an equal partnership.

New campaign methods

But I think as well as getting smarter in the way we operate, we need to work out ways in which we are going to destroy these laws and create more equitable laws. That may mean we do things differently.

We need to get a lot smarter about how we operate. We need to build links and get back to the basics of unionism, to grass- roots unionism where we re- ach out into the community and we actually make real connections with it, not just “can you attend a picket” and then go away.

Let’s get really involved with the community in the sense of what are their issues, what’s important to them, how can we support them in their local struggles and make it a proper partnership, not just a one way affair.

We have to take our struggle to the streets in America and we have to do it, not just to have to do all doom and gloom. [See above image from a Spotless cam- paign for cleaners.]

We need to be creative with these types of actions. We are crazy if we think industrial action just means standing up in front of gates. This doesn’t always work, particu- larly in casualised areas in which they don’t have a front gate or those workers don’t have a home.

Given the way they try to po- lice the workforce at the moment, we need to think of different ways to engage with people by using the technology that we actually have. It means that we need to be about the action that we are actually do- ing and not just about what the purpose is and what our focus and objective is every time we do any form of action. We need to have a political component in that. That we are actually educat- ing people through activity and through action.

We have collective power that we can actually make a difference. We also need to be able to involve working class people in the political process.

If you would like to help or join the group, please come along to the next meeting and bring your friends. It will be held on Tuesday December 12, at 6.30pm at the Concord Bowling Club (Clermont Ave, North Strathfield).

For more information contact: Jennifer Glass on 02 9749 6040.
Working together against unjust laws

David Kerin is the Victorian coordinator of Union Solidarity, a community-based group that has now channeled up a number of successes in supporting trade union struggles. He spoke to The Guardian about their campaigning.

Union Solidarity came together two years ago at the MUA, Finlays Engineering, Australian Envelopes and others – quite a large list of struggles where the employers had specifically aimed the new laws against the workers’ organisations involved.

We’ve found that the majority of the community assemblies we’ve set up have been around the issue of the sacking of shop stewards and OH&S reps. If we look at the Amcor dispute it involved a company that was in difficulty and sought voluntary redundancies.

The way those things are normalised, and the employers provide the requested redundancies. In other words they gave the company what it had asked for and make workers who were willing to put their hand up and accept the package.

And then proceed to say, “No, out of the 15 or so who volunteered, these five, we don’t want them any more. We want these five to go”, and of course the five go included the shop stewards.

They tried to negotiate but got nowhere. The sacking finally came out. The new laws were used and the union was injured from the dispute, meaning that the organisers were injunction off [an injunction is a stoppage of any action by the union as far as the legal system is concerned]. When an employer seeks a legal order to demand that the union not continue the dispute it then becomes illegal for them to participate in the dispute.

And then there is the real world. And in the real world the dispute – the struggle – doesn’t stop just because there are bad laws there that say that you must stop.

Our view is a simple one. We believe that the rules now are that there is no way back. They’ve torn up into old agreements on which industrial relations used to be carried out.

Class struggle

It’s now a class struggle. At Amcor, what it wanted was a number of local communities gathered together around the clock in secret worker meetings.

The Union Solidarity groups in that area supported them with shelter, food, firewood, collected funds, that sort of stuff.

They’d been out by that time for close to three weeks and held the line, on a couple of occasions against thugs that were being used. It was a good victory for them and it was fairly typical – although the details vary from dispute to dispute of what we’ve been going through so far.

The beautiful thing for us too – we’ve now seen a number of disputes where reinstatements of workers have actually occurred.

Of course we always aim at that.

Working together against unjust laws

When 60 or 70 people come together to discuss issues within the community and to develop strategies to highlight the struggles of workers under the Howard Government’s WorkChoices laws in the Sutherland Shire.

Last week, Unions NSW Secretary John Robertson welcomed them as the 42nd Your Rights at Work committee in NSW. “These are not groups we have gone out and established”, he said. “They are being established in the community because of a genuine desire to get into the union movement.”

Sutherland Shire Your Rights at Work committee rep, Maryanne Stuart, said, “We’ve got people from all backgrounds and all political affiliations; they are there to fight the good fight and get rid of this government.”

The group had a very successful day. They put a wider community at the Gymea Village Fair on October 29, where hundreds of locals signed onto an activist register and added their names to an anti-WorkChoices petition. These petitions will be forwarded to the Federal Members for Cook and Hughes.

Leaflets and other materials were eagerly received and all involved agreed that it was an extremely positive step in building a broad united front to oppose this attack on workers. Committee members staffing the union was inundated with queries and personal stories of how these unjust laws are being used against Sutherland Shire residents.

A young school-leaver texted us how he was coerced into signing an AWA by a fitness chain. He was told to sign or there was no job. He now works 12 and a half hour shifts, 6-7 days a week.

The Sutherland Shire Your Rights at Work community group will have another stall in the auditorium of the Gymea Trade Union Club where the November 30 National Day of Community Action will be linked to the live telecast around the nation. The group’s President, Paul McAleer, will be speaking to introduce the group and seek further support from the community.

May Day – Sydney

This community based initiative was the famous case of obtaining a workplace rights and conditions of Australian workers and their families and the Sutherland Shire Your Rights at Work Community group has been created so that residents can stand up to these vicious attacks.

The movement is growing in the Sutherland area and as our leaflet says “Come along, join the fight. We can win.”

If you are interested in joining or finding out more about the group then phone Rebecca on 0412 484 094.
The 107: in defence of democratic rights

West Australian CFMEU Organiser Vinnie Molina speaks with The Guardian about the 107 workers who are facing the wrath of the Howard Government’s “Work Choices” legislation.

The crime: acting on their democratic right to take industrial action against their employer.

Guardian: Vinnie, by now most of our readers would have heard of the plight of the 107 workers in Western Australia. Can you give some background on what’s happening over there?

Vinnie: Yes, thanks for this opportunity to talk about the situation. The 107 case is now quite well-known by the Australian public and also by some of the contacts we have internationally, you can appreciate it is one of the biggest industrial actions to take place during the reign of the Howard Government.

The workers were employed by LKJV, a multinational company involved in a joint venture to build a city tunnel as part of Perth’s railway system. During the past 12 months workers had raised with LKJV several annoying conditions. The union’s major concern was the long working hours and poor workplace safety. The multinational really under-estimated safety in the workplace, they were putting extra pressure on the workers, some of them were on the job 70 hours a week.

As you can imagine this takes away their right to spend with their families and the workers were really fed up with the working conditions. The union delegate was playing a proactive role in the dispute and was sacked by the company.

G: This seems like a real test case for the government’s represive new industrial relations system, there must be some concern that an example will be made of the workers who’ve been charged, is this the case?

V: Yes, certainly. I think it is very sad and totally unjust that the Howard Government is playing with the lives of workers’ families. The workers have been charged for taking industrial action and are facing fines of up to $28,600 each. This amount of money to a worker can represent their home, their car and other personal assets. Obviously the government wants to use this particular action to deter other workers from exercising their democratic right to take industrial action and withdraw their labour.

G: Vinnie, what has the CFMEU been able to do to support the workers?

V: In this particular case the union was not responsible for the action taking place, so it is the individual workers who are facing the charges. The union cannot pay for the fines imposed on the workers as this would mean for 80 hours a week!

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The new IR laws are almost designed to make people unhappy. It’s not human for people to be under that sort of pressure – increased job insecurity working all sorts of hours or less pay, adds up to a lot more stress at work.

It’s really noticeable at the doctor’s office. Patients no longer feel safe about taking time off work when they are sick. It may be concerned about job security or anxiety about being labelled a malingerer at work, or just the fact that there is no one else to replace them.

“Just give me one day off, but I’ll probably go in anyway,” is often the response.

Even when the patient has a bad virus – when rest is about the only thing that will help, patients forge a medical certificate and simply ask for an antibiotic – hoping it will do the trick. Unfortunately, antibiotics don’t work for virus infections – and probably will make you worse.

http://cpasa.blogspot.com/

Official blog of the CPA South Australia

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Eureka 2006 Celebrations
Sunday 3 December
1pm Flag Raising at Village Green (Rathen near Henley)
1.30 March & Street Theatre
2.30 for Village Green Speeches, Music & Entertainment
Eureka Day Celebrations Committee in association with the Toowomba Workers Rights Committee and Toowomba Folk Club
Tel 07 4634 7933 or P O Box 707 707 or On 07 4620 9495

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I want a permanent job. I don’t want people. I’m dying to get a new job.

Statistics from the early pages of the book paint a bleak picture. For increasing numbers of Australians, this is a disappearing reality. It is rapidly disappearing in the manufacturing sector. The Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCUFA) recently marked the passing of another part of this world with the publication of “a collection of stories told by retrenched workers about their lives and work at Felix Carpets in Braybrook, Melbourne.”

Finding the Threads is a slim but beautifully produced and brightly illustrated volume that gives truly remarkable access to the feelings of the workers who, after years of hard, dusty, noisy work at the Felix factory, found themselves on the hard, dusty, noisy work at the Feltex factory, found themselves on the street and looking for “jobs” of the Howard variety. Despite the best efforts of the TCUFA to place the 165 retrenched workers in suitable jobs, 12 months after less than half are happy with their current job or the hours they work per week.

Statistics from the early pages of the book paint a bleak picture. “From 1986 to 2001 Textile, Clothing and Footwear (TCF) employment levels have halved from 116,000 to 58,500.” “Full time employment for women in the TCF Industry has declined by 47 per cent from 1985 to 2002.” “A University of Melbourne study found that among retrenched TCF workers one third will not find another job and for another third any job found will be only part time or casual.”

Finding the Threads gives voice to some of the people behind the chilling stats. “I want to get a job and meet people. I’m dying to get a new job. I want a permanent job. I don’t want a job where they only call me when they want me – I don’t want that kind of job. I have things to do. For me this is something that is missing – like somebody is missing from my family”, one of anonymous Felix workers noted about the reality of Howard’s “jobs boom.”

“My work at the moment is on call. So if I was sick I have no job”, another lamented.

For many of the workers, getting a job at a workplace like Felix meant getting a start in Australia. Recently arrived migrants would hear about their jobs regularly on offer at the factory throughout the 1970s and 80s and would decide to try their hand at operating the complex, cantankerous machinery: “I didn’t know how to even say good morning or how are you. Nothing. My friend was there but I was not put with her to teach me. They put me with another girl, but she was alright because she showed me how to do it in my language. So for me it was good. I was happy with that.”

Feltex, like many other Australian factories, was a veritable United Nations where the real work of building a multicultural society was carried out. “You know we had a table for our group. We talked about my country, their country, everything. I think I learned a little bit about their countries when I was there.”

Of course, there was a darker side to work at Feltex. Alongside the fond memories of camping trips, the exchange of food, the yarns and practical jokes there is a record of some of the horrendous injuries suffered by the workers. “Safety has never been done to stop something happening … In 1986, in the cutting section we had a channel of metal 17mm wide and two and a half metres long. We had to step on the part to fit the wool on to. It was very dangerous and you had to do this while the machine was running … I’ve been complaining previously to put some board across but they said it was okay. I slipped in. I had oily shoes and my foot got caught in there. I lost my toe. So on the same day, before the inspectors were coming they put a board on each machine.”

And there was the strike in 2001 to protect conditions from a company attack in the form of a new enterprise agreement. “When we did go out on strike, it was all these women who were forty something at the time, who stood in front of the trucks and did these things that they would never, never have done in their lives.”

The reality of police horses, management threats and attacks from the bosses’ media is eloquently described. So is the bitter-sweet feeling of returning to work victorious, alongside the scabs that had ignored the strikers’ pleas for unity.

“It is hard to imagine a book giving a truer picture of what it means for workers when global capital determines fatter profits can be made elsewhere.”

Finding the Threads is a valuable contribution to the record of the rapidly changing nature of working life in Australia.

Finding the Threads, by Tricia Bowen, published by Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia, pp 65, $15 ($p&p $2.50) (See advertisement below for purchase details.)

Finding the Threads $15 (p&p $2.50)

A collection of stories by retrenched workers about their lives and work at Felix Carpets in Braybrook, Melbourne. First published by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union. Well illustrated with pictures of some of the workers involved in their struggle. (See Book Review this page)

What are Trade Unions? $4 (p&p $1)

Outlines the history and origins of the trade union movement and their role in modern capitalist society and in socialist society.

Brother Bill McKie by Phillip Bonosky

Tells the dramatic and courageous story of how workers built trade union organisation at Ford’s River Rouge plant. Henry Ford boasted that he would never accept a union in his car-making factories and when he put up a $50,000 bounty for the task, workers were encouraged to strike. By 1945 the union had taken 80,000 workers. This is a collection of stories by retrenched workers about their lives and work at Felix Carpets in Braybrook, Melbourne. First published by the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union. Well illustrated with pictures of some of the workers involved in their struggle. (See Book Review this page)

The Communist Manifesto $3 (p&p $1) by Marx and Engels

This is the most popular outline of the policies and outlook of the Communists ever written. First published in 1848 it remains a definitive work and has sold and continues to be sold each year in tens of thousands of copies.

Cuba - beyond our dreams $20 (p&p $5) by Silvia Martinez Puementa

This edition was published in Australia and was sponsored by the CWU in solidarity with the Cuban Federation of Works. It deals with economics, government, elections, trade unions, women and youth, education, hospital services, science, culture, sports and many other topics. (420 pages including many illustrations)

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Class struggle

Anna Pha

How often do you hear comments such as “the class struggle is dead”, “the world has changed, class struggle is no longer relevant”? Or views expressed that the working class no longer exists – workers own shares, are called “contractors”, “self-employed”, or “partners” with their bosses? The world certainly looks different to you and me.

So what has changed?

The world has changed in that employers are demanding when they sign workers up on AWAs (individual contracts),

• lower hourly wage rates
• abolition of shift penalties
• cuts to public holidays
• loss of overtime rate
• no annual leave loading
• removal of redundancy payments
• shut the union out of the workplace and so on …

And what are unions demand- ing when they reject these AWAs and struggle to get these issues and conditions on the table and negotiate a collective agreement with them? Exactly the opposite.

Unions are fighting to hold on to existing conditions, to shorten excessive hours or increase very short hours, to secure permanent employment, for better redundancy provisions, union recognition and representation of workers, and so on.

These two sets of demands ref- lect the economic struggle between workers and employers. This lies at the heart of the class struggle.

The employers never let up in their drive to cut costs – in partic- ular the cost of labour – their aim being to maximise profits. Workers on their part, represented by their trade unions, are primarily con- cerned about income, working conditions and quality of life. They seek an adequate income to meet their living expenses and also desire to work in a safe environment, and enjoy a reasonable amount of leisure time as well as get enough sleep.

It is a continuous struggle for a bigger share of the cake – the cake that was made by the workers.

The working class still sells its labour power, its capacity to work, to a capitalist or some larger em- ployer. The capitalists (or capitalist) are frequently depicted as a tenacious union struggle is the the trade union movement, its level and its successes depend very much on the strength of the working class and its leadership.

The struggle over these issues inevitably leads to considerations of deeper political questions of the class issues and conditions fearfully depicted as acting on behalf of trades people or the working class in the hardest and most dangerous occupations. However, they also cover employees in a huge number of trades and professions, and in a vast range of workplaces.

WHAT IS A UNION?

Unions are frequently depicted as a tenacious union struggle is the trade union movement, its level and its successes depend very much on the strength of the working class and its leadership.

A union is a group of employees who work together to defend their rights and welfare. Unions negotiate in the workplace, and their role is to protect the rights of workers and to promote their interests. Unions can negotiate on behalf of the workers in the workplace, where the employer and the employees come to an agreement.

Unions are fighting to hold on to existing conditions, to shorten excessive hours or increase very short hours, to secure permanent employment, for better redundancy provisions, union recognition and representation of workers, and so on.

The world looks very different to what Marx was thinking in the mid-19th century. There are many forms of employment and even quasi-employment such as con- tractors where the worker is being exploited, where workers do not own the fruits of their labour and are not being paid the full value of their labour. In addition to the unsecured workers, there are other share hold- ing companies with large corporate investors in control.

Many workers own shares, some would have us believe they have joined the capitalist class. But in reality they still rely on wages income from an employer for their basic needs. The aim of the working class is to save for a rainy day and build a comfortable retirement. The story of the working class is promoted so as to tie workers financially to the profit-outcomes of their employer or other corporations and to blur class consciousness and suppress class struggle on the part of workers. It is also the big investors with additional capital for investment who do not gain control of these investments.

However, the struggle over these issues inevitably leads to considerations of deeper political questions of the class issues and conditions fearfully depicted as acting on behalf of trades people or the working class in the hardest and most dangerous occupations. However, they also cover employees in a huge number of trades and professions, and in a vast range of workplaces.