

Take back our party - MP

Jon Ford, WA Legislative Council member and Opposition spokesperson for the Fishing, Mines and Petroleum portfolios, made the following speech when opening the MUA National Council meeting at the Esplanade, Fremantle in October

I acknowledge the Noongar people on whose traditional lands we meet, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders, laws and customs.

I also acknowledge:

Paddy Crumlin, National Secretary

Mick Doleman, Deputy National Secretary

Ian Bray, Assistant National Secretary (ex WA Branch official)

Warren Smith, Assistant National Secretary

Chris Cain, WA Branch Secretary

The MUA's international guests from NZ, PNG and Timor Leste.

Delegates, members and guests,

I would like to congratulate Paddy Crumlin on being elected as International President of the International Transport Workers' Federation (on 13 August 2010). This is a significant achievement and reflects well on Paddy's personal dedication to the pursuit of better lives for working men and women in Australia and across the world.

Comrades thank you for the great honour of opening your National Council today.

I am Jon Ford, member of the WA Legislative Council and Opposition spokesperson for the Fishing, Mines and Petroleum portfolios. But foremost and importantly, I am a proud unionist and recognise that the opportunities that have been given to me and my family – particularly in education, health, a better than average wage throughout my life and legislation that seeks to protect us in our community and the workplace – are due not to the Captains of Industry, nor to

the speculators or shareholders but to the great heritage of the labour movement, the struggle and perseverance of workers and their leaders across the world continually striving for a better life for people, everywhere.

I do not accept that the Right of society is benevolent and committed to the same goals as us.

I do believe that the work you all do over the course of this Council and similar work by our comrades in our other unions is the very cornerstone of a fair society.

Have no doubt of the importance of the work you do today and every day.

Internationally we see the near tragedy of the 33 Chilean miners trapped beneath the earth for 69 days, and whilst the many reports focussed in on the rescue technology and the human interest stories of individual miners and their families, scant attention was given to the causes of the accident, the disempowerment of these workers and the government's clear failure to protect them.

In China we hear of another mining tragedy with the media reporting there is little hope that 11 missing miners survived a gas leak in a central Chinese coal mine that killed 26 of their colleagues. Yet the Australian media choose to report on how much bigger Twiggy's fortune has grown as a result of the strong Aussie dollar!

On October 4 this year in Hungary 600-700,000 cubic metres of red mud and water flooded three towns killing nine people and leaving a legacy that will haunt those people affected in nearby areas and along the Danube for generations to come.

In Pakistan over 18 million have been affected and nearly 1000 people reported dead as a result of a devastating flood which is still going on. Yet yesterday the *West Australian* newspaper reported that more Lamborghinis are sold in WA than any other state.

Reporting on the Gulf of Mexico disaster has all but stopped; can anybody remember the Montara disaster? A recent report into poverty by the Salvation Army revealing that 1 in 10 Australian children along with two million other Australians are living in poverty got page 9, after the Lamborghini story.

Recently a vessel with passengers was sailed holed and out of survey from Barrow Island to the port of Dampier. This barely cracked a mention despite determined efforts from your union and the State Opposition.

This is our struggle.

Delegates, six workers died in WA in the past six weeks, but this is deemed un-newsworthy. In 2010 why is it accepted that lives can be lost in the pursuit of profit?

For far too long the Australian Labor Party has focused on issues that have alienated its membership and the Australian public. Why? Is it because in our fear of being governed by the conservative parties of this nation we have compromised our ideals and our principles to protect political leaders who for some time have chosen to follow a popular agenda more designed to keep the ALP in power than serve its purpose?

I have no doubt that many senior members of the ALP at a state and national level find the option of handing over the progressive left agenda to parties like the Greens very attractive. They can go on delivering more of the same, not removing the abhorrent ABCC, dancing around human rights and climate change, arguing the pursuit of the dollar over all else while issues that are of importance to us and our memberships and our communities are relegated to a small number of seats to be discussed, to be given empathy but never implemented.

We have to take back our party, we have to be courageous and not be intimidated, stand our ground and say no more to unacceptable outcomes no matter what embarrassment or political consequence to the ALP. If we do not, we risk irrelevancy in the current Australian political paradigm.

At a recent union conference in Queensland Bob Hawke reminded delegates that it was the labour movement that allowed and supported the significant reforms to the Australian economy that have resulted in the generally soft landing from the horror and excess exposed in the current Global Financial Crisis.

Sydney Harbour's glorious waterfront is a direct result of union action to protect it from developers.

Unions led the fight for basic rights and minimum wages and conditions for Aboriginal people.

The AMC just down the road is the direct result of a combined union push to give WA the capacity to tender for work resulting from the resources boom and create more opportunities for jobs and training.

Comrades these are just a very small sample of the great achievements of our movement.

All of you share this proud legacy

And this goes on. We now see our leadership adopting strategies to grow our membership and regain the strength of our cause. Strategies such as Pit to Port and Solidarity emphasise a united approach to organising the workforce and growing the union movement as a whole.

Unions that go it alone cannot survive; unions that base their policies on membership to the detriment of other unions will only drive the community away. We must always remember unity is strength and unions such as the MUA have always supported these approaches in mind and action.

It is a fact that a union workplace is a safer workplace, that a union member is better paid than a non-union member.

Sell your message! It is a great message to sell!

Take back your party! We need your help to bring back policies of conviction and relevance to all Australians. Use the frustration and anger against the ALP to motivate your members to get involved both within your union, the party and their community. Take back your party!

Comrades thank you all again for your strength, commitment and dedication to a better society. I wish you all well in your deliberations and work within this council. Thank You.