

BULLETIN · ISSUE 10

International Women's Day is a time for worldwide solidarity. Women make up nearly half the work force and globally they face many of the same challenges. This IWD we are thinking of our comrades around the world who are improving labour conditions for all when they fight back against discrimination, harassment and abuse in their workplaces as well as lead the struggles for childcare, healthcare and equality. Read on for more.

As always we welcome your feedback at:

we.are.workers.solidarity@gmail.com

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2020



Nicky Minus

WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

TWU - Jetstar

On 19 February baggage handlers and ground staff at Jetstar took 24 hour strike action. A quarter of the airline's flights were cancelled, with many more rescheduled. As part of the action the TWU released survey figures showing 80% of Jetstar workers have been injured at work, and 90% wanted more hours. Unsurprisingly the dispute centres on safety and shifts.

ASU - Hobsons Bay City Council

Council workers at the Hobsons Bay City Council are continuing work bans including mowing sporting fields and reserves, processing court documents for fines, issuing planning infringement notices, and removing fallen branches or seaweed (except where public health is threatened). After nine months of negotiation, ASU members voted for a range of industrial action options in November, and the work bans have been in place ever since. Labour hire scabs have been used to clear seaweed on beaches, and the Council has previously threatened to lock out workers for taking protected action. The union is seeking a 7.5% pay increase over 3 years.

MUA - Toll

On 21 February Toll workers at Webb Dock in Melbourne stopped work for 24 hours. The MUA said the stoppage would be followed by an indefinite ban on all overtime. It has been reported that workers are frustrated that after 6 months of negotiation no agreement has been made. While the strike and bans only apply to workers in Melbourne, as Tasmanian wharfies are covered under a separate agreement, it will still have a considerable impact on Tasmanian imports and exports.

VAHPA - Healthscope

Workers at The Victorian Rehabilitation Centre, the North Eastern Rehabilitation Centre and the Knox Private Hospital have taken stop work action over the past few weeks. These centres

are all run by Healthscope, a private healthcare provider that operates 43 sites in Australia. VAHPA members are taking action as part of their fight for an agreement that doesn't reduce their conditions.

MUA - Hutchinson

Wharfies at Sydney's Port Botany terminal stopped work for 24 hours on 26 February after a collapse in bargaining last week. The strike followed a 24 hour stoppage in Brisbane on 21 February. The union is pursuing job security clauses and the introduction of income insurance fund Protect into their agreement. The stoppages will be combined with overtime bans.

International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) - International Container Terminal Services (ICTSI)

The ILWU which primarily represents dockworkers on the west coast of the USA has been hit with a potentially bankrupting fine of \$93.6 million USD. ICTSI claims it was unable to operate in Portland due to the ILWU's industrial action, in part over two mechanics' jobs which the ILWU believed should go to their members. The Port of Portland and the company operating the port employed the 2 mechanics, however ICTSI argued the action equated to an illegal secondary boycott against them. The Taft-Hartley Act bans solidarity actions or secondary boycotts in the USA. There are similar laws in Australia. Australian wharfies are not strangers to ICTSI either. Their subsidiary VICT was successful in having the MUA fined \$120,000 in the Supreme Court for contempt after officials broke an injunction order to speak to a community assembly during a dispute at Webb Dock in Melbourne in 2017.

University and College Union (UCU) - Higher education sector UK

Workers at 74 universities in the UK are taking 14 days of strike action in February and March, culminating with a week-long walkout from 9-13 March. This follows on from action at 60 universities in November and December. As well as strike days, union members will be working to rule, not covering for absent colleagues and refusing to reschedule lectures lost to strike action. The dispute centres on the universities' superannuation scheme, as well as wage increases, fewer jobs with short-term or zero-hours contracts and demanding stronger action to close the pay gap for women, ethnic minorities and workers with disabilities. The union has warned that if the dispute isn't resolved after this action, they will ballot members again to ensure they can take action until the end of the academic year.

BACKBONE OF OUR MOVEMENT



Libby Jamieson
Pronoun: she/her
ASU VicTas delegate, branch executive

How long have you been a union member?

Joined ASU in 2011, before that MEAA (13yrs).

Why did you join the union?

I grew up in an anti-union house. My father hated the unions which I could never understand, his work life could have been better if he was in a union. I was drawn to them because I could see the power of the solidarity of workers.

And I was a fan of Billy Bragg and the Red Wedge at the time because of Thatcher in 80's England. There is Power in the Union by Billy Bragg was a favourite song for a while there!

What's your best memory/story about being in the union movement?

The first time I went on strike. (it was the late 80's, I was 18) I was working at a cannery in country NSW and we were pulled off the job because a bloke got the sack. We all walked off the job in the morning and the factory ground to a halt. We sang songs in the canteen, he was reinstated a few hours later. It taught me about workers power and the gendered nature of work. He was a forklift driver and sat on his butt for hours watching women do all the hard work, standing in one spot for hours, hot and sticky from handling fruit.

What's the most important issue facing the union movement today?

Saving the equal pay campaign from the union busting of the coalition govt.

Why should people join their union?

So many reasons. To fight the union busting campaigns of the Federal Government. To collectively bargain for wages and working conditions. To be a part of national movement to fight for fairness for workers.

However, the hard work is not over yet. An international standard is only valuable when it can be leveraged to protect workers on the ground in real time. Each individual country must ratify the Convention, and unions are now running country-level campaigns to get their elected officials to vote in support of it. While governments have a specific process for ratification, that doesn't mean action needs to wait on the legal process.

Gender-based violence and harassment can be a hard issue for many workers to get their heads around – but strengthening union solidarity in the workplace around this and other OHS issues, and being good comrades, means working together to eliminate gender-based violence.

The message on the poster for the 2020 International Women's Day Rally? "Workers of the world unite to end violence against women!"

International Women's Day, as Union as May Day

ANALYSIS

Borne from the strike of women garment workers in capitalism's early and brutal ascendancy, International Women's Day (IWD) stands alongside May Day as a red letter date in workers' global resistance.

On 8 March 1908, thousands of mostly immigrant striking women marched through New York City. They were demanding better pay and the end to the grueling and dangerous conditions, which included long hours and sexual harassment. After three months on strike, they won.

The following year, the Socialist Party of America organised the first National Women's Day, bringing together thousands of women workers in New York City and across the country "to fight, to struggle, to right the wrong," as one banner declared. In 1910 the second International Conference of Socialist Working Women, held in Copenhagen, established International Women's Day to mark the victorious garment workers' strike and launch a campaign for women's right to vote – giving women's militancy more political force.

On 8 March 1911, a million women took the streets throughout Europe to demand their rights. In 1913 and 1914, they rallied against the oncoming imperialist war. On IWD 1917 in Russia, women textile workers in Petrograd

struck for "Peace, Land and Bread," bringing other workers with them. Five days later Czarism collapsed, and within that year Russian workers, led by the Bolshevik Party, brought the first, yet to be finished, socialist revolution to the world.

Australia's first IWD was held in Sydney, in 1928. With a global Depression looming, unemployment was rising and industrial disputes over cuts to wage and conditions were intense. This IWD called for equal pay, an 8-hour day for shop workers, the end to piecework, a basic wage for the unemployed and annual holiday on full pay.

Women are now nearly half of workforces throughout the world. Female workers experience the worst of what capitalism dishes out to its wage slaves – from sexual abuse to treacherous conditions and unequal pay. Still the mainspring of the family, they bring this social awareness into the workplace. They've pushed organised labour beyond "bread and butter" demands by bringing their needs into the movement – child-care, education, healthcare, discrimination, violence against women and global issues like war and international exploitation. This is especially true of women who are First Nation, immigrant, of colour, queer, trans and disabled.

In the past two years, rank-and-file women workers have driven union calls across Europe and Latin America for strikes on IWD. The slogan, "Non una di meno" ("Not one less," meaning that we must not lose another woman to violence) originated in Argentina and is now global. Italy's IWD strike in 2018 affected air, rail, road and public transport across the country. This year in Mexico, where 10 women are murdered every day, IWD's call is for a general strike against femicide and gender violence.

In March 2019, 111 years after the garment sisters' victory, Chemist Warehouse workers struck over similar conditions and demands. Immigrant women were prominent leaders on the 24/7 picket lines and after just 16 days, they won. This was an inspiring reminder that "strong unions need women," as the union slogan says.

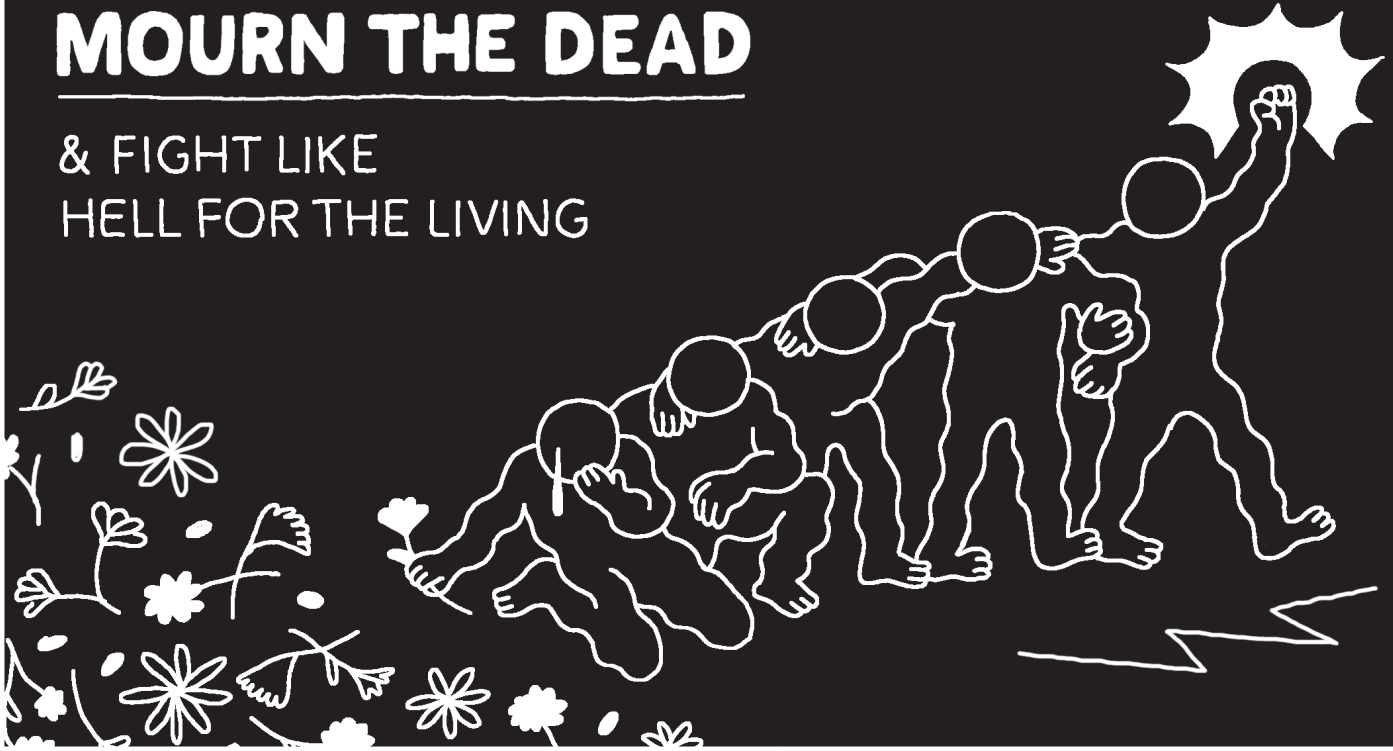
Corporates can splash their branding of purple, green and white across computer screens and elaborate luncheon celebrations all they want, but they can't co-opt this day. International Women's Day belongs to women workers and our unions. And our well-organised resistance won't stop until we toss our chains.

Debbie Brennan

Community member of the United Workers Union and organiser for Radical Women

MOURN THE DEAD

& FIGHT LIKE
HELL FOR THE LIVING



Workers Solidarity remembers the two workers who were killed in a recent train derailment on the XPT between Sydney and Melbourne. An investigation is ongoing but we know staff had warned about faults in the track in the weeks before the crash. Already this year 28 workers have died on the job in Australia. **Rest in peace and no more deaths!**

WHAT'S ON

Workers Solidarity General Meeting
(Third Thursday of every month)
Thursday 19th March 18:00
Archive Room, Victorian Trades Hall

Women's Rights at Work Festival
1st-8th March
unionwomen.org.au/wrawfest2020
for full list of events

International Women's Day Rally and March
Thursday 5 March 17:30-19:00
State Library of Victoria

'Pinkwashing Exposed' documentary screening
Friday 6 March 19:30
Siteworks, 33 Saxon Street, Brunswick
Free - tickets via Eventbrite

Rally: International Day Against Racism
Saturday 21 March 13:00-15:00
State Library of Victoria

Tools down - Friday Arvo Unionist Drinks
Cheap drinks for union members
16:00 - 19:00 every Friday
Common Rooms Bar, Victorian Trades Hall

Trans Pride March Melbourne
Sunday, 29 March 2020 from 12:00-14:00
State Library Victoria

Justice for Refugees: Palm Sunday Rally
14:00 Sunday 5 April
State Library of Victoria

**United We Stand -
Unions and Refugees Together**
Free workshop
13:30 - 17:30 Saturday 18 April
Victorian Trades Hall



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