In this issue we speak to a longtime member of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, get a rundown on the recent changes to laws regulating the use of new industrial chemicals in Australia and our comrades at the Toronto Airport Workers Council tell us about their experiences organizing in an industry turned upside down by the pandemic. Read on for more.

Questions? Comments? Email us at: we.are.workers.solidarity@gmail.com

SDA fails to act in the best interests of a member

The Fair Work Commission has rebuked the SDA over its poor management of a conflict of interest. The SDA failed to bring an unfair dismissal claim, or to advise the worker in question that they were not intending to bring the claim. The decision was made by the SDA in order to ensure the finalisation of redundancies before a creditors meeting to assist in finalising the sale of Harris Scarfe. The FWC said the union “had a clear conflict of interest” to act in the best interests of all remaining Harris Scarfe workers by ensuring the sale of the business, and the individual worker whose unfair dismissal claim was not made. Deputy President Saunders said – “Mr Griffin did nothing, and worse still, did not inform [the member] that the SDA has made a deliberate decision, contrary to her interests.” The FWC has granted the worker an extension to submit her unfair dismissal claim - hopefully with better representation than the SDA.

NTEU - University of Melbourne

Workers at the University of Melbourne have rejected a variation to their Enterprise Agreement. Over 8000 voted on the proposal which would have cut pay by 2.2% and reduce redundancy entitlements. 5,190 workers rejected the proposal. University bosses claim that without the pay cut, more workers will have to lose their jobs. University workers pointed out that the top 20 executives at the University of Melbourne “are on $20 million collectively”.

Hospo Workers - Hotel Northbridge, Perth

A worker at the Hotel Northbridge quit after her boss refused to pay 14 hours overtime she had worked doing extra cleaning in line with COVID-19 precautions. The employer demanded a justification of the overtime claim, and when provided with one replied “Get prepared to restructure the food and beverage team or temporarily shut down.” The worker in question quit, and four of her colleagues quit in solidarity. Subsequently, the negative publicity has

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chased the venue off social media. At the time of writing, it is unclear if the owed overtime is being pursued through other avenues or if it has subsequently been paid.

May 1 Movement/AMWU/ADU/ RTBU/ MUA – Bus Privatisation in NSW

While the Berejiklian government has delayed their controversial plan to privatise the state’s bus services, the May 1 Movement has brought together a coalition of unions including the RTBU, AMWU and MUA to fight against privatisation – whenever it happens. David Rabineau the State Secretary of the RTBU said “Unless the decision to privatise is reversed, commuters are going to find their local bus services and stops are on the chopping block in the very near future.” The May 1 Movement called a car convoy for 18 June which saw dozens of cars with flags and horns at Parliament House, as well as protests in front of MPs offices across Sydney.

ILWU ports shut down – Black Lives Matter

The ILWU dedicated a west-coast stopwork meeting and day of action to the Black Lives Matter movement. On June 19th, members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union shut down 29 ports on the west coast of the USA in solidarity with the ongoing protests following the murder of George Floyd. The ILWU has a radical, antiracist and militant history. It was one of the first unions in the USA to desegregate work gangs, protested against the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, protested the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, has refused to unload an Israeli-owned ship to protest the killing of Palestinians, and has previously shut down ports over murders committed by the police.

Healthcare workers (CUT) – France

French healthcare workers went on strike on June 16. 18,000 workers and their supporters demonstrated in Paris, with thousands marching in other large centres across the country. Unions have been critical of the government’s austerity policies since before the COVID-19 pandemic, but with highly positive public sentiment towards healthcare workers, workers mobilised to call for increased wages and a freeze on hospital closures and cuts to health services. One worker commented: “The French have shown their solidarity by banging on pots and pans and lighting candles but we have to go beyond that and remind the government that they need to raise wages.”

Victorian nurses & midwives occupy an intersection, 1986

Gabrielle Bennett, Australian Nursing & Midwifery Association Rank and file member, previous delegate

How long have you been a union member?

Over 40 years.

Why did you join the union?

I joined the union as a teenage student nurse, probably influenced by my family.

My father was involved in his union and dinner time discussion often involved union business. But as I began to understand more about the workplace, lack of equity and poor working conditions and wages I got more involved.

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

Returning to Melbourne in 1986 after a years world holiday I found thousands of nurses on the picket line. I had planned to get straight back to work as I was broke. But I remembered the poor conditions that prevented us from providing quality care to patients. Not to mention the low wages and antisocial hours. Nurses were leaving nursing work as they were earning more money working in shops. It wasn’t enough to pay the rent! As a sector dominated by women, the strike was seen as radical. Still the public were with us and it was an incredibly exciting time. But also challenging and harrowing.

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

That people are not joining unions! Conditions and wages have deteriorated for so many, but union membership has decreased. Unions need to move with the times. Society is very different now to how things were in 1986. We need to find new ways to engage and increase union membership.

Why should people join their union?

It’s the only way we are going to improve workers wages and conditions. This leads on to improving the health of the community as a whole, decreasing poverty, and then improving the well-being of a country and the world. Workers have immense power if we band together.
But NICNAS has given reassurances that audits will be undertaken to ensure companies can substantiate why they have placed a chemical in a particular category. According to a spokes-
person for the regulator: “The reduction in pre-market assessment of lower risk chemicals is balanced by a substantial increase in post-
market monitoring and enforcement activities.”

But there is a real fear that there will be insufficient audits, and that newer more complex compliance rules – such as “infringement notices” and “enforceable undertakings” – will reduce the level of prosecution of companies doing breaking the, in our view, much weaker law.

The position of the union movement throughout the process to overhaul the legislation was that while we hoped that reforms of NICNAS would improve the capability of the regulator to assess ‘existing chemicals’ and improve the uptake of control measures recommended for both ‘new’ and ‘existing’ chemicals, there remain serious concerns that the review has not al-
lowed for a thorough consideration of sound chemical management in Australia through the use of preventive, pro-active policies which an-
ticipate risk, and promote safer alternatives.

One of the main issues unions and public interest groups have had with the matrix itself, which we felt allowed classification of potentially very unsafe chemicals to be “low” or “medium” risk when it should have been “high” risk. We also believe the matrix does not adequately cover the potential risk of chemicals in nano form.

Reporting obligations will now apply to all 6 introduction categories – a small ‘win’ for interest groups have had is with the matrix introduced into Australia – they will be able to classify more chemicals as “very low risk”, meaning they can be introduced without public disclosure or first telling the regulator.

Industry must use a risk matrix (based on calculations of both exposure and hazard) to classify chemicals from “very low risk” to “high risk”. Using this matrix, companies will self-determine whether new chemicals should be exempted, reported or assessed.

The exempted category will apply to “very low risk” chemicals that can be introduced without telling the regulator beforehand. There will be no public record of these chemicals, but companies must keep records and, in some cases, submit a one-off declaration. The reported category will apply to “low risk” chemicals. Initially there will be no requirement to either keep records or report to the regulator. Chemicals categorised by the companies themselves to be “medium to high risk” will be assessed by the regulator prior to introduction and listed on a public database.

New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman infa-

duously defended globalization with the comment, “No, most of our political elite has not realised that the world is flat.” His beloved neoliberal globalization has indeed helped flatten our world as we are all reading this in some form of quarantine.

With lightning speed our lives came to a halt as COVID-19 arrived on planes from one country to another, disrupting the travel and work of air-
port workers the first domestic workers exposed to its horrors. At Toronto’s Pearson Airport (YZ), we have already lost 15 co-workers, all precarious workers, with hundreds of other confirmed contacts and infections.

Unbelievably, Canada’s Public Health Agency (PHAC) refuses to even report the total numbers of confirmed cases and deaths to protect the “privacy” of the affected corporations and its employees (no worker in history has ever demanded the right to know whether or not he or she is sick). For weeks, bureaucrats calmly assured us that all was under control, denying all work refusals, until posters of fundraising appeals for children of the deceased started sud-
tently appearing in our lunchrooms.

When directly confronted, PHAC dismiss-
ively stated that co-workers’ deaths are a “labour” issue for us to take up with our bosses, as their mandate is for the health of the travelling public only. To paraphrase Marie Antoinette, “Let the dead file a grievance’.

Airport’s Operations Devastated

At the same time, our airport’s operations have been reduced by around 85%, laying off tens of thousands. All agree YZS is devastated and will take years to recover. Only our most experienced and essential workers are left running YZZ at passenger levels not seen since the 1950s.

Still operating and in the centre of the action is the Toronto Airport Workers Council (TAWC), the collective voice of most of YZS’s largest Local unions and its 50,000 workers, union and non-union. We call TAWC a community union, as it does not do this work to attract members but can’t be bargained with just one employer through the traditional business union model.

In 25 years, TAWC has grown to include activists from across YZS, Canada’s largest workplace, from the most precarious contract workers through to customs officers. Simply put, if you believe in working-class solidarity, you have a place in TAWC.

TAWC’s activists, many of whom are YZS’s most experienced union representatives, stepped in to fill the role PHAC abandoned, using our solidarity network to alert YZS of any COVID-
related news to either report or to keep quiet.

In the end, it was TAWC and the media, not PHAC, that advised our community of its 13 deaths and TAWC that leads the fight for airport-wide standards.

This is just one part of TAWC’s COVID Recovery Strategy, drafted by our spokesperson, Steven Tufts, after an emergency meeting with representa-
tives from all of TAWC’s solidarity unions as soon as the crisis hit. This strategy is broken into three phases:

Short Term: Stabilise the Health and Safety of YYZ

We know that the rush to re-open YYZ was a threat to YYZ workers’ health and safety. We call for a virtual airport-wide COVID reporting system, installing plexiglass barriers at workstations as practical and other urgent needs.

Medium Term: Create a virtual Worker Resource Centre to help our co-work-

ers get the assistance and employ-

gement needed to adjust to future work.

Long Term: Using this downtime to collectively ‘retool’ YYZ for this new era, as well as fixing long-ignored issues and overdue im-

provements. Also, look for ways to create desperately needed jobs like installing plexiglass barriers at workstations as practical and other urgent needs. TAWC that leads the fight for airport-wide standards.

This wasn’t some wish list to be posted and ignored but the practical fixes that were already in place but abandoned by both levels of our Airport Authority, the STAA, which TAWC has been working with since this nightmare

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**WHAT'S ON**

**Workers Solidarity General Meeting**
Online via Zoom
Next meeting: Thursday 2nd July, 18:00.

**Does Australia Need Independence from the U.S.A?**
Online Zoom forum and discussion about the economic, political and military relationship between Australia and the U.S.A Hosted by Spirit of Eureka Saturday 4th July 16:00 - 17:30.

**Oppose Imperialism! No to U.S. Wars and Interventions!**
US Independence Day Rally
Organised by Spirit of Eureka Saturday 4th July 12pm, Outside the US Consulate, St Kilda road, Melbourne.

**Defend the Right to Protest - Free the Refugees**
Join the protest outside the front of court calling to defend the right to protest and to free the refugees who have been held in detention for 7 years. The protest will start from 8am, the court case (a mention) is scheduled for 9.30am. Organised by Refugee Action Collective (Victoria) Thursday 6th August 8:30am See Facebook event for more details.

**Car Protests are Safe, Detention Centres are Not**

**Donate to help Richie from the CFMEU pay his unfair ABCC fine**
Fundraiser organised by Victorian Trades Hall Council richie.raisely.com

**3CR Community Radio Annual Station Appeal**
Fundraising / subscriber campaign June 2020 3cr.org.au/donate

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