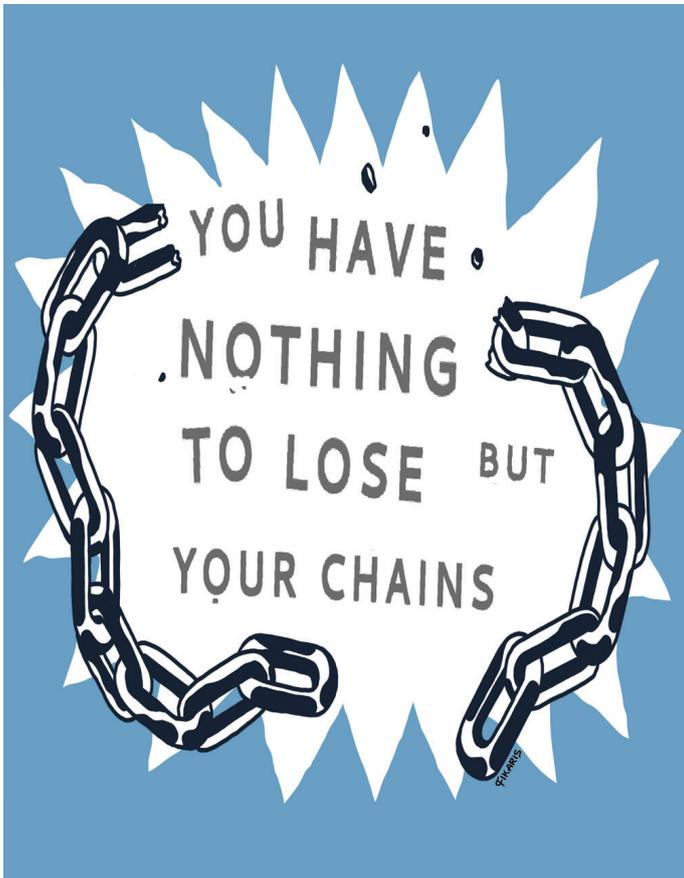


## BULLETIN · ISSUE 23

It's been over 4 weeks now since the tragic explosion in Beirut that killed hundreds and wounded and displaced thousands more. The blast was a result of government negligence and rampant safety violations. Could something similar happen here in Australia? And what is 'lockdown fatigue', the vague catchall being used to describe the restlessness of workers in this intense period of uncertainty? **Read on for more.**

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Michael Fikaris | @fikarisart

### WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

#### 54 years since the Wave Hill Walk-Off

This week was the 54th anniversary of the Wave Hill walk-off. On the August 23, 1966, Vincent Lingiari led 200 Indigenous stockmen and their families to walk off Wave Hill Cattle Station in the Northern Territory, protesting their work and pay conditions, and fighting for housing, water and services. What started out as a strike for pay and conditions grew into a fight for the return of land and the right to control it. See our article on this in Issue 7.

#### RAFFWU and Woolworths

RAFFWU represented Woolworths members in their campaign to secure July wage increases. Woolworths tried to change the agreement to avoid paying the wage increase until February. Now Woolworths Group has pulled their case and agreed to backpay the stolen wages. A \$35 million win for members.

#### UWU and Officeworks

Officeworks Warehouse members across NSW and Victoria stopped work for 24 hours on Monday August 24 in their fight to win job security and a fair wage increase. Officeworks has seen up to 28% increase in sales during COVID-19, but is offering a less than inflation wage offer of 2% without looking at any of the clauses to improve job security for workers.

#### TWU and Qantas

The TWU called for the head of Qantas Alan Joyce to resign after a further 2,500 ground staff jobs were put on notice.

Qantas announced on Tuesday that along with Jetstar it was reviewing whether to outsource its ground handling operations at the 10 Australian airports where this work is done in-house. The decision would outsource cleaning and transport services to a company with a reputation of wage theft and slashing workers' conditions. The TWU questioned the federal Government's bail out of the company saying that the original sacking of

6,000 jobs despite a \$500 million government corporate subsidy and JobKeeper payments and the new round of job cuts is a sell-out of loyal workers who had in some cases worked for the company for decades. The union is calling for the sacking of the CEO and for the government to take an equity share in the company.

#### MEAA and the Media Support Fund

MEAA has called for greater oversight of the Federal Government's regional media support fund. Last week Southern Cross Austereo, a recipient of \$10 million under the government's \$50 million package, announced 38 jobs would be lost. Another recipient, Australian Community Media, has shut down or closed multiple mastheads with the loss of an undetermined number of jobs.

Border Watch Newsgroup announced on Facebook that they had decided to shut operations. Their decision to close The Border Watch (Mount Gambier), South Eastern Times (Millicent) and The Pennant (Penola) will cost the jobs of 38 staff.

MEAA said "It seems that the government package is supporting shareholders and boardrooms rather than the working journalists... The government needs to reset its priorities to better serve audiences and the taxpayer."

#### MUA and WA Government

The MUA is calling on the WA Government to withdraw plans to build a new port and close Fremantle. The union went to the streets this week supported by other unions including the CFMEU, TWU, ETU, AWU in a call for the Fremantle Port to remain a working port.

#### United Services Union and the AFL

The United Services Union has lodged a formal dispute against the AFL accusing the league of imposing a major restructure and job cuts without consultation after AFL CEO Gillon McLachlan announced hundreds of jobs to go by November with up to half of all jobs impacted in some way. The union document to the Fair Work Commission alleges the AFL changed its redundancy policy in March without notifying workers, disadvantaging long serving staff. The union also criticised the AFL for seeking job cuts saying there is no justification for axing jobs in a matter of weeks when the AFL remains eligible for JobKeeper well into next year.

#### Jobkeeper

The government's JobKeeper 2.0 bill extends employer powers to reduce hours and adjust workers' duties and location of work, both for businesses still claiming wage subsidies and for "legacy employers" no longer on the payment but still suffering a 10% decline in revenue.

In the bill, legacy employers cannot reduce a worker's hours below 60% of their ordinary hours, must give workers seven days' notice of changes

and can't ask them to work for less than two hours on a day they are called to work.

Labor warned the government they shouldn't be extending the emergency industrial relations powers to businesses that had fully recovered.

#### USA

After video of a cop shooting Jacob Blake in the back at close range in front of his children was circulated, the WNBA Washington Mystics stepped onto the court wearing handmade shirts that read 'Jacob Blake' with 7 bloody bullet holes in the back just before the league postponed their games that night. Shortly after, key players in the NBA signaled they would not play their scheduled game and could possibly sit out the rest of the season in the first strike of its kind in the sports world.

After two days the strike was ended with the promise of a social justice coalition comprised of players and lawmakers. While it lasted, the strike sent shockwaves and fear through the sports ownership and follows a building pattern of protests led by black athletes.

August 14th marked four years since quarterback Colin Kaepernick first took a knee during the national anthem in protest of police brutality.

## BACKBONE OF OUR MOVEMENT



**Dani**  
RTBU, Women's Advocate

**How long have you been a union member?**

Three years.

**Why did you join the union?**

I honestly didn't know much about unions before I started in public transport. I joined initially because I knew that it would mean that I would have support if I needed it.

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

I went to my first RTBUWomen meeting in October 2018, and it lit a fire in my belly. Participating in the Anna Stewart Memorial Project has definitely been a highlight. The opportunity to see the inner workings of my union and others was educational and empowering. I definitely recommend it for women keen to be more involved in their union and networking with the union sisterhood.

Our union's very public protected actions during our EBA negotiations were also quite the talking point in the last year. I love the energy of a vocal rally in the loading bay at Trades Hall!

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

The increasing restrictions on union activities. The more our rights to organise and rally are limited, the more our rights as workers will be eroded.

On top of that, the current pandemic has really shone a light on the additional unpaid workload of women workers and the hidden gender pay gap created by insecure work. By strengthening the rights and conditions of our most vulnerable workers, we strengthen our union movement as a whole.

**Why should people join their union?**

Because we are stronger in numbers, workers supporting workers.



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BULLETIN**

[workerssolidarity.org.au](http://workerssolidarity.org.au)

# Explosion in Lebanon – could it happen here?

## OHS MATTERS

On the evening of August 4, a fire in what is believed to be a fireworks factory, led to a small explosion in the port area of Beirut, Lebanon. Subsequently there was a massive explosion of a warehouse holding 2,700 metric tonnes of ammonium nitrate.

Ammonium nitrate is a common fertilizing agent – and is also the main ingredient in some types of explosives. The chemical had been stored in the warehouse since 2014 when it had been seized from a Russian cargo ship.

It has been reported that Lebanese customs officials wrote letters to the judiciary at least six times from 2014 to 2017, seeking guidance on how to dispose of the highly combustible material – reportedly not getting any response. Because of the nature of the materials they were unable to act. Other reports are that customs officials did not follow proper procedures: they simply kept resending the same letters in response to the judge’s request for more information.

The explosion, which was felt in Cyprus 290km away, was devastating: the blast wave levelled buildings near the port and where the warehouse was is now a 140m wide crater. It caused extensive damage over much of the rest of the capital, home to two million people. Hospitals were quickly overwhelmed. At least 200 people were killed and over 5,000 injured. 300,000 people were left temporarily homeless and collective losses may reach AUD \$14.6 – 20bn. Tragically, a number of first responders sent to put out the initial fire and did not know of the ticking time bomb in the warehouse, were killed.

The political fallout has been huge: the blast led to protests in Lebanon’s streets, and on August 10 Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced the resignation of the Hezbollah government – but it is staying on in caretaker mode. The ‘transparent’ investigation promised by President Michel Aoun continues, however, and more than 20 people have been arrested.

The fallout for the country: COVID-19 cases have more than doubled since the explosion; there are daily electricity blackouts; food prices have risen by 80 percent and the national currency has fallen by the same percentage.

It is clear that the store of ammonium nitrate was a ticking time bomb – whether its continued storage in such a built-up area was due to ineptitude, red tape, apathy, corruption or greed – or possibly a combination of all of these – may never be known.

But could such a calamity happen in Australia?

Because of our size and space, and lower population density it’s unlikely that a similar explosion would lead to such devastation. But we have had several very serious toxic fires due either illegal dumping or storing of hazardous and dangerous chemicals which have had devastating effects on the local environment and probably the health of people living in the vicinity.

In early August WorkSafe Victoria charged a Harkness man with endangering people at a workplace following a 2018 chemical fire at Tottenham.

Graham Leslie White, 59, was charged under sections 32 (“Reckless endangerment”) and 26 of the OHS Act for recklessly engaging in conduct that placed or may have placed people in danger of serious injury and for failing to ensure that the Tottenham site, and the means of entering and leaving it, were safe and without risks to health. These were among 26 new charges White was facing under the OHS Act and sections 31 (“Persons required to take precautions”) and 31C (“Aggravated offence”) of the State Dangerous Goods Act 1985.

The reckless endangerment and aggravated offence provisions both carry maximum penalties for individuals of five years’ jail or 1,800 penalty units (almost \$300,000). This is one of the few prosecutions ever taken by WorkSafe under s32 of the Act.

The charges relate to four warehouses at which it is alleged that dangerous goods were stored – the Tottenham warehouse and three sites in

**“The full extent of the environmental damage is not known: within hours of the fire, dead fish, eels, birds & other wildlife were washing up on the banks of nearby Stony Creek.”**

Campbellfield. WorkSafe also charged his company, Bradbury Industrial Services, with multiple breaches of the OHS and Dangerous Goods Act. The company is now in liquidation.

In the hours after the fire began, authorities issued a “community advice warning” for eleven suburbs in Melbourne’s west, with residents being warned to close windows and doors. Residents were still reporting health issues three weeks after the fire. Firefighters were also concerned about the long-term effects of exposure to toxic chemicals.

The full extent of the environmental damage is not known: within hours of the fire, dead fish, eels, birds and other wildlife were washing up on the banks of nearby Stony Creek. The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) warned people not to eat fish from the creek or the lower Yarra River, and not to enter, put their hands into or allow dogs into the creek. The EPA continues to monitor the water and sediment of Stony Creek for pollutants including phenol, BTEX, PFAS, acetone and butanone. The clean-up, costing millions of dollars, has not yet been completed.

After some investigations, WorkSafe discovered that the warehouse was not registered to store dangerous chemicals. After this WorkSafe inspected other industrial properties within the area, and “found dozens ... that also failed to comply with the [Dangerous Goods] Act”. The Environment Protection Authority also investigated links between the owner of the site, the lessee, and other properties in the north of Melbourne, where industrial chemicals were found to be stored illegally.

White is not the only rogue in the business. Earlier this month an e-waste recycling centre in Melbourne’s north erupted in a massive toxic blaze. The Campbellfield premises of MRI e-cycle solutions, one of Victoria’s e-waste operators, caught fire early on the morning August 9 and burned for more than a day. The explosions were heard kilometres away. The components of batteries and electronics stored at the site are toxic to health and the environment, especially when damaged or exposed to fire. Toxic smoke billowed over Melbourne’s northern suburbs.

The company had been under investigation by the EPA for allegedly amassing an illicit stockpile of batteries and electronic equipment. The regulator had barred the company in March from accepting any more waste, and had issued it with a formal warning threatening to suspend MRI’s license to continue operating the facility.

The EPA later said that smoke impacts were limited to nearby industrial areas and its monitoring had not detect any effects on surrounding residential areas including at Roxburgh Park. EPA took samples in nearby Foden Reserve, Merlynston Creek and Jack Roper Lake, and warned the public to avoid contact with the water in those areas. Hume City Council also put up warning signs to

alert members of the public using the parks. So yes, a similar thing could, and has happened in Melbourne – and no doubt our other capital cities. The same issues arise: companies breaking the law, regulators failing to regulate and then scrambling to clean up and minimise the fallout – both literal and political.

These companies should have the book thrown at them, and their owners be imprisoned. Too often the outcome has been companies going into liquidation and never paying a cent, and owners getting off scot free, ready to start up another company. Hopefully this time Mr White will go to jail.



The Worker’s Solidarity Bulletin is a living document written to reflect what is happening within the labour movement, here in Australia and across the world. The producers of this publication, and participants in Workers Solidarity more broadly, don’t necessarily endorse or agree with all of the views in this publication. This is a place for debate and discussion.

See something you disagree with? Not seeing something you think we should talk about?

Shoot us a line with your thoughts at [workers.solidarity@gmail.com](mailto:workers.solidarity@gmail.com)

## Lockdown Fatigue

### ANALYSIS

The media and the politicians are telling us that many of us in Melbourne, Victoria are experiencing lockdown fatigue. That the people that are defying the lockdown laws are crazy or antisocial. They are telling us to hang in there, that we are all in this together.

There is another way to understand this fatigue.

It is not fatigue. It is desperation and fear. Economic collapse is frightening. It is frightening for workers, particularly casuals and people on visas, it is frightening for small business owners and it is frightening for sole traders, it is frightening for people who are unemployed and at the mercy of government decrees.

Some politicians are trying to extend their State of Emergency powers. People that have been ruined by economic collapse are fighting back, but in the absence of any meaningful leadership from the working class, they are fighting on economic demands that will only benefit one or other side of the capitalists.

Some of these people are saying that the lockdown laws are not necessary. They are saying this because they need business to start up again. So that they can work, and so that they can eat, and so that they can pay their bills and their rent. Amongst these people protesting the use of power by the state to shut everything down, there are organised fascists.

**“It looks like the choices for workers are to either defend the State and the increasing emergency powers, or to defend those fighting against this, among them, the fascists. But there is another way”**

But medical experts say that the lockdown is necessary to stop COVID-19 from spreading. In Victoria, based on the daily numbers, the lockdown seems to be working. However, from a social point of view, it is not working. Because people are losing their jobs and their livelihoods, they are scared and they are pushing back.

It looks like the choices for workers are to either defend the State and the increasing emergency powers, or to defend those fighting against this, amongst them, the fascists.

This is no choice for workers. There is another way.

We must demand a living income for all. So that even if people cannot go to work, they can still eat, and they can still pay their bills and their rent. They can still access medical services in their home, they can still take care of their mental health while we are in isolation, and they can still pay for in home entertainment and activities, while we are locked down.

A living income for all includes small business owners and sole traders. These people are not workers, but they are still oppressed by the ruling class. If we don't defend all the layers of society oppressed by the ruling class and as a result ruined by the economic crisis, then we risk driving them into the hands of the fascists.

The working class is the only force in society strong enough to fight back against the ruling class, but we must lead the fight for a society without oppression and exploitation, not just for a better deal for workers. Our power comes from our collective, productive role in the economy. We make all of the food, power all of the transport, move goods from ships onto land, onto trucks and into warehouses, we care for the sick, educate the children, keep the roads clean, build essential infrastructure, and make the energy that keeps everything going. If we stop, there is nothing they can do. The managers and the bosses cannot run the entire hospital network, they cannot drive all of the public transport, they cannot unload all of the ships, they cannot teach all of the children, they cannot build all of the essential infrastructure, they cannot build and maintain the roads.

How we use this power, and for what, is a matter of political decisions and organisation. We must be organised, we must have democratic, open discussions in our unions about how we use our power and how we will defend ourselves against the bosses when they attack us back.

We demand: A living income for all. Free health-care for all. Secure housing for all.

We must organise around these demands. We must take collective, cross-industry action in defence of these demands.

We must fight. If we don't, we will lose.



Mary Leunig

August 28 was Equal Pay Day. It takes a woman an extra 59 days to be paid the same as a man in the same field. That's an extra 2 months of work. This year's Equal Pay Day comes at a time of economic recession that is hitting women particularly hard - losing jobs and hours at a faster rate than men. This is a union issue.

**Workers Solidarity General Meeting  
(Online via Zoom)**

Third Thursday of every month  
Next meeting TBA  
workerssolidarity.org.au

**Webinar: José Ramos-Horta & Bernard Collaery.  
East Timor, oil & secret prosecutions**

Hosted by The Australia Institute  
Wednesday 2nd September 11:00 - 12:00  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Webinar: Stand up for the ABC**

In the lead-up to the October budget three speakers offer their perspectives on the national public broadcaster.  
Wednesday 2nd September 14:00 - 16:00  
www.abcfriends.org.au

**How to Talk About Climate Change: Online Talk**

With Dr Rebecca Huntley. SEARCH event co-hosted by New International Bookstore  
Wednesday 2nd September 18:00  
Register at nibs.org.au

**Why Black Lives Matter to Jewish Australians  
(Online Panel)**

Hosted by Caulfield Shule  
Wednesday 2nd September 20:00 - 21:15  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Film screening: Pills, Powder & Smoke:  
inside the bloody war on drugs.**

A documentary by Antony Lowenstein.  
Thursday September 3rd, 18:30 libraries.  
hobsonsabay.vic.gov.au

**Victorian Socialists - What we stand for &  
how you can get involved**

Saturday 5th September 16:00 - 17:30  
search 'facebook' for more information

**'Revolution on Film' with filmmaker Liam  
Ward - Online event**

Hosted by Socialist Alternative  
Sunday 6th September 18:00 - 20:00  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Online Forum: Raising the age of criminal  
responsibility**

Hosted by Sydney Ideas. In Australia, children as young as 10 can be arrested by police and put in prison. Forum discussion.  
Monday 7th September, from midday  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Forum: How lockdowns make the case for a  
basic income**

Economist Guy Standing expands on his research on a Universal Basic Income.  
Tuesday 8th September 18:00  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Reading group: Fighting fascism - How to  
struggle & how to win**

Discussion of a text by Klara Zetkin. Hosted by Campaign Against Racism and Fascism  
Tuesday 8th September, 18:00  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Forum: Our refugee movement in a pandemic**

Panel to discuss the fast emerging opportunities for refugee-led advocacy amidst pandemic and recession  
Thursday 10th September 18:00  
refugeevoices.org.au

**Public Meeting: Responding to the Covid 19  
housing crisis**

Rental Stress, evictions, and public housing sell offs  
Hosted by Victorian Socialists  
Saturday 12th September 14:00 - 15:30  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Media Spokesperson Training (Online)**

Four-day training program combining theory and practical media interview simulations  
Organised by Australian Progress  
21-22 September  
australianprogress.org.au

**Build Our Future: Climate Justice & Jobs  
National Day of Action.**

First Nations communities, School Strikers and young people, workers and unions are coming together to demand that our Government funds our future not gas.  
25 September - Nation wide  
schoolstrike4climate.com/buildourfuture

**Online Rally: Defend the Right to Protest,  
Free the Refugees**

Timed to coincide with landmark court case's contest mention  
Refugee Action Collective (Victoria)  
Tuesday 29th September 08:30am  
search 'facebook' for more information

**Voice. Treaty. Truth. Advocacy Course**

Two day Online Course Organised by the First Nations Workers Alliance and the ACTU  
Running regularly from now until November  
atui.org.au/voice-treaty-truth-advocacy-course