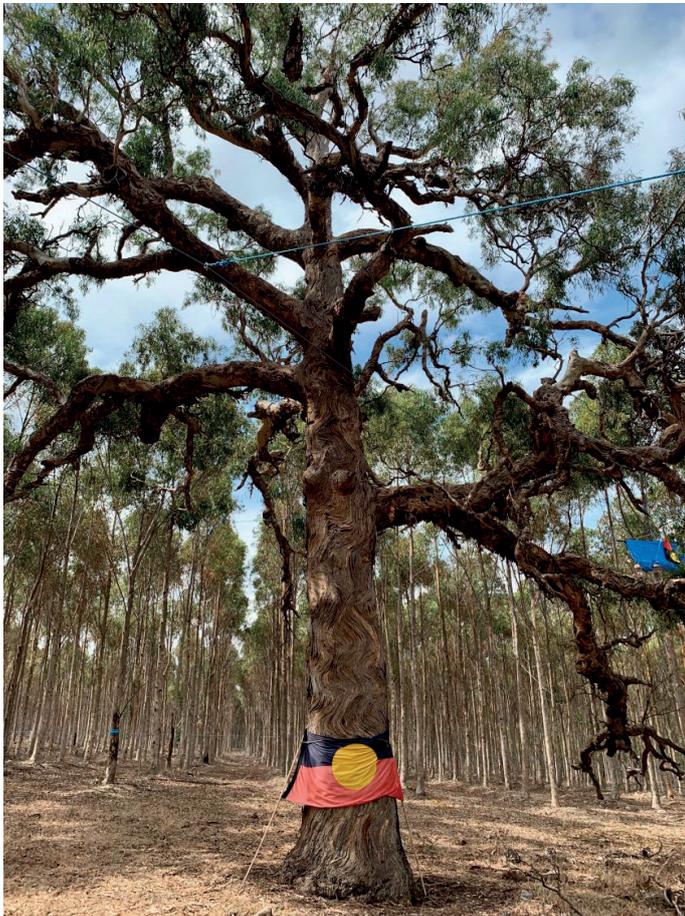


WORKERS SOLIDARITY

BULLETIN · ISSUE 27

On Monday, Victorians reported their first day of no new COVID-19 infections since June. While the public and media were celebrating, the Andrews government took the opportunity to begin forcibly removing land protectors camped at the Djab Wurrung Embassy and cut down the sacred Directions Tree. We stand in solidarity with the Djab Wurrung people in their time of mourning and call for an end to this destruction.

we.are.workers.solidarity@gmail.com



WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

CFMMEU vs Probuild at Curtin University

A 23 year old man died on a Probuild construction site at Curtin University in Perth, on 14 October. Another two men were injured. The WA CFMMEU State Secretary, Mick Buchan said that the industrial murder was a result of Probuild's cost-cutting and race to the bottom on health and safety standards, by using inadequate materials on the build.

A mass rally of workers at WA parliament last week, was organised by the WA CFMEU and endorsed by other unions. The rally had 1,000s of workers calling for the introduction of industrial manslaughter laws in WA. The McGowan Labor Government had promised the laws but after four long years, the laws were finally passed on the Wednesday after the rally.

MEAA vs Australian Federal Police

The MEAA has welcomed the decision of the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions to abandon possible charges against ABC journalist Dan Oakes.

Oakes, along with colleague Sam Clark, were the targets of the Australian Federal Police raid on the ABC over their investigation into allegations of war crimes committed by Australian soldiers, dubbed The Afghan Files.

ETU Takes on Suicide Prevention

The ETU Vic branch acknowledges that sadly, the construction and electrical industries experiences some of the highest rates of suicide in the country. They are running a course on how to save a life - the Suicide Prevention & Awareness webinar - which is being run through the union's, The Centre for U.

TWU and QANTAS

Hundreds of QANTAS TWU members protested at the company's AGM, held last week. The Qantas board so far has stayed silent on the deplorable outsourcing of thousands of loyal workers. The union organised an "alternative AGM" at Melbourne Airport, in a parody display of how QANTAS treats its workers, compared with the massive profits its making in the middle of a recession.

Indonesia

Tens of thousands of Indonesians protested in the first weeks of October against the introduction of an 'omnibus' jobs creation bill introduced under the cover of covid. Workers claim the new laws will harm workers and the environment.

The bill makes significant changes to Indonesia's labour regulations. It abolishes the sectoral minimum wage, in favour of minimums set by regional governors. It will reduce severance pay to a maximum of 19 months' salary, depending on how long the employee has had the job. Previously the maximum was 32 months pay. Allowable overtime will be increased to a maximum of four hours in one day and 18 hours a week. Businesses will only be required to give workers one day off a week instead of two.

Restrictions on outsourcing have also been reduced, as have restrictions on the jobs in which expatriates can work. The law also relaxes environmental standards, only forcing businesses to file an environmental impact analysis if their projects are considered high risk.

The protesters have demanded the government revoke the bill and international unions and human rights groups have condemned it. Rallies took place around the country. Hundreds were arrested in Jakarta. Hundreds more have been held in strikes and protests in other cities this week.

BACKBONE OF OUR MOVEMENT



Lourdes Garcia Larqué
Rank and file member and sub-branch Women's Officer of the AEU, Victoria

How long have you been a union member?

I have been an AEU member since I was a student-teacher in 2013, before that I have also been a union organiser in what is now the United Workers Union

Why did you join the union?

Since I moved to Australia from Mexico I was able to see how organised workers campaigned for health and safety in industries that back in my country are incredibly dangerous or precarious like construction, mining or sanitation. Years ago, I worked at what used to be the Miscellaneous Worker Union, campaigning with the cleaners. As soon as I became a teacher I just knew I had to be a union member.

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

I had participated in a number of solidarity actions with other unions, but unfortunately I am disappointed that my union does not fight hard enough for some issues that matter for education workers. However I think the work sub branches do can be amazing and very empowering for members.

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

I think the lawfare against unions that penalises solidarity, which is the backbone of the union movement.

Why should people join their union?

Because there is strength in collective action. During the pandemic it became even

clearer to me that workers need to be in their union to protect their jobs and conditions. In my workplace we made a big deal of health and safety when the Department of Education has sent us back to school when it was still clearly unsafe. I have also campaigned to guarantee flexibility for people with caring duties at home; these rights exists, but it is up to organised workers to make sure their entitlements are respected.

"I am almost 63 years old and was wondering what weight an employer can ask me to lift on a regular daily basis? I'm working in a job where the employer says that 20 kgs is the "standard weight". But in reality we're often told to lift and carry bags that are closer to 25 kgs, and this can be up to 50 times a day. I feel this is too heavy for someone my age. After I raised this, the site supervisor gave us a demonstration on safe lifting techniques, and put some posters up in the lunchroom."

OHS MATTERS

Our OHS laws, except in some very limited circumstances (exposure to lead) do not discriminate in terms of age or sex. Further, there is no weight limit in the laws, but this is simply because lifting just 5 kg can be hazardous manual handling and cause a musculo-skeletal injury. This is irrespective of both the age and the sex of the worker. The employer has a legal duty under the regulations to identify and then eliminate, as far as practicable, any manual handling that is hazardous and likely to cause an injury.

Part 3.1 of the regulations: Hazardous Manual Handling require the employer to undertake a risk identification and assess all the factors involved in the manual handling tasks in the workplace to identify whether there are risks. There are many factors in addition to or apart from weight which must be taken into account. If any such risks are identified, then the employer must take measures, according to the hierarchy of control in the regulations, to eliminate/minimise those risks.

The definition of hazardous manual handling in the regs is that if the work involves one or more of the following:

- repetitive or sustained application of force;
- sustained awkward posture;
- repetitive movement;
- application of high force involving a single or repetitive use of force that it would be reasonable



to expect that a person in the workforce may have difficulty undertaking;

- exposure to sustained vibration;
- manual handling of live persons or animals;
- unstable or unbalanced loads or loads which are difficult to grasp or hold

Lifting 20 kgs regularly is certainly hazardous – lifting 25 kgs 50 times each day is even more hazardous. If there are other factors, such as twisting or bending this increases the risk of you and others sustaining a musculoskeletal injury.

This is a summary of regulation 27 – Control of risk, which sets out the ‘hierarchy’ of control:

- 1 The employer must eliminate any risk of a musculoskeletal disorder associated with hazardous manual handling so far as is reasonably practicable; or
- 2 If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, then reduce it so far as is reasonably practicable by –
 - a. altering--
 - i. the workplace layout, or
 - ii. the workplace environment, including heat, cold and vibration; or
 - iii. the systems of work which involve hazardous manual handling; or
 - b. changing the things used in the hazardous manual handling; or
 - c. using mechanical aids; or
 - d. any combining any of the risk control measures referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c).

If the employer has complied with sub-regulations (1) & (2), and risk remains, the employer must reduce that risk, so far as is reasonably practicable by using information, instruction or training.

The employer may ONLY rely solely or primarily on information, training or supervision IF none of the measures in subregulation (2) are reasonably practicable

This means the employer must not use information (including ‘safe lifting’ posters), instruction or training of workers in manual handling techniques as the sole or primary means of controlling risks UNLESS it is not ‘reasonably practicable’ to eliminating/controlling the risk using any of the ways described in (1) & (2) above.

If people keep lifting these weights, then someone will be hurt. Hopefully you work on a unionised site: go find your elected health and safety rep. The HSR can take the matter up with the employer and follow up with other action if necessary. If you don’t have an HSR, contact the union for assistance – both with this matter, but also to elect and train an HSR.

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

Health Care in Australia

ANALYSIS

Australia has a good health care system when compared to most of the world. It provides access to primary health services, hospitals and medication for the vast majority of its citizens at no or low cost. This is achieved through Medicare, the PBS and the public hospital system. It is far better than the American situation where health care is almost fully profit-driven, wildly expensive and completely out of reach of the poor and uninsured. However Australia’s claim to have a universal health care system is not true, when many vital services are only available privately – dental care and mental health care being two of the most obvious examples.

The system is also marred by lack of funding, an over-complicated organisational structure, a profit driven private sector as well as a parasitic health insurance industry. Together this has created a situation where Australia’s health system is underfunded, overstretched and so fragile that it is always on the verge of collapse. And during the 6 months of the pandemic, nothing has been done to strengthen it.

There is no doubt that public hospitals would have failed to meet the demand placed upon them by the coronavirus pandemic if it had affected Australia to anything like the extent that it has affected most of the rest of the world. What can be done to address these problems before the next health crisis hits?

Money in Healthcare

Funding in healthcare is never enough, because the ideologies of “user-pays” and privatisation are so dominant. For many years hospitals have been struggling to keep up with demand – waiting lists for non-critical surgery (elective surgery) have

been an election issue over and over again. New treatments and newly developed medical machines and equipment are expensive. People who work in hospitals need to be paid decent wages. In a medical setting, buildings and infrastructure must be maintained at a high standard if they are to fulfil their function.

The Australian health system divided not only horizontally by the involvement of different levels of government, it is also split vertically into private and public sectors. There are private service providers in all sectors, and then there is primary health care: most GPs are self-employed, pharmacies, which include small businesses to national chain stores, private hospitals and allied health professionals; health professionals that are not part of the medical, dental or nursing professions.

The health system of Australia can never be completely uncoupled from Australian capitalism or world capitalism. We are not in a position to research, develop and produce our own medications and modern medical equipment.

However it is possible to reduce the amount of money taken out of the system as profit. A much greater provision of free services and the abolition of private hospitals would reduce the opportunities for profit-making as well as greatly shrinking the role of private health insurance. We need healthcare for people not profit.

“Australia’s health system is underfunded, overstretched and so fragile that it is always on the verge of collapse. And during the 6 months of the pandemic, nothing has been done to strengthen it.”

Administration

On one of their web pages the Department of Health writes that “The Australian, state and territory, and local governments share responsibility for running our health system.” This statement is followed by more than thirty bullet points that detail which level of government is responsible for what and which are shared responsibilities between multiple levels of government.

The fact that the health system is administered and funded by multiple layers of government leads to excessive bureaucracy and inefficiencies. The shared areas of responsibility, particularly the joint funding of public hospital services, leads to time wasting arguments between the different states and territories and the federal government. A single centralised department that covers the funding and administration of all areas of the Australian health system would be more effective and responsive to the changing health care needs of Australia’s population.

None of this has been fixed in the 6-months of lockdown to manage COVID

Although politicians argued that the reason the lockdown measures were necessary was because an influx of sick people with COVID would over-burden the healthcare system, nothing has been done to resolve the bureaucratic quagmire that runs the system, or the lack of funds invested in the system, or the billions of dollars removed from the system

“The lockdown has stopped the spread of COVID, but we can’t be locked down forever. There is no plan for a third or fourth wave, if they come. There is no plan for another, different pandemic, if one comes.”

in the form of profits. The lockdown has stopped the spread of COVID, but we can’t be locked down forever. There is no plan for a third or fourth wave, if they come. There is no plan for another, different pandemic, if one comes.

Many of these shortcomings could easily be remedied by greatly increased funding to existing services, particularly hospitals and mental health services, and by extending the range of free services with dental health as a priority. This would enable the health system to prioritise the provision of health care according to patients’ needs rather than their ability to pay and would greatly reduce the influence of the health insurance industry.

**Defend and Extend Medicare Now!
Free Healthcare for All!
Free Dental and Mental Healthcare for All!**



This is an excerpt from a piece written by Sissy Eileen Austin, a Djab Wurrung woman and a member of the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria.

The full version appears in the Guardian. Read it online on their website.

On Monday our biggest nightmare became a cold hard reality. The sounds of chainsaws, excessive police force, the crying of children. We felt defeated as an element of our culturally significant landscape was torn away, taken, gone forever. We are the last generation to ever be in the powerful presence of our directions tree on Djab Wurrung country.

It has been 862 days since the establishment of the Djab Wurrung heritage protection embassy to protect sacred women’s country from the Victorian government’s Western Highway duplication project in the state’s western district.

Country is who we are, country is what guides us and what grounds us in all that we do as First Nations people. This particular 12km stretch, where the expansion of a road between Melbourne and Adelaide is planned, holds a deep intimate connection for Djab Wurrung women, with birthing trees that are more than 800 years old. Thousands of generations of Djab Wurrung babies have been born in this country.

Over the last two years Djab Wurrung people have risen to protect these trees. Our determination to rise has been fuelled by the deep power our country holds. That power is one that guards our spirit and our soul when coming up against the coloniser. We are seeing right now the weakness of the Traditional Owner Settlement Act and other associated legislations and incorporated organisations that are creating tidal waves of pain and loss for our people.

Victoria claims to be progressive in its relationship with Aboriginal people and communities. There are conflicting agendas here, one where the government is supporting the progression of the treaty and the other where they’re comfortable in proceeding with the irreversible destruction of significant cultural heritage.

Our hearts are broken, our trust in the “progressive” Andrews government is broken. We are experiencing a loss like no other, with the restrictions of Covid-19 further restraining us from coming together to mourn.

In an attempt to make it through each painful hour of the current days, I am listening deeply to Uncle Kutcha’s song Is This What We Deserve with tears rolling down my face. The lyrics ring so true: “We’ve been here since time began, our ancestors’ footprints buried in the sand, we are but caretakers of this ancient land, but you still don’t understand.” How many more generations of my people will find themselves like us, crying to the songs written by generations before us?

Workers Solidarity General Meeting (Online via Zoom)

Third Thursday of every month
 Next meeting Nov 12, 18:00 AEDT
workerssolidarity.org.au

Virtual Organising Conference

Australian Trade Union Institute
 16 – 20 November
 Visit voc2020.atui.org.au

Eureka Rebellion Anniversary (Online event)

Saturday 28th November
 More information at spiritofeureka.org

Free Palestine Online Forum

Organised by International League of People's Struggle.

28 Oct, 19:30 – 21:00 AEDT

For the zoom link please email: ilps@ilpsaustralia.com

Speakers:

- **Muayad Ali** – Free Palestine
- **Hilmi Dabbagh** – BDS Australia
 BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions)

In October 2020, the ILPS (International League of Peoples' Struggle) is holding the month-long campaign – “Global Solidarity with the Palestinian People”

What is Causing Food Insecurity in Africa's Sahel Region?

Organised by the Freedom Socialist Party
 4 November, 19:00 AEDT

Search facebook for registration and more details

Speakers:

- **Eyassu Tesfamariam** is an Eritrean Australian activist and motivational speaker who supports the grassroots Yiakl (Enough) movement, which is mobilising for change in his country of birth. Committed to building multiracial solidarity, he is a passionate community organiser. He is a member of the United Workers Union.

- **Alison Thorne** is the managing editor of the Freedom Socialist Organiser. She is a socialist feminist and eco-socialist, who is also a workplace delegate with the Community and Public Sector Union.

Legitimising Repression: Anti-Terror Legislation in the Philippines and Australia

Organised by the Philippines Australia Solidarity Association, PASA invites you to join their discussion on The Philippines Anti-Terror Act 2020 and the proposed amendment to Australia's ASIO Bill 2020.

6 Nov 19:00 AEDT

Online via facebook live

Speakers:

- **Neri (Bong) Colmenares** – A human rights lawyer and activist. President of National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL) in the Philippines. Public prosecutor in Impeachment hearings of several politicians. Former member of the House of Representatives for 9 years. Lecturer in various colleges and universities including the University of Melbourne.

- **Teodoro (Teddy) Casiño** – A writer, journalist and politician. He was a member of the House of Representatives from 2004 to 2013. Teddy has co-authored 4 laws passed in the Congress that have benefited the poor and marginalised sectors of society including the Tax Relief Act of 2009 and the Anti-Torture Act of 2009.

- **Robert (Rob) Stary** – Australian criminal defence lawyer with more than 30 years of experience as a criminal lawyer. Rob was an Accredited Criminal lawyer specialist in 1995. Rob was also awarded the Law Institutes Paul Baker Human Rights Award in 2005.