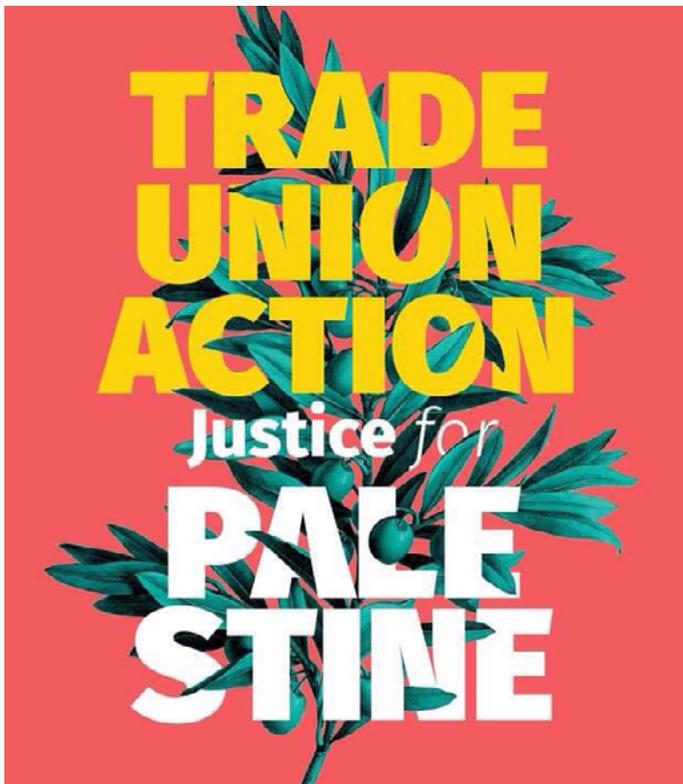




BULLETIN · ISSUE 36

Halfway through 2021, Australia remains woefully behind on vaccinations. What has gone wrong in the supply and roll-out stages? Meanwhile, the world has watched the recent escalation in the asymmetrical conflict between Israel and Palestine. During this time, a number of unions world-wide have shown solidarity and support for the Palestinian struggle. Workers In Palestine, a group of militant trade unionists, have called for an international coalition of workers to join them to take action. **Read on for more.**

we.are.workers.solidarity@gmail.com



Workers in Palestine

WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

ETU versus Downer Group

More than 70 ETU members at the Williamstown Railyard, together with their comrades from other unions on site have struck a blow against casualisation, reaching an in-principle agreement on 22 June, that brings a long-running dispute to an end. The workers are employed by Downer Group to work on the Evolution Rail consortium's High Capacity Metro Trains project. They have been negotiating with Downer Group over their next EBA since February 2020.

The main sticking point in negotiations had been the issue of casualisation. There are currently 32 fixed-term workers on contracts plus several casual workers at the site. Over the last year, 15 full-time workers have left the project, but none of the contract workers have been converted to full-time.

The unions demanded a clause in the EBA that converts fixed-term workers to full timers to address the issue. Downer initially refused to accept this claim, but the unions dug in for a fight. In reaching an in-principle agreement with the company, ETU members have won an important battle in the fight against casualisation in the rail industry.

UWU versus General Mills

Workers endorsed a deal on 25 June, that will see all their conditions maintained, a wage increase of almost 9% over three years back paid to Feb 11, a \$1500 bonus and protection for all labour hire casuals and contractors who participated in the strike.

When 90 General Mills UWU members started this strike on June 4, workers were facing

an average pay rise of 1.5%, cuts to their conditions and new clauses that could see them forced to work more over the weekend. The fight at General Mills was a fight against wage stagnation with yet another company that made huge profits from their essential workers during COVID only to turn around and try to slash their conditions.

Workers stood strong against this global corporate giant. They called on United Workers Union members across the country to take action to support their fight, raised \$35,000 from the community, and held solidarity rallies at the strike. After three weeks on strike, standing strong, United Workers Union workers won!

MUA versus Svitzer

The MUA protested shipping company, Svitzer, on Monday 28 June, for turning its back on Geelong workers in favour of Fly in/ Fly out workers from North West Australia on significantly reduced wages.

Svitzer Australia is owned by highly profitable multinational shipping conglomerate Maersk, the largest container ship and supply vessel operator in the world. Despite being on the cusp of finalising a new workplace agreement earlier this year, Svitzer management decided to use the COVID crisis to introduce 30 new claims that would slash the rights, conditions, and job security of their Australian workforce.

TWU versus NSW Government

Food delivery riders were joined by the Transport Workers Union on 16 June to protest NSW's proposed new safety laws, which will force them to rush, work longer hours and take more risks, as they call for the state government to take "real action" that does not target the most vulnerable. The new law comes after a spate of worker deaths over a short period last year, including four in Sydney, put renewed scrutiny on the industry and its working conditions.

Under the proposed laws, food delivery platforms would need to provide workers with protective equipment and induction training. They would also see NSW Police issue identification numbers to workers, who would be penalised for "repeated unsafe practices".

According to a recent TWU poll of over 200 riders, 84 per cent believe the proposed laws will increase pressure on them, while two thirds said they won't prevent deaths

or injuries. Over half of the respondents have been fined by police while working as a delivery rider, with almost three quarters saying pressure to pay fines made them work more dangerously, including longer hours and rushing to complete more deliveries. Meanwhile, two thirds said they struggled to pay for rent, bills and food.

The union and riders withdrew from the taskforce in April over the "continued silencing" of concerns about "exploitation, unrealistic time pressures and the need for regulation to provide workers with minimum pay and protections".

ASU/FAAA/TWU versus QANTAS

The High Court turned down an application by Qantas workers and their unions on 25 June, to hear an appeal over the airline's abuse of the JobKeeper wage subsidy to pocket workers' entitlements.

A Federal Court ruling is pending on the outsourcing of 2,000 Qantas ground workers. Several serious safety breaches have been reported in Qantas' supply chain since the groundwork was outsourced, including a damaged plane which took off some weeks ago, with passengers on board after being hit by a baggage vehicle.

MUA versus Fremantle Ports Authority

The MUA has accused the Fremantle Port Authority of significantly escalating an industrial dispute at the Kwinana Bulk Terminal by standing down workers undertaking legally protected industrial action.

The MUA has said that Fremantle Ports' heavy-handed response to limited forms of lawful industrial action had resulted in the Kwinana terminal effectively shutting down for five hours a day, which is already causing delays that have resulted in an iron ore bulk carrier being diverted to another port.

The dispute follows a forensic audit which found more than 100 Fremantle Ports workers had been underpaid more than \$3.5 million across the last six years, with some short-changed more than \$10,000 a year.

That audit was undertaken in the context of revelations of alleged corruption by a former Fremantle Ports manager who is accused of funnelling more than \$5 million from the WA Government-owned port operator to offshore bank accounts.

Workers' solidarity with Palestine

Workers around the world have stood in solidarity with Palestinians by blockading giant freight carrier ZIM. ZIM's ships are the tenth largest freight carrier in the world. They declared a record profit of \$524m for 2020. Originally, ZIM's was an Israeli state-owned company but was fully privatised in 2004 when the Israel company bought out the remaining state-owned shares. The Israel Company was owned by the billionaire Ofer family who are one of 20 families that control 25% of Israel's exchange-listed companies.

The first action to occur by workers in response to the recent onslaught on Gaza were dockworkers in the Port of Livorno in Northern Italy. The workers organised by Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), an independent trade union organization representing workers in the main commercial port of Tuscany in northern Italy, refused to load a ship that they believed might be carrying weapons destined for Israel. The USB workers issued a statement that they no longer intended to load weapons that were destined to kill civilians, in Gaza or elsewhere.

On 18 May, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (Satawu), issued a statement calling on dockworkers in Durban to refuse to offload a ZIM Shanghai ship in support of the Palestinian struggle. About 100 protestors protested the docking of a Zim's ship on 21 May.

A Block the Boat action occurred at the Port of Oakland on 5 June, when hundreds of activists maintained a picket across six gates of the Port of Oakland to picket the unloading of a ZIM's ship. When the ILWU Local 10 refused to cross the picket line, the ship was successfully turned around and unable to unload. The President of the ILWU Local 10 Trent Willis stated "Workers' struggle is worldwide. Worker power, and economic power, is real power. It's more powerful than those bombs Israel is dropping."

Iran petrochemical strike

Workers at oil and gas projects and petrochemical plants have gone on strike on 24 June, in South Pars, in Tehran and across Iran as part of coordinated action called Strike Campaign 1400, referring to the current year in the Iranian calendar.

Because independent unions are not recognized by the government and are systematically

restricted, the wildcat strike action is coordinated by workers' strike committees. The immediate demands of the strike are for better wages, adequate social security, and better living conditions. The strike committees have issued a clear set of wage demands for each employment category and have said that work will resume if employers meet the demands.

The workers are employed by subcontracting companies who provide labour for development projects in the oil and gas fields. The subcontractors act as a buffer between workers and the oil and gas companies and try to control workers' demands by employing them on rolling short term contracts. The shift cycle is 20 days on and 10 days off. During the 20-day working period, workers are housed on site in communal dormitories. Most are technicians and tradesmen such as scaffolders, fitters, welders, and electricians.

The strike mirrors a month-long wave of strike action by more than 10,000 workers that took place in the South Pars oil and gas fields in August last year. The 2020 strike action forced employers to improve wages and living conditions.





Vanessa Born, member of the Australian Services Union (ASU)

How long have you been a union member?

10 years.

Why did you join the union?

I joined during the Equal Pay Campaign. My dad had always been a union member, but my feminist course at Uni made me think that unions only really helped out men. When an ASU organiser came to visit my workplace for the first time during the Equal Pay Campaign, I asked if I could come and listen to the meeting, and I suddenly realised that unions were for women too, so I joined immediately.

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

I have a few... but the walkouts of Women's Health West workers was fantastic. Women's organisations have for too long expected women to sacrifice themselves and their own health for their work, not even realising that it is these kinds of scenarios that leave women vulnerable to the types of social disadvantage we are apparently meant to be fighting against. It was great to see the organiser, Kristy Lee, so supportive and encouraging of these workers to stand up for their rights and for the health of the organisation overall. It was an inspiration to all of us in that sector!

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

The need for independence and militancy. Our unions have become overly focused on negotiating 'on our behalf', focusing on forming relationships with parliamentarians and bureaucrats and having small meetings and negotiations with them. They have also become overly focused on their most conservative members, and not always supportive

of their more militant members. There is enough research to show that unions are powerful when members are powerful, not when organisers are, and especially not when organisers are on a professional path to parliament. Unions should not be places that are dependent on and protective of their relationships with governments, and then too nervous to risk that. What we are seeing too often, is unions talking members down from taking action, and telling them 'oh, we're talking with the government on that issue, watch this space'. Or, even more so, workers not even knowing who their union is, because organisers have not gone down to a workplace and made sure there is a delegate there who is supported and able to build their workplace. We need an evidence-based approach to unionism, and not reinventing of the wheel based on some people's biases, professional aspirations and bizarre obsessions with Obama administration campaigns that have nothing to do with the history of successful unionism.

Why should people join their union?

Because workplace rights are a system wide issue and we need power in numbers to fight successfully for those rights.



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COVID-19 Vaccinations: Where are Things at?

OHS MATTERS

In early April, the Morrison government had been boasting that everyone in Australia would receive the first of the two vaccination doses, at least, by October of this year.

The staged vaccine rollout of the two vaccines that Australia currently has available, the AstraZeneca and the Pfizer, commenced on 22 February this year, organised through the Federal government. High risk, frontline workers and older or vulnerable Australians were to get immunized first. The rollout was supposedly proceeding well: those workers and members of the community in Phase 1a receiving the vaccines before anyone else.

These, as identified by the Federal Government, were:

- Quarantine and border workers.
- Hospital staff (both clinical and non-clinical) who work in emergency departments, intensive care units, COVID and suspected COVID wards.
- Ambulance staff, paramedics and other emergency service workers.
- Staff in GP respiratory clinics and COVID-19 testing facilities.
- Staff working in COVID-19 vaccination clinics.
- Aged care and disability care staff.
- Aged care and disability care residents.

The Federal government has responsibility for the private aged and disability sector, the state governments for those in the public sector.

But by mid-April, the wheels seemed to have fallen off the rollout wagon, with Scottie from marketing dropping the much-repeated October target. There is now no target at all! The vaccine rollout is in shambles. Now, at the end of June, and after a serious community outbreak in Melbourne of two variants of concern, the Delta and Kappa strains, we are still scrambling to get large numbers vaccinated. Now NSW is in the same boat.

There is a general and widespread criticism for a lack of transparency but here are just some of the things that have gone wrong.

Problems with Supply

According to the government, Europe was preventing the export of the supplies of the AstraZeneca vaccine ordered by Australia. Italy was reported to have prevented about 200,000 doses from being shipped, and the federal government said the EU was blocking further shipments of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Strangely though, we haven't heard this excuse for a couple of months.

The Labor Opposition, and some experts in the area criticised the Australian government from the beginning, saying it made a serious mistake in putting almost all of its eggs in one basket. It ordered only 10 million Pfizer vaccines initially to be delivered over one year, but a total of 53.8 million doses of the AstraZeneca: 3 million imported and the rest manufactured here. This is not what other countries such as the UK and the USA did.

While there appear to be no major problems with the Pfizer vaccine - other than very limited supplies and increases not expected until much later in the year - the AstraZeneca vaccine has now been shown to have an extremely serious, albeit very rare, side effect. It's now beyond doubt that there is a correlation with a very rare type of blood clot.

The blood clots that are of particular concern are cerebral venous sinus thromboses (CVST), which occur in the veins draining blood from the brain. These can be fatal. This type of clot has also occurred in the abdomen (splanchnic vein thrombosis, or SVT) and in arteries in some who have received the vaccine. In most of the patients identified so far, these clots occurred in combination with thrombocytopenia, a condition characterised by abnormally low numbers of platelets and sometimes bleeding. This is counter-intuitive as, usually, having

“Australia has just 4.7 per cent of our population fully vaccinated (23.9 per cent has received the first dose).”

low platelets creates an increased risk of heavy bleeding, because it makes it harder for blood to clot.

In other words, these are not the ‘usual’ blood clots (eg DVTs) and when diagnosed are not treated in the same way nor with the same medications.

The estimation is that between one in 100,000 and one in 250,000 people receiving the first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine have developed these clots. Some have died. In Australia, there have been 60 cases identified, 37 confirmed, 23 probable. This has grown from just two cases by mid-April.

In early April, quite some time after many other countries around the world, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advised that the Pfizer vaccine was preferred over the AstraZeneca vaccine for people aged under 50 years. However, it also advised that even in adults aged under 50 years where the benefits of protection against COVID-19 are likely to outweigh the risks of the side effect, the AstraZeneca vaccine can be used. But with the cases increasing, and two people in their 50s dying as a result of the clots, ATAGI last week amended its advice: the AstraZeneca vaccine is no longer recommended for people aged under 60.

The federal government has now expanded access to Pfizer to all Australians aged 40 to 59.

The decision puts further strain on the federal government’s vaccine rollout which will now have to rely even more heavily on imported Pfizer doses. Millions of doses

of AstraZeneca, previously the backbone of the rollout plan, are being produced in Melbourne, but Australia does not have the capacity to build mRNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna.

Problems with the Rollout

Initially, the Pfizer vaccine should have been directed to under 50 yr-old workers in Phase 1a. It has emerged, however, that the rollout has been badly mishandled:

- Aged care residents we’re, and continue to be, vaccinated with Pfizer; and dozens of facilities somehow ‘missed out’ altogether.
- Many workers in Phase 1a have not only not received either of the vaccines, but have no idea when they might be getting it. In April a Queensland doctor and nurse treating suspected COVID patients were diagnosed with COVID themselves. Neither had been vaccinated.

Just after Easter the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Vic Branch) released the findings of a survey it ran amongst some of its members. The survey revealed that 86 per cent of Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Vic Branch) private aged care members – nurses and personal care workers – had not received a vaccination. Of those who had been vaccinated, most had become tired of waiting for the promise of a workplace vaccination and had sought to arrange their own vaccination through their private GP.

Even worse, media reports at the same time found that many aged care and disability workers were “scrambling to source their own COVID-19 jabs”.

As a result, the ANMF (Vic branch) called on the Federal Morrison Government, responsible for the vaccination of private aged care residents and staff across the country, to urgently ask the Andrews Government to take on the vaccination program for the Phase 1a private aged care workforce.

ANMF (Vic Branch) Secretary Lisa Fitzpatrick said ‘The Morrison Government must prioritise vaccination of private aged care staff at work given the hundreds of resident deaths in this sector last year. Their hands-off approach ignores the brutal aged care lessons we learned during last year’s COVID-19 outbreak.’ Ms Fitzpatrick said, “By outsourcing their responsibility under the

guise of choice, the Morrison Government has abandoned private aged care nurses, personal care workers and other staff.”

The union says that the Victorian Andrews Government, which is responsible for the vaccination of public aged care residents and staff, is using an effective combination of outreach services and vaccinated with many having received their second dose.

It has since been revealed that the companies contracted by the federal government to vaccinate the aged care homes did not include staff, who were told to organise it themselves with their own GP. Even more shocking is that the federal government has no idea the extent of immunization in aged and disability sector workers.

And yet according to the ABC’s Dr Norman Swan, there should have been adequate numbers of vaccines for all people in Phase 1a to be vaccinated over a short period.

The Morrison government has ordered 20 or 30 million more doses of Pfizer, and the company has reportedly said that there is no issue with supply – although there must be some issue as Australia is not getting them fast enough.

Earlier this year, some were asking: why does it matter anyway? We had negligible numbers of infections in the country, and assuming Australia’s quarantine program identifies incoming travellers with COVID-19, we had community infections under control. Why shouldn’t countries undergoing their third and even fourth wave of COVID, with huge numbers of infections and deaths get priority when it comes to vaccinations?

Well, people’s views changed quickly when a more virulent strain of the virus ‘leaked’ out of a quarantine hotel in Adelaide. A returning traveller who caught COVID in the hotel, came home to Melbourne and triggered our current outbreak – and lockdown number 4.

There had been an issue of “vaccine hesitancy” – but no more in Victoria, with queues and booking sites and hotlines clogged with those of us wanting that first shot. Despite this, due to supply issues, we remain at appalling low rates. Australia has just 4.7 per cent of our population fully vaccinated (23.9 per cent has received the first dose). Compare this to Italy and the UK: 29.1 per cent and 48.4 per cent respectively, fully vaccinated. The Australian government has well and truly f*#&ed up!

In any case, the question was no longer simply one of health. It is a political and economic one. Even if we were not at risk of high levels of infection, as countries vaccinate their people, the world will open up to travel and commerce, and we won’t be able to. We will be isolated: unable to travel to visit family or go on holiday – and the many millions of tourists and international students on whom so many of our jobs rely, will not be able to come to Australia either. So, the shambles must be sorted out – the sooner the better.

Workers Solidarity with Palestine

ANALYSIS

On 10 May Israel Defence Forces’ began mass bombardment of the Gaza Strip, in retaliation for Hamas and other groups’ rocket fire towards Israel.

This new chapter in the Palestinians’ struggle began on 6 May in Sheikh Jarrah, a Palestinian neighbourhood in occupied East Jerusalem. Six Palestinian families who have lived in Sheikh Jarrah for decades are under imminent threat of eviction from their homes which are to be annexed by Israeli-Jewish settlers, who routinely subject them to harassment and violence. Israel’s Supreme Court was to decide on confiscating the homes under Israeli occupation law in early May. On 6 May, hundreds of Palestinians filled the streets in Sheikh Jarrah to protest the evictions and were met with brutal violence from settlers and Israeli security forces who stormed the nearby al-Aqsa Mosque during prayers a day later. The Palestinians’ mass defiance forced Israel’s Attorney-General to intervene and delay the Supreme Court’s ruling.

Virtually all Western media coverage has depicted Hamas’ rocket fire from Gaza as coming before Israel’s bombings, because Hamas had issued Israel with an ultimatum to vacate al-Aqsa in the West Bank and Sheikh

Jarrah shortly before commencing rocket fire. However, this omits that Netanyahu's government had carried out a bombing in northern Gaza beforehand, killing dozens of people.

On May 21st, Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem yet again, dispersing Palestinians with tear gas, stun grenades and smoke bombs, only hours after an "unconditional ceasefire" was reached between Israel and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. This violence illustrates how little the ceasefire already offers to Palestinians in both the Occupied Territories and Gaza, what the normality of apartheid, siege and state repression means for them and why they will continue to need urgent global solidarity from workers and unionists.

In early June, the Palestinian Authority rejected an offer from Israel for 1 million doses of coronavirus vaccines, hours after the deal was made. Israel had said that the vaccines "will expire soon", when in actual fact, the vaccines were too close the expiration date to be distributed, and according to the Palestinian Authority, did not meet health officials' standards.

Against Israel's aggressive war of annihilation against the Palestinians, and the COVID pandemic raging in one of the world's most densely populated areas, Palestinian workers organised a general strike. The strike, which was supported by Palestinian trade unions, was observed across the Occupied Territory and Israel.

The Palestinian people need the solidarity of trade unionists and workers around the world. There is an international call for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions, not of Israel's people, but of the Israeli state as a way to end its regime of apartheid and occupation.

Workers in Palestine, a new group of militant Palestinian workers and unionists have been calling for solidarity actions with the Palestinian struggle, including boycotting of the Histadrut, Israel's so-called trade union federation that in fact sustains the status-quo discrimination and apartheid between Arab-Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli workers. [Follow their call to action on the Workers in Palestine facebook page.](#)

WHAT'S ON

Workers Solidarity General Meeting (Online via Zoom)

Third Thursday of every month
Next meeting 8 July, 6PM
workerssolidarity.org.au

Rally: Back to the Streets for Palestine

Organised by Free Palestine
Melbourne
Sat 3 July 1pm, State Library Victoria
[check facebook for more event info](#)

Book Launch: China Panic - Australia's Alternative to Paranoia and Pandering, by David Brophy

Co-hosted by New International Bookshop and Solidarity
Tue 15 July 6:30pm
Kathleen Syme Library
251 Faraday St, Carlton VIC
[Check facebook for more event info](#)

Book Launch: The Fight for Workers' Power by Tom Bramble and Mick Armstrong

Hosted by Socialist Alternative
Tue 15 July 6pm
Wayside Inn
446 City Road, South Melbourne
[Check facebook for more event info](#)

Rally: 8 Years of Harm

Organised by Adelaide Vigil For Manus and Nauru, Sun 18 July 2pm
Tartanyangga / Victoria Square, Adelaide
www.adelaidevigil.com

Rally: 8 Years No Freedom

Organised by Refugee Solidarity
Brisbane / Meanjin
Sun 18 July 12pm
Near BITA detention centre (TBC)
Pinkenba QLD
[Check facebook for more event info](#)

Panel: What Path to Peace with Justice in Palestine?

Hosted by Green Left
Saturday 3 July, 2PM
Boorloo Activist Centre, Perth
www.greenleft.org.au