

VIGILANCE

maritime
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bulletin

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For rank & file control of the MUA - Nationalise the maritime industry under workers' control

Issue 37, November 21, 2007

Vote Labor ahead of the Coalition - put Labor to the test

This Saturday November 24, it is essential that we all vote for Labor ahead of the Liberal and Nationals. Howard's government has to be replaced by a Rudd Labor government. Then can we put Labor to the test.

Kevin Rudd has promised time and again to abolish Howard's WorkChoices legislation. But the fact is, Rudd's new *Forward with Fairness* industrial relations policies leaves large parts of WorkChoices in place.

AWAs will be phased out over five years while allowing for other individual contracts. Howard's right to strike restrictions and mandatory secret ballots will stay. The powers of the Australian Building & Construction Commission will remain in one form or another.

Labor will not repeal all WorkChoices (unless forced to do so by strong union action). Labor will act in the interests of big business - and not of workers.

But the only way to convince people of this is to put Labor into office so they can see for themselves.

"The Labor Party will deceive and betray you, but you do not believe us . . . [so] we will go through the experience with you". This quote from Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky sums up this point.

Many workers see Labor as "their party" - but only the test of office can disprove that. That is why *Vigilance* calls for a vote for Labor ahead of the Coalition.

Ninety six WA CFMEU members face fines of up to \$28,600

October 24 saw the start of a landmark Federal Court hearing against 96 Western Australian construction workers. Charges brought by the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) mean that these workers face fines of up to \$28,600 each.

In February 2006 members of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union working on the Perth to Mandurah rail line project took industrial action after the union's elected health and safety representative was sacked.

Ninety two workers now face fines of up to \$22,000 each for allegedly breaking the Building and Construction Industry Act.

Eighty two face further fines of up to \$6600 for breaching an Industrial Commission anti-strike order.

Initially the ABCC brought charges against 107 workers, but has since dropped charges against eleven and downgraded them for another four.

The ABCC looked set to be scrapped by the Labor Party. This year's ALP National Conference voted to disband the ABCC should Labor win.

Labor has since caved in to corporate interests. It plans to retain the ABCC until 2010, when its powers will be transferred to a specialist division of Labor's planned Fair Work Australia agency.



Constructing Fear is a documentary about the ABCC and its attacks on workers' rights. Director: Joe Loh. 37 mins.
www.constructingfear.com.au

Rudd expels WA Construction union official from the ALP

On the recommendation of Kevin Rudd, construction union official Joe McDonald was expelled from the Labor Party on October 26.

McDonald is the assistant state secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) in Western Australia.

He has also appeared in recent Liberal election advertisements yelling "we're coming back".

McDonald was acquitted on October 25 of the first of six "trespass" charges on to various Perth building sites. Outside the court he told awaiting media that "John [Howard]'s gone but I'll be back".

The next day the Liberals released an internet advertisement with footage of McDonald calling a site manager a "fucking thieving parasite dog". This was all too much for Rudd who then moved for expulsion.

Rudd's expulsion of McDonald - just like the forced resignation from the ALP of Victorian Electrical Trades Union secretary Dean Mighell - is meant to show big business that "union bosses" do not control the ALP.

Labor PM Bob Hawke - the anti-worker "union boss"

The Liberals like to scare us about Labor governments controlled by "union bosses". Former Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke was a long-running president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). So how did workers fare under this "union boss"?

The Hawke years (1983-1991) saw workers real wages fall between 17% and 28% and a shift from wages to profits of over \$400 billion.

Promises to repeal Liberal anti-union laws were never acted upon, while militant unions were attacked. Union density fell from 50% to 40%.

The Accord - lower wages, higher profits

The rot began in 1983 when Hawke and the ACTU signed the Prices and Incomes Accord.

Workers were told that the Accord would increase workers' wages while it reformed the economy.

In reality the Accord slashed wages and working conditions and transformed the union movement into the enforcers of wage restraint. Union militancy was hobbled, delegate structures crumbled and union density plummeted.

Unions who refused to abide by the Accord and continued to fight for better wages and conditions were attacked and ultimately smashed.

The Builders Labourers Federation is wiped out

One such union was the militant Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), which continued to take industrial action to improve wages and conditions. These actions placed both the Accord and the Hawke Labor government under pressure.

McDonald was only doing his job - insisting on his right to enter building sites despite WA laws that have removed this right of entry.

McDonald should be defended for his actions - not expelled. The anti-right of entry laws that he broke are laws that Labor has vowed to repeal. If this is how Rudd treats militant, effective unionists before getting elected, it will only get worse once he wins office.

Labor and the bosses wanted to teach the unions a lesson. So in April 1986 the Federal, NSW and Victorian Labor governments deregistered the BLF.

Police were called to building sites and ordered BLF members to join rival unions. If they refused, they were sacked on the spot and escorted off site.

BLF officials were banned from sites, charged with trespass and on occasions jailed for 28 days.

The ACTU and "left-wing" building unions cut off all support for the BLF and organised a scabbing operation to break BLF pickets and to poach its members.

The BLF put up a valiant fight. But it could not withstand the combined police, Labor and ACTU onslaught.

Hawke smashes the Pilots' Union

In 1989 the Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP) attempted to break out of the Accord straightjacket and pushed for a 30% wage increase. The response from the Hawke Labor government was to use the military to break the strike.

Labor isolated and attacked the pilots. Hawke once famously described them as "glorified bus drivers". ACTU leaders threw their weight behind strike breaking efforts and the use of air force pilots.

It is no coincidence that Sir Peter Abeles, part-owner of TNT transport and Ansett airlines, was also a close personal friend of Bob Hawke.

The years 1983 to 1991 saw Labor PM and "union boss" Bob Hawke attack workers' rights and militant unions. A Rudd Labor government will be no different.

