

# Workers' Liberty



*The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself*  
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## Avoid Labor's disappointments! Organise to win!

Celebrating the end of Scott Morrison's LNP Coalition government has been a great relief from an elitist, mean-minded, anti-union, punitive, sexist, racist, climate science denying political period. It has raised hopes and expectations for change, that a Labor Government could tackle problems related to incomes and the cost of living, financial insecurity, health, care and education, justice for indigenous Australians, discrimination and to climate and the environment. Hopes have been kept up by some positive steps in the first 3-4 months, including the commitment to an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, a legislated (though inadequate) target for reducing carbon emissions, and abolition of the Cashless Welfare Debit Card.

But the signs are already there, that business and the wealthy are at the centre of opposition to needed reforms. And Labor accepts that it should work within constraints that business demands.

The Jobs + Skills summit in early September was revealing. Firstly, the ACTU's proposal for multi-enterprise bargaining is opposed by significant employers and groups, who would be threatened by any right to strike, and increased wages that would mean increased labour costs.

Secondly, the Treasurer and the Finance Minister both made it clear. Many good proposals at the summit, for improved social services and payments, including paid parental leave, could not be funded because of the public debt of \$1trn.

Yet there is vast wealth in private hands. Dividend payments of \$36 billion were estimated to be paid out in the first half of 2022 alone, by ASX listed companies, with their cash levels at record highs. Treasurer Jim Chalmers says he will not stop the Morrison government tax cuts costing \$243.5bn up to 2032-33, cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the richest 25%.

Even earlier, Albanese made commitments to allow new oil and gas projects, and the Minister for Resources, Madeleine King released 46,758 square km of new acreage for petroleum exploration.

In the memories of the Government, and many union leaders and Labor supporters, are the circumstances that ended Labor government under Rudd and Gillard. Business leaders, the Liberal and National parties, and the right-wing media were able to generate public hostility and panic in response to budget deficits, climate action and carbon pricing, a mining super-profits tax, and to "broken promises". The "small target" and very modest promises made by Albanese in the election campaign express the low (some say slow and patient) ambitions of the Labor leadership, beyond winning and holding office.

Everyone else, who doesn't have wealth and connections, who is struggling to pay the bills and have a roof over their heads, or who understands that climate change is an emergency, need and want more urgent action.

Individual action is not powerful enough. Lobbying MPs, voting for candidates who acknowledge problems, making climate conscious choices in food, clothing, transport ethical or green credentialled bank or super funds, will not stop investment in fossil fuels, or significantly increase social spending.

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Employers say they fear strikes, and that is because when workers decide they need to strike, that is when they win concessions. When unions start winning, and when campaigns have victories, then more people are inspired to get together and work out their demands and how to win them. Solidarity grows more solidarity. This is why we all need workers to have the right to strike, and this is why we expand that right by exercising it.

Several unions have been striking recently, for pay, and in the service sector, for increased staffing to cope with workloads. These include early childhood educators in the National Union of Workers, NSW public transport workers in the RTBU, the NSW Teachers Federation, and NSW Nurses and Midwives Association. Climate rallies, picnics and meetings are planned. These are all steps to build on.

We need our unions, our climate campaigns, our community and social media groups, to organise for clear demands, to involve members in face-to-face discussion and decisions to take collective action. We need to build a movement that is stronger and more influential than the business interests and the Right that the Labor Government defers to.

## **More anti-democratic shenanigans at the NSW Public Service Association**

by Leon Parissi

Some New South Wales Public Service Association members will remember when the PSA/CPSU leadership - Rank & File as they like to call themselves – brought in ‘winner takes all’ in union elections. At first the undemocratic tactic worked for the Rank & File faction.

With this rule in place meetings of the union's governing body - Central Council – lasted just 15 - 20-minutes. Questions and discussion were not encouraged.

The Progressives PSA group restored proportional representation when they later won the leadership of Central Council. The Progressives valued different opinions and genuine discussion around things like pay and conditions.

Rank & File are again tampering with elections to limit members democratic rights. Notice has been given of a Rules change which would restrict groups running. The problem is that the Rank & File proposed change only allows a ticket or team to run for election if it fills all the vacant positions. But the PSA/CPSU has a long tradition of independents and small tickets/teams running and

often winning a few delegate positions. And that's good for union democracy.

What is the RF faction afraid of? No rationale for this change has been given, the names of the movers of the rule change is also a mystery.

Union leaders should be answerable to members.

Do members want to return to the days when Rank & File did secret deals, such as giving up sick days? Reject the change to rule 85c(ii) which would limit the right of PSA members.

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## **Liverpool Dockers: A history of rebellion and betrayal**

by Bob Carnegie

Please share this contribution about the Liverpool Dockers' strike, global union solidarity, democracy, and betrayal by Jack Heyman, a dockworker from California. He spoke at a panel discussion of Mike Carden's book - *A History of the Liverpool Dockers: rebellion and betrayal*, about the Liverpool Docks strike from 1995-1998. Jack says "Any young worker who is interested in trade union organizing should read Mike's book which movingly documents the necessity of fighting to implement decisions democratically taken by the membership but denied by an ossified, class collaborationist trade union bureaucracy."

Jack also covers the legacy of the defeat, the formation of the International Dockworkers Council, and calls for the once exemplary IDC to reverse its May 2022 damaging change to its structure and political direction.

At: <http://labournet.net/docks2/2208/heyman1.html>

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## **Workers' Liberty: what we stand for**

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Public ownership of essential industries, and taxation of the rich to fund renewable energy and environmental protection, decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all. End fossil fuel extraction.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social

provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Indigenous control of indigenous affairs. Working class unity against racism.

- Free refugees, let them stay, right for workers to remain in Australia without insecurity of short-term visas.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

- Democracy at every level of society, in trade unions, and from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

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## Exploitation rises in Myanmar

by Hein Htet Kyaw

In Myanmar, even though open protests are not common any more as they were after the February 2021 military coup, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) is still in action. A lot of state employees are no longer actively working in their positions. A small number of student activists and workers still protest, though in guerrilla style to avoid being arrested.

On 24 August 2022, the military regime detained Vicky Bowman, a former British ambassador to Myanmar, and her husband Htein Lin, a Burmese artist and former political prisoner, on immigration-related allegations.

In July 2022, four democracy advocates were put to death by Myanmar's military junta on suspicion of aiding in "terror actions". These were the country's first executions in decades. The death of former hip-hop singer and ex-MP Phyo Zeya Thaw, who is a member of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) shocked expatriate communities. Ko Jimmy, a well-known democracy advocate, was also put to death. Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw were the other two men executed. After the death sentences against those four, hundred of workers, activists and revolutionaries are being listed for death penalty by the military junta.

During the first week of August 2022, in a decision by the military administration, Toru Kubota, a Japanese journalist, was charged with violating immigration rules. In the second week of August 2022 Sean Turnell, an Australian researcher who served as Aung San Suu Kyi's economic adviser, appeared in public for the first time with his testimony in the military court. In the following week, another six years of prison sentence were added to Aung San Suu Kyi's 11-year original sentence by the military junta.

On 1 February 2022 the people of Myanmar participated in a "silent strike" on February 1, 2022, to honour the one anniversary of the military takeover. They stayed indoors, shut down businesses, and stopped all outside activities, leaving the streets of several major towns and cities all but barren. Participants had been forewarned that they risked being charged with breaking the statute against inciting terrorism. The military lobbyist "Han Nyein Oo" called on his Telegram channel for the arrest of shop owners who had announced on social media that their business would be closed on the day of the silent strike. He made the announcement on his Telegram channel. The military council then jailed more than 200 individuals.

Following the economic crisis caused by the mismanagement of the military junta, their inefficiency in administration capabilities, and the upheavals of an ongoing revolution, a lot of capitalist corporates are exploiting the workers more and more.

Food Panda Myanmar's management announced severe wage cuts on 16 March 2022. In response, riders shut down their accounts and arranged a strike on their own. Nearly 90% of the affected employees joined within three days. In Myanmar, there are about 9,000 Food Panda riders, with 7,000 of them based in Yangon, the country's capital. One cyclist claims that where they were previously paid 1000 Myanmar Kyats for a distance, it is now only 500–600 Myanmar Kyats.

In July 2022, almost 2,000 employees of a garment factory in Mingaladon Township's Zaykabar Industrial Park in Yangon went on strike, claiming that violations of their fundamental rights had become intolerable. The labourers are employed by JW Factory, a facility in the industrial park that is run by ADK, or "A Dream of Kind," and is owned by Great Glowing Investment. The reasons for the strike are abuses of power in the factory and wages which are way lower than minimum wages.

According to a report on 25 August 2022, the Lotte Hotel Corporation, a joint venture between the military junta and the South Korean business group POSCO, has decreased the currency rate when paying salaries to local staff. The market exchange rate between Myanmar kyats and US dollars is around at least 2100 Myanmar Kyats for one US dollar. However, they are exploiting the marginalised local Burmese employees by calculating the wages with the exchange rate of 1000 Myanmar Kyats for one US dollar.

All these incidents show that workers should not restrict their aims to liberal democracy. They must liberate themselves not only from the military junta but also from capitalist wage-slavery too.

The working class is the force that has the power to transform society, just as it has the power to paralyse the entire system. The misfortune of Burma is that the working class lacks a vision that is willing to go above and beyond the demands of liberal democracy. However, if the working class gained the leadership position, it could rally the youth, the middle class, peasants, and national minorities behind it, not only to overthrow the military regime but also to eradicate capitalism.



## Diary of a construction worker: the dreams are different

by Bob Carnegie

Conversations with my workmates now, as a traffic controller on construction and civil engineering sites in Queensland, Australia, are completely different from what I had before as a seafarer and a construction worker.

We are employed by traffic-control contractors which function like labour-hire companies, and there are almost no conversations with the workers directly employed on the sites. Traffic controllers want to talk about traffic. There's almost no talk of politics.

There are a lot of complaints about how we are treated by management — by the labour-hire companies, that is, not the main site management —

complaints are about getting hours of work (it's a zero-hours job) and about the time and cost to get to sites when we have jobs. I'm signed up with three companies just to try to get two days' work a week.

But so far, I've found only one other traffic controller who's interested in trade unionism. The others aren't hostile to unions, but unions are not part of their world, yet.

There are probably 100 traffic controllers, at most, in Queensland, who are on EBA [union-negotiated] pay rates, but maybe 10,000 others, on varying rates of pay, none much more than the award [legal minimum].

The ute drivers, who set up the signs and so on, complain most, although they get more hours than the rest of us, they are paid a little more than us per hour, and in practice they are the supervisors on the worksite.

Some of them act like tinpot dictators, though some are helpful and friendly. Every two hours we are supposed to get ten minutes' break, but often we don't get it.

A lot of traffic controllers are workers in their 50s and 60s, and then there are some young women and men in their late teens and early 20s, some of whom seem to have got into the job because other family members have worked in traffic control. Often the older workers are in the job as a result of marriage breakdowns or such.

Their dreams and thoughts are different from those of workers in the better-paid unionised jobs I've worked in before.

These are people fighting to get enough money to rent a house and to pay the bills, where better-paid blue-collar workers think about buying a nicer house or even buying an investment property. Maybe because of the lack of union presence, there is far more pettiness among workers than on a unionised site — much more of one worker trying to embarrass another worker by telling them they're doing something wrong.

## Join the fight for socialism

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