

# Workers' Liberty



**The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself** ISSN 1446-0165

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## Support Noel Washington, abolish the ABCC

By Riki Lane

**Noel Washington, Senior Vice-President in Victoria of the Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union (CFMEU) faces six months prison for refusing to talk to industrial police about what happened at a union meeting outside work hours.**

A preliminary hearing on 12 September 2008 drew a protest of 500 in Geelong. In Queensland, the CFMEU and BLF shut down the big construction sites for four days, from Friday 12th over the weekend, and 3000 workers came to a rally in Queens Park, Brisbane

Under Howard's legislation, the ABCC, a special police force for the construction industry, has powers in industrial matters exceeding what the ordinary police have over the most horrible crimes. Workers or union officials summoned to answer questions by the ABCC have no right to silence, no right to talk to anyone else about what questions they have been asked or what answers they have given, no right to be assisted by the lawyer of their choice.

At a 30 July Victoria Trades Hall Council rally of 2000 Noel spoke with passion about seeing the effects on union members and their families being dragged before the commission for simply "standing up for their mates". A 19 year old apprentice was subjected to ABCC interrogation for daring to report an electrical safety hazard to Work Safe and the union. Noel himself was called in by the ABCC for speaking to a meeting of CFMEU members in their own time and off the employers' premises. For refusing to testify, he faces six months in jail.

Many speakers pointed out that Labor was elected on the back of hostility to Howard's WorkChoices laws, yet little has changed. The ABCC boasts that it has increased their activity by 60% since Labor was elected. Rudd's government has promised to abolish the ABCC — but in 2010, and only while replacing it with a new ABCC-lite.

The meeting had a militant feeling, but was kept under tight control. It called for immediate abolition of the ABCC, cancellation of the National Code and Implementation Guidelines (which the government can do without legislation), supporting Noel Washington, calling for mass rallies on the day of his court case, and a general campaign including industrial action against the remains of all Howard's IR laws. Amendments moved by supporters of Solidarity — for 24 hour strikes when the court case happens and if Washington is jailed — were ruled out by VTHC President Anne Taylor as opposed to the main thrust of the motion.

The officials probably judged that the motions were likely to be passed, given the militant feeling and large number of experienced construction industry activists present. This bureaucratic manoeuvring does the union movement no credit. Tim Gooden, Geelong TLC secretary and a member of the DSP, made a reasoned case against the amendments, arguing that a 24 hour strike will mean construction (and other) workers stay home for the day, a better option is a mass rally in work time for which workers will walk off the sites and out of the factories. However, the final resolutions contained no promise of specific actions if Noel Washington is jailed. We need a great deal more public agitation to make Noel Washington's case an issue which arouses the whole working class.

### Rights at work for construction workers

Sign up for rights on site -  
<http://www.rightsonsite.org.au/>  
Not too many people have high expectations of the Rudd Government getting rid of anti-union laws. Construction workers fighting for their rights need our support. If there is a future for an active workers movement in Australia, that can buck Labor conservatism, then this campaign could be one of the catalysts.

## NSW ALP, unions call Government to account

Janet Burstall

This is a critical moment for Unions NSW under the leadership of John Robertson. They can claim a lot of credit for the defeat of privatisation of electricity generation, and of the Howard Government at the last federal election. How will they react to Rees's declaration of intent to cut the public sector and cap pay rises below the rate of inflation?

<http://ouburstinoz.blogspot.com/2008/09/nsw-alp-conference-can-call-labor.html>

## World economy in crisis

Martin Thomas at the AWL July 2008 conference

Since late 2006, stream of financial collapses. That's how the crisis has immediately presented itself. The peculiarity, compared to the norm of capitalist crises, is that it comes at a time when profits are generally high, average company debt low. Origins in consumer credit rather than in transactions between companies. Results so far: slowing growth, US recession. No collapses in trade and production yet, but we'll see.

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/09/17/world-economic-crisis>

## Rudd's government

Torillio Urgan at the AWL July 2008 conference

Labor increasingly follows an economic rationalist path. The prospect of rolling back Howard's WorkChoices agenda seems a long way off for many workers. Existing AWAs remain in place. In the construction industry the draconian anti union measures of the ABCC remain in force until 2010 at the earliest.

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/09/17/australian-political-situation>

## Issy Wyner – 1916-2008

Issy Wyner, one of the pioneers of Australian Trotskyism, has died.

Read obituaries by:

John Percy

[http://directaction.org.au/issue4/issy\\_wyner\\_1916\\_2008](http://directaction.org.au/issue4/issy_wyner_1916_2008),

Tony Stephens

<http://ozleft.wordpress.com/2008/08/19/eighty-years-of-defying-authority/#more-546>,

Ruth Braham [http://www.sa.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1780&Itemid=125](http://www.sa.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1780&Itemid=125);

And a review of Hall Greenland's biography of Issy's close comrade Nick Origlass

<http://archive.workersliberty.org/wlmags/wl50/reviews.htm#origlass>

## Iraq: a discussion with the WCPK about Kurdistan

Jalal of the Workers Communist Party of Kurdistan at the AWL July 2008 conference

While in the main part of Iraq the occupation is the main issue, different in Kurdistan. Occupation by US not a big issue. Don't see many US troops anyway. Other issues: fighting for freedom, against rule of Talabani, Barzani etc. for infrastructure etc. Kurdish people very scared of again being dominated by Arab nationalists. So on 5 March we decided to establish WCPK. Ideologically communist, for workers' government, close to WCPIraq.

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/09/17/iraq-%E2%80%93-discussion-wcpk-about-kurdistan>

## Environment, catastrophes and the working class

Janet Burstall at the AWL July 2008 conference

An alternative government and union response that could be drawn from historical experience is public provision of necessary low emission infrastructure. Government intervention and development of critical infrastructure to replace high carbon emissions is an alternative not even considered by Australian governments. The union campaign against electricity privatisation in NSW raises the argument that government ownership of electricity generation does give the government more power to effect environmental policies in energy production.

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/09/17/environment-catastrophes-and-working-class>

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