

Anarchist-Communist Discussion Group

April 7th, 2010

Discussion topic: Current attacks on the working class

As we endure a period of recession in New Zealand, as always capital and the state try to force the brunt of the cost onto the working class - those of us who are least able to cope. Around the country in our workplaces, thousands are being made redundant, forced to take pay cuts and/or cuts in wages and conditions.

When we lose our jobs or are unable to work for health or family reasons, crackdowns on beneficiaries make it even harder to survive on what are already meagre benefits. In our communities, funding cuts mean closures to vital services.

It is only through collective resistance that we can fight effectively against these attacks, and push for not merely maintaining the current inadequacies but potentially for something better.

Workplace Struggles

Tens of thousands of jobs have been cut over the past 18 months - approximately 5000 in May 2009 alone - and many of those who have kept their jobs have found themselves forced to accept little to no increases in pay and sometimes even cuts, along with cuts to other conditions. In many cases, workers have relied on the unions they are members of to ensure the best possible outcome, but in many cases they have been sorely disappointed.



At clothing manufacturers Lane Walker Rudkin (LWR), almost 500 staff across Australia and New Zealand lost their jobs as LWR went into receivership. The response of the National Distribution Union (NDU), who represented many of the LWR workers was pitiful. In May, they organised a handful of cake selling stalls under the moniker *Bake a Cake for Lane Walker Rudkin Workers*, raising only a few thousand dollars for the workers who had lost their livelihoods. By the end of May, nothing more would be heard about this ridiculous concept. Meanwhile, many of the LWR workers were left stranded in small towns with little hope of being able to find a new job without moving to a new city.

A more positive example of workplace struggle are the Ministry Of Justice workers, who have been engaged in industrial activity against their employers for about 8 months. This activity has included go-slows, work to rule, overtime bans, pickets, rallies and strike activity (including wildcat strikes). While their union, the Public Service Association, is notoriously one of the most pro-partnership and



conservative unions around, the workers have managed to engage in a wide range of tactics in their efforts to attain a contract that breaks the current public sector wage freeze. Unfortunately, their efforts have been made more difficult by fellow MoJ workers who are members of the traditionally more combative National Union of Public Employees, who signed a deal rejected by the PSA membership.

Beneficiaries

Beneficiaries are perhaps the easiest target for Governments looking to score cheap points, and the current Government is certainly making use of them. Parents on the Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) are perhaps the hardest hit, with the removal of the Training Incentive Allowance (TIA) for all but secondary level courses. The TIA paid for added costs associated with parents returning to study (such as petrol and childcare). DPB recipients are also facing added work testing.

At a time of some of the highest unemployment figures in years, unemployment beneficiaries are also facing attacks. Beneficiaries may be cut off the benefit and forced to re-apply every year, with all of the appointments, courses and forms that go along with that arduous process. Meanwhile, WINZ has signed a deal with McDonald's and are increasingly pressuring beneficiaries to apply for jobs with this notoriously bad employer, with the added consequence of being able to cut off your benefit if you refuse.

Community

Many vital institutions are also under attack. This includes ACC, where a range of users are facing increased levies and/or decreased services. Bikies have been especially noisy, organising a loud protest at Parliament. Also affected have been survivors of sexual abuse, with a new process imposed that was roundly condemned by survivors and counsellors alike.

Locally, the 198 Youth Health Centre is also set to close its doors on April 30th. Over 4000 10-25 year olds are registered with the service as their primary doctor, while in 2009 nearly 15,000 people walked through the doors to make use of the free GP, counselling, family planning, sexual health, alcohol and drug services and more. The centre, which has been operating for 15 years, has been an indispensable tool in ensuring the health of many of Christchurch's young people. 198 has received comments from many of its patients to the effect that if it had not existed, they would not have sought help anywhere else. This sobering thought only further underlines how important it is that 198 find the funding it needs to ensure its survival.



Save 198 Youth Health Centre rally

The Anarchist-Communist Discussion Group meets at 7pm on the first Wednesday of every month at the WEA, 59 Gloucester St, Christchurch. All welcome!

Organised by Beyond Resistance and the Christchurch branch of the Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement

<http://beyondresistance.wordpress.com/>

<http://awsm.org.nz/>