

Australasian

SPARTACIST



Supplement

8 September 1989

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All Out to Shut Down the Airports!

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In face of this scabherding and threatened with an array of fines and even jailing by the government, airlines and tourism bosses, the pilots have stood firm. Only 15 percent of the normal domestic volume is being carried on the scab flights. But that could soon change. Already Ansett Airlines boss Sir Peter Abeles claims he is negotiating with individual pilots and that he'll be back in the air soon. Organised labour has a vital interest in the outcome of this dispute — if it allows this military strikebreaking operation to go unanswered it will pay the price. The Transport Workers Union have refused to refuel military planes, but that carries little weight as they're refuelled at RAAF bases by military personnel. The Qantas pilots' contract is nearly due for renegotiation. Air traffic controllers have been demanding higher wages and better manning levels for months. Standdowns of over 20,000 airport workers are threatened and mass layoffs have begun in the tourist industry which is at a standstill. Smash Hawke's strikebreaking, and all the anti-union laws! All the airport unions, domestic and international, and especially the powerful Metalworkers and Transport Workers, must join the battle, put up mass picket lines and shut the airports down tight!

This dispute recalls Reagan's 1981 smashing of the conservative air traffic controllers union PATCO in the US, which set the scene for years of union-busting, Cold War reaction and anti-Soviet war preparations. But Hawke's effort to bust the AFAP takes place on the basis of having delivered all those things. Smashing the BLF in 1986 was the equivalent watershed to PATCO. Following a precedent that was set when building magnates were "compensated" for busting the BLF, Hawke is considering tens of millions in "compensation" to the airline bosses — a perfect expression of capitalist "austerity."

Hawke calls the pilots "glorified bus drivers," insulting both in the process. Ripping up all the air safety regulations and bringing in dubious outfits of air cowboys, Hawke is cynically gambling with the lives of air travellers in his bid to smash the pilots federation. This in the interests of the greedy airline bosses, who are getting into position for the 1990 "deregulation" of the airline market. AFAP president Brian McCarthy, in a 6 September letter to Abeles accused: "You and your friend, Mr Hawke, planned the airline shutdown in the belief that you could destroy the federation, deal with individual pilots and force us back to work on your terms." What Hawke, Abeles & Co want is half the pilots working twice the hours "at the stick." Likewise air traffic controllers, already on Hawke's hit list, who juggle stupendous amounts of air traffic at Sydney's overcrowded Mascot airport. And airport ground staff will be next. The consequences for passenger safety will be horrendous. Deregulation and rationalisation are codewords for union-busting. Look at how naval dockyards are "rationalised": Cockatoo Island, a bastion of union militancy, to be closed and 1600 jobs lost.

The bourgeoisie is testing its alternatives for the next federal government. Will it be the Liberal/National opposition, with their "collective bargaining" in a "deregulated labour market" — ie, de-unionised labour market — or the ALP with its lashing of the unions to the capitalist state via the corporatist Accord? Hawke reacted so violently to the pilots' wage claim because if successful it could well sink the Accord and his government along with it. After all, if the pilots can get away with thumbing their noses at the bosses' courts then the working class might figure they can too. A month after the IRC handed down the latest version of the Accord the ACTU is still having trouble selling it. Union meetings across the country are either voting down trade-offs of conditions (award restructuring) for the miserable six percent wage rise or

resentfully accepting it because they see no way out. There is a way out — dumping the Labor leaders and taking the road of hard class struggle.

CREAN AND KELTY: AUSTRALIAN CAPITALISM'S POLICEMEN

The ACTU bureaucrats have been at the forefront of efforts to smash the AFAP, knowing that if the Accord disintegrates they'll lose their "special position" within the state apparatus. To a man the union bureaucrats have railed against the "selfish" and "elitist" pilots, who have the nerve to demand 30 percent (which given inflation and years of real wage cutting is minimal), when the ACTU is trying to enforce further real wage cuts! To be sure, the pilots see themselves as professionals, separate and "above" the working class, and they justify their break from the Accord in those terms. The ACTU and union tops have been playing this angle for all its worth, to keep the pilots isolated and the lid on their union base which has had enough of Accord sacrifice. The Tasmanian secretary of the TWU, Ken Bacon, said of the pilots, "They scab on us every chance they get. If we won't refuel them, they go thousands of miles out of their way to get fuel. Also, if staff load planes then the pilots keep flying them" (Australian, 25 August). No doubt. But that's craft unionism for you, and the TWU is no paragon of class principles — TWU tops have agreed to refuel strikebreaking charter freight planes.

It is indeed ironic and symptomatic of how the Accord has hamstrung the unions that it has been left to the white collar AFAP to show the way. As any halfway decent union would, they prepared their action months beforehand, instructing members to clear up personal debts and get together a "nest egg," and when it came to the crunch they told the court to go to hell and the government to shove its threats. The Accord must be smashed, and the scabherding Hawke government brought down along with it! That is a job for the working class in action. It must not be left to the ruling class, sections of which believe the Accord and the ALP government have outlived their usefulness and want to definitively break union power. The punitive anti-union weapons directed against the pilots are being delivered by the ALP/ACTU into the hands of the bosses for future union busting. Break with the ALP/ACTU traitors! 30 percent for the pilots! Massive wage hikes for all the unions! For an industrial union of all airport workers!

Hawke has invoked national chauvinism in his war on the pilots, saying "They've had no concern at all about the interests of Australia" (Australian, 4 September). At one point he told them to get out of the country if they had no "commitment" to it. In fact the pilots' recognition that they are underpaid by international standards has hardened their resolve, and some have already landed higher paid jobs overseas. His henchmen in the ACTU have echoed this nationalist garbage, with Crean adding "There is a requirement for discipline" (Australian, 23 August). Hawke, with his rich "mates" like Bond and Abeles, Crean and Kelty with their seats on the boards of Qantas and the Reserve Bank respectively, are scabherders who serve only to police the working class for the capitalist rulers of this country. For six years, "discipline, in the national interest," has been their rallying cry as they have made the working class pay for the bosses' foreign debt, their ravaging of the productive capacity of the country, the insane anti-Soviet war build-up. Working people, all the oppressed of this society, have no interest in common with the rapacious capitalists, who want to line their overflowing pockets, continue to pillage the tiny countries of the South Pacific, and as a junior partner of US imperialism dream of restoring capitalist exploitation in Vietnam and Kampuchea, China and even the Soviet Union.

BUILD A REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS PARTY!

The various groups which pose as leftist alternatives to Laborite union-busting in fact offer no alternative at all. The Communist Party of Australia, one of the chief architects of the Accord, has in the pages of Tribune condemned both Hawke's strikebreaking and the pilots for going outside the Accord straitjacket. A more "critical" variant of Labor loyalism comes from the sinister Socialist Labour League in its paper Workers News. They call for a general strike, but for the purpose of convening special conferences of the ALP to "expel the Hawke/Keating right wing" and form a workers government! They neglect to mention which Labor "lefts" they want to do this, because there are none. The rest of the left "support" the pilots and "condemn" Hawke's scabherding, without offering a single word about how to fight it. That's because they are all thoroughly reformist, parliamentarist and Laborite to the core.

The ALP stands as the biggest obstacle on the road to workers power. From its parliamentary wing, which today administers the capitalist state, to its trade union leaders who police the working class for the bosses, it's a party whose sole purpose is to save the capitalist system. Workers need their own, revolutionary party, built in struggle against the ALP through splitting its working class base from the scabherding pro-capitalist tops. Only such a revolutionary party can lead all the oppressed in the conquest of state power, expropriating the capitalists who have looted the country and run its plants into the ground, and through planned socialist reconstruction build a society with justice, decency and freedom for all: a workers republic of Australia as part of a socialist Asia.

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