



A M W U

UNION NEWS

Thursday July 5th, 2007

Vol. 2 Issue 23

HOWARD'S LAWS REMOVE COCHLEAR WORKERS' CHOICE

Workers at the Cochlear manufacturing facility in the Prime Minister's electorate of Bennelong are being denied the right to choose to be represented by their union in wage negotiations.

An overwhelming majority of the 300 mainly female migrant workers have voted to be represented by the AMWU on several occasions, but each time the company has denied workers their choice, using the so-called 'WorkChoices' laws.

In the latest ballot, over two thirds of the workers again voted against on a non-union agreement that removed family friendly provisions and their right to the protection of union representation.

AMWU NSW Secretary Paul Bastian said that the company was attempting to wear down the workers by forcing them to vote over and over again.

"The example of Cochlear workers clearly shows how the Prime Minister's WorkChoices laws actually prevent choice in the workplace."

"Many of these workers speak limited English and they joined the union so that they would have someone there to protect their rights at work.

"They have clearly stated their choice for union representation, but the company has the real choice to ignore them.

AMWU members said that they felt disrespected by the company's actions, and let down by the Prime Minister.

"The majority of us want the union to negotiate our collective agreement, but the laws allow the company to just say no," said one.

"Howard has always liked to say that he governs for all Australians but his laws are hurting us. Why should we lose so much so the bosses can have everything all their own way?"

Mr Bastian said that the new laws had taken away the right to representation in the workplace and tipped the balance too far in favour of the employer.

"These workers love their jobs and are proud of the good work Cochlear does – all they want is for their choice to be respected."

Cochlear workers are now taking their campaign to the local community, distributing postcards that ask locals to urge Cochlear to start negotiating a collective agreement with the AMWU.



Cochlear workers are asking their local community, in the Prime Minister's electorate of Bennelong, to support their right to choose union representation at work.

FORTY WEEK STRUGGLE GOES TO FEDERAL COURT

After forty weeks, the worker and community protest at Mechanical Engineering Services in the La Trobe Valley has come to an end.

AMWU members have been forced to take legal action against their former employer in the Federal Court in order to secure their full entitlements.

The protest which commenced in October 2006 was organised in response to the company's lockout of its workforce after many months of refusing to negotiate with workers for a new collective agreement. Workers were offered a 'take it or leave it' AWA which cut their pay and conditions.

In March this year, the workers were sacked.

AMWU organiser Steve Dodd said the protest, one of the longest running in the La Trobe Valley, had immense support from the local community.

"I was very moved by the acts of generosity and solidarity towards the workers during this very long protest."

Dodd said the dispute was the best example of how Howard's laws favour employers at the expense of workers.

"We had a situation where the boss outright refused to negotiate with us and there wasn't a damned thing we could do about it."

Workers at Mechanical Engineering had many years of service and are owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in entitlements.

"We are seeking their entitlements under their old agreement since a new one was never established. They had a contract of employment when Mechanical Engineering took over from Skilled Engineering that their conditions of employment would be maintained."

The boss Anthony Elliott is facing charges relating to actions on a protest at his Kilsyth business where he ran his truck into the protesters. As a result he collected several people on his bull bar and smashed into police vehicles.

The protesters were acting in support of the workers at Mechanical Engineering.

THALES URGED TO LOOK AFTER ITS WORKERS AFTER SECURING NEW CONTRACT

AMWU members at Thales in Bendigo are urging their employer to do the right thing by their workers and negotiate a new agreement after the company signed a new contract worth millions of dollars.

The company secured a contract with the US to make the 'Bushmaster' vehicle.

AMWU organiser Damian King said that the contract was won because of the skills of the people who work at Thales.

"The workers at the plant are highly skilled workers with a lot of expertise. They rely on their workers to win the contract and to make a lot of money."

"We want the company to recognise

the contribution of the workers by negotiating a collective agreement that doesn't take away their working conditions."

Two hundred and twenty workers at Thales have taken protected industrial action in support of a new agreement that secures their working conditions in the face of employer moves to reduce them.

Mr King said that workers were determined to secure their pay and conditions and the news of the contract has made them more determined.

"The workers believe that they shouldn't have to lose entitlements when the company will do so well," he said.



AWA FORCES KIDS TO PAY FOR CUT AND RUN CUSTOMERS

A NSW restaurant has been caught trying to force its young staff to pay for the bills of customers who do runners - while they sometimes get paid just \$26 a night.

Staff at Chili's Restaurant were sometimes hired for just two hours a night at the federal minimum rate of \$13.44 an hour and asked to wait around for up to 45 minutes - without pay - before clocking on.

Two former staff from the Wollongong restaurant told *The Daily Telegraph* they had been asked to cover the costs of patrons who had skipped without paying.

They also said they were told they had to provide their own \$50 float to give change to customers and were often told to wait around until the restaurant got busy before starting.

Alice McCarthy, 22, said she was asked by manager Imran Suleman to pay for a \$130 tab that three customers had done a runner on.

She said Mr Suleman told her: "If we can't find it [the money] it's not looking good for you."

Faced with the prospect of having to work for nothing for five shifts to pay off the bill, Ms McCarthy resigned.

Another 19-year-old former waitress said she was also told to pay for the bill of a table of customers who did not like the food.

Chili's CEO Gavin Reynolds, said staff were made to repay absconding customers' bills if there was some evidence of collusion.

Mr Reynolds confirmed that staff were asked to provide their own float for serving customers.

(Source: *Daily Telegraph* 5/7/07)