

THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS HEIGHTENS NEED FOR JOB SECURITY

Economics has hit the front pages of the newspapers again as the impact of the global economic crisis is felt around the world. The crisis began as a result of unscrupulous lending practices by U.S. financiers who lent to people who could not afford to repay their loans. The crisis spread throughout the system by financial wizardry that repackaged dodgy loans into apparently safe investment products. While the banks get bailed out the real impact is being felt by workers both here and overseas. Unemployment in the United States has increased to over 7% and over 6% in the United Kingdom.

The biggest player in the Australian Airlines Industry, Qantas had already moved to cut flights and staff as a result of the high price of fuel. This may mean that there is less room for further job cuts as a response to the economic crisis. We know that bookings have been low over the holiday period and that airlines are heavily discounting fares in order to attract business. Nobody knows how long the crisis will last or how bad it will get. The longer the crisis lasts, the more likely it is that there will be more jobs lost in the Airlines industry. The biggest risk to jobs in the airlines industry is likely to be consolidation of the industry as airlines merge to reduce costs and increase their market share.

With the possibility of redundancies becoming more likely in the airlines industry, bargaining often focuses on improving job security. Workers are beginning to demand increased entitlements for workers who are made redundant as a financial disincentive for companies to put off staff. Procedures such as consultation with unions about redundancy and calling for people interested in voluntary redundancy before making compulsory redundancies can

be implemented to make the process fairer. These processes are already in place in many unionised airlines.

Those airlines workers in accumulated benefit superannuation funds will find that their superannuation has taken a hit as the value of property and shares has dropped. This may mean that workers will be staying in the workforce for longer as they try to make up what they have lost. While all superannuation funds are performing poorly at the moment, it is important to remember that industry super funds will provide better returns because they are not operated for profit and do not receive commissions for the investments they make and many take on a lower level of risk than commercial funds.

Globally, unions have issued the "Washington Statement" on the economic crisis. They are advocating for:

- **A recovery plan for the economy including cuts to interest rates, infrastructure investment, investment in green jobs, and industries and support for development in less developed countries.**
- **Reregulating the finance sector and the global economy to prevent a crisis occurring again.**
- **Combating inequality in the distribution of income both within and between countries, between rich and poor and between men and women.**

The crisis has had a significant impact on CPI which will affect bargaining outcomes in the short term. CPI peaked at 5% in 2008 but in the final quarter of 2008 it dropped to 3.7%. Most economists are predicting that CPI will drop further in 2009. When inflation was high union members increased their expectations about outcomes in collective bargaining to keep up with the increased cost of living. However, as the rate of inflation slows union members won't need wage rises quite as high to maintain or improve their standard of living.

While the crisis continues it is just as important as ever to build our unions and to keep organising and bargaining. Workers in unionised workplaces are more secure in their employment and fare much better in tough times than non-unionised workers. There will be pressure on workers to give up employment conditions that have been fought for over a long period of time. We need to make sure that we are organised so that we can protect what has been built.

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Committee Member (Qantas) SLAVCO ZIPEVSKI	

Editorial Content: Sally McManus
Publications Coordinator: Erin Smith
We welcome your letters and comments

HOW TO CONTACT US

PHONE SYDNEY 9310 4000

OUTSIDE OF SYDNEY 1300 784 278

SYDNEY

39 - 47 RENWICK STREET REDFERN NSW
PO BOX 1865 STRAWBERRY HILLS NSW 2012

NEWCASTLE PO BOX 2268 DANGAR NSW 2309

LISMORE PO BOX 1056 LISMORE NSW 2480

ACT PO BOX 1012 DICKSON ACT 2602

FROM THE SECRETARY



In the past two weeks we have witnessed the shocking loss of lives and dreadful destruction wreaked on the people of Victoria by the worst bushfires in memory. Such terrible disasters reinforce what Australians know all too well, just how fragile our existence is on this tough, unforgiving continent. It also tells us something new and uncomfortable — the 44 degree temperatures on the day of the fires confirms what many scientists have warned us for decades now — unchecked global warming will result in extreme weather conditions.

Despite the great sense of loss and even despair we may feel, the remarkable thing that comes out of such events is that the great Australian quality of mateship is alive and well — whether it be the volunteer fire fighters, who leave their own homes to defend others or the solidarity that people across the country have shown in donating money or support to those who have been the victims. It shows how we can work together in times of adversity and win against the odds. The women and men who battled against nature's fury are our colleagues and fellow workers. They risked their

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lives to help their neighbours, often putting the interests of many in front of their own.

The other great disaster that is affecting the financial security of people world wide, the global financial crisis, continues to unfold with more job losses and company collapses announced every day. What started as a crash and credit crunch caused by the excesses of the big end of town has inevitably led to real financial pain inflicted on workers and retirees and the lowest and often least skilled of our workforce.

More than ever, belonging to a union provides protection from the ruthless behaviour of bosses in these times who will use the financial crisis as an excuse to reduce conditions, cut hours of work and lay off workers. Often these have been loyal employees for years, but this counts for little during an economic crunch. Being in the Union is the best job security you can have in these times. ASU members in unionised workplaces can fight to preserve conditions and wages and in the event of redundancies, union members consistently receive a better deal than other workers. It is our unique qualities of mateship and our ability to stick together as workers through the Union that will help Australians through these hard times.

WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?

MALAYSIA AIRLINES NEGOTIATIONS – MANAGEMENT RESPOND TO OUR CLAIMS

BARGAINING AT MALAYSIA AIRLINES (MAS) FOR A VARIATION TO THE CURRENT ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT IS WELL UNDER WAY.

MAS employee representatives have met with management on three occasions and presented their log of claims. At the latest meeting on the 17th February, the company presented a disappointing response to our claims. They rejected all of our claims apart from one, which was the payment of a 10% base salary on top of the regular wage for those employees acting in higher duties.

The other main issue was pay. MAS has proposed a 2% pay increase across the board with subjectively allocated performance incentive pay. ASU members at MAS

maintain that they will accept no less than a 3% wage increase for workers in the airlines industry.

The negotiations cover a broad range of conditions and highlight the need for many changes to the current agreement. As MAS refuses to allow the ASU to have joint meetings with the company, the employee reps will be having breakfast meetings to progress negotiations. Employees are represented at the bargaining table by Bev Clarke, Rose Gollan, Jeff Morris, Allan Mitchell (NSW) and Anthony Saragias. Jo Justo, the national industrial officer is leading the team on behalf of the ASU.

For a comprehensive description of the log of claims download the bulletin at www.asu.asn.au/airlines.



Joint Consultative Committee members: Allan Mitchell, Bev Clarke, Jeff Morris, Rose Gollan, and Teresa Meyer standing in for Anthony Saragias

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Gow-Gates in partnership with the ASU can guide you in the process of meeting your pre-retirement and retirement goals.

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Please contact our Union Liaison Officer, Maggie Ferguson on **(02) 8836 1111** or visit www.gowgates.com.au

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CANBERRA AIRPORT WORKERS UNIONISE

QANTAS WORKERS AT CANBERRA AIRPORT ARE GETTING ORGANISED. TWO NEW DELEGATES, JANE PALMER AND MARIE O'HARE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN ELECTED, AND WILL ASSIST THE EXISTING SOLE DELEGATE CLAIRE BAINES. REGULAR MEETINGS WITH QANTAS AIRPORT MANAGEMENT ARE ALSO BEING HELD TO ADDRESS A NUMBER OF OUTSTANDING ISSUES AT THE TERMINAL.

The delegates have already achieved some wins at the airport by ensuring that staff get everything they are entitled to under the ASU collective agreement. They have ensured that:

1. Workers get the meal breaks that they are entitled to;
2. Where the cap on part time hours is being exceeded, part time positions are converted to fulltime positions;
3. Positions that have been filled by staff working in higher duties for longer than 6 months are converted to permanent positions.

There is still much to achieve at Canberra. The delegates are working on improving the allocation of leave by reducing the close of bids from fourteen months in advance to six months. They are working on improving the safety of staff at the airport by improving the response of police and security to violent and aggressive passengers and eliminating unpaid overtime for customer service staff.

Delegates will only be able to fix these problems with the

active support of members at Canberra Airport. There are things you can do to support your delegates and to improve conditions for all of the staff.

1. The delegates are only in a strong position to negotiate where they represent most of the workers at the airport. Make sure that you maintain your membership to the ASU and keep your details up to date.
2. Have a conversation with a colleague who is not an ASU member about joining.
3. Occasionally delegates will ask you to help them by doing things like attending a workplace meeting to make decisions or by participating in a collective action like signing a petition. The union succeeds with the active participation of all members so it is important that you participate when delegates ask you to help.
4. Lastly, your delegates can't fix problems that they don't know about. If there is a problem at work it is important to raise it with your ASU delegate first.



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PRIVATISED POWER WON'T PAY FOR ITS PART IN THE FIRES

Who will be punished if the pending law suits find private power companies liable for the fires?

Why, you will, dear reader – thanks to the terms that state governments negotiated when they sold off our public assets. Consider the case of SP AusNet, the subject of a class action for negligence around the Kilmore fires.

The Insurance Council of Australia has estimated the damage of those fires at about \$500 million. But SP AusNet's legal liability has been capped at \$100 million under a deal struck by the former Kennett government with private utility operators, when the former State Electricity Commission was privatised in 1995. Legal sources said this meant the Brumby Government could be forced to cover a shortfall of hundreds of millions of dollars.

The recent heatwave highlighted some other results of the great privatization binge carried out a decade or so ago.

Connex, the group that seized Victoria's rail network, recently excused the 2300 services it cancelled last month on the basis of ... wait for it ... the weather. Its trains can't, you see, function in weather warmer than thirty-five degrees. Given that each year there's this phenomenon called 'summer' (you may have heard of it), operators of a transport system designed for the benefit of the public – most of whom, strangely enough, still have to work on hot days – might conclude that cool-weather-only trains simply don't cut it.

But Connex, of course, is a private company, and makes its decisions on the basis of an entirely different calculus. That's why, though Melbournians would clearly prefer to buy their fares from a conductor, we're stuck instead with dysfunctional ticketing machines, unable in most cases even to provide change. Not surprisingly, there's now a widespread culture of fare evasion, which the private owners attempt to counter with hectoring advertisements and roving gangs of thuggish inspectors.



But there's a bigger issue relating to climate change. Now, we don't have to believe in global warming. The science is complex and most of us don't fully understand it. But many of us are also sufficiently mathematically challenged as to not follow the process by which Eratosthenes of Cyrene first calculated the circumference of the planet. But we don't therefore sign up with the Flat Earth Society, since we possess sufficient common sense to accept the consensus of the scientific world.

If we adopt that methodology with climate change – aligning ourselves with the vast majority of scientists rather than the small but shrill denialist faction of oil-company flacks, shock jocks and the tabloid journalists who are professionally wrong about everything – certain things follow. We can expect a small but real increase in average temperatures, and that means bushfires will become more likely and more devastating. No, you can't ascribe the blame to climate change for any particular fire, just as you can't definitively link your heart attack to your pack-a-day habit. Heart problems kill non-smokers, too – but only a fool would conclude that means you can puff away without risks.

In other words, if we don't do something, we can expect more tragedies like the one we've just endured.

But that brings us directly back to privatisation. It's not only that the process by which we swapped our public assets for a bag of magic beans has led to an appreciable degradation in services, it's also disarmed us in the fight against the causes and consequences of climate change. How is the private company that makes money from selling you electricity – and thus becomes more profitable the more of it you use – going to foster energy efficiency?

The short answer is that it will do so about as effectively as, say, a pub campaigning for sobriety, a casino against problem gambling – or, to use a more apposite example – the private utility in charge of our taps for water efficiency.

The world financial crisis has already exposed many of the ideologues behind the neo-liberal excesses of the last decades as at best charlatans and at worst overt fraudsters. By all means, prosecute the arsonists. But let's also have some genuine accountability about the policy makers who got us into the mess we're now in.

This article, written by Jeff Sparrow, editor of Overland, was published by Crikey on 16 February 2009.

ASU QF SIT MEMBERS CHALLENGE QANTAS TO STICK TO THE AGREEMENT

DISPUTE OVER HIGHER DUTIES AND DISABILITY ALLOWANCE.



HIGHER DUTIES

ASU members working at Qantas at the Sydney International Terminal (SIT) are campaigning to enforce the higher duties provisions of the Qantas Collective Agreement and to claim a disability allowance under the agreement.

Qantas have breached the Agreement by filling positions for more than 6 months on higher duties. Clause 25.3.1 of the ASU Qantas Agreement requires Qantas to fill positions permanently if they have been filled for more than 12 months on higher duties.

Around 36 staff were employed on higher duties, with some of them working in positions on higher duties for up to nine years. Workers who are employed on higher duties for an extended period of time miss out on superannuation on the higher rate of pay.

ASU delegates have attempted to resolve the issue through regular meetings with management for more than 6 months. In frustration with the delays the delegates decided to take the matter to the AIRC

under the disputes resolution clause in the agreement. The commissioner set a timeline for the resolution of the outstanding higher duties positions. This timeline pushed Qantas to deal with the matter in a timely way. While Qantas did not meet the time limits imposed by the AIRC, they have resolved many more of the outstanding higher duties positions.

DISABILITY ALLOWANCE

As any worker at the SIT knows, the terminal has been undergoing major building works for more than 12 months. Workers have made a claim for a disability allowance that they are entitled to under clause 26.1 of the ASU Agreement. To avoid paying the allowance, Qantas have asked the ASU to specify exactly who has been exposed to the conditions that require the disability allowance. This is virtually impossible given that there are 500 staff on various shifts over a period of more than nine months. Discussions are still continuing on this matter.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK FACT SHEET 5: OCCUPATION HEALTH AND SAFETY

Over 477,000 people in Australia receive a work related injury or illness each year and about 6,700 people per year lose their lives. Ensuring that your workplace is a healthy and safe environment is the most important thing you can do as a worker, union member or delegate. Occupation Health and Safety is underpinned by a basic rule that:

'Every worker has a right to healthy and safe work and to a work environment that enables them to live a socially and economically productive life.'

The difficult thing is to know how to apply this basic rule to your everyday work.

Firstly, the rules.

Your Occupational Health and Safety rights are set out in a number of documents including the NSW Occupation Health and Safety Act, Workers Compensation Act and NSW State Regulations.

Your Right to be Consulted

Under the NSW OH&S Act employers are required to consult with you about Health and Safety at work. They must enable you to contribute to making decisions that affect your health, safety or welfare at work.

Getting together an OH&S Committee

Every workplace is required by law to have an OH&S committee or representatives if it is requested by the employees. It is the job of the employer to set up a consultation process that includes either

- 1. an OHS committee if there are more than 20 employees or;**
- 2. elect OHS representatives if there are under 20 employees or;**
- 3. any other arrangement if it is agreed with employees who may be represented by their union.**

Whichever of these are in place, it is the right of the workers to elect their own representatives. There should be an open and transparent election from the workers to choose who will represent them on the committee or as an OH&S representative. It is also essential that the people that are elected get accredited OH&S training in work time.

What to do when you identify an OH&S problem

If you identify an OH&S problem or hazard at work you should immediately inform your manager and your OH&S representative or an OH&S committee member. If it is an immediate threat to the health or safety of workers, the hazard should be isolated and work should not continue in that area until the hazard is removed. If the issue is of a longer term nature the employer should consult with you and your workmates about the best way to remove the hazard.

If you have any questions about your rights with regard to OH&S talk to your delegate or call the ASU office on 9310 4000.

UNIONS CALL FOR SOLIDARITY IN GAZA – AND AN END TO VIOLENCE BY ALL SIDES

On the 27th December 2008 the Israeli Government initiated Operation Molten Lead, a brutal military attack on the people of Gaza that resulted in over 1000 deaths, mostly civilians. Israel claimed to be targeting " Hamas militants " but many of the people they claimed to be militants were actually government employees and the attacks so widespread and the population of the area so dense that a massive proportion of the dead were women and children.

These attacks have been condemned by the international community. Many international union organisations such as the International Trade Union Confederation and SOLIDAR – an international alliance of labour movement-based humanitarian aid agencies, called for an immediate end to the violence. At home the ACTU, Unions NSW, APHEDA and the Victorian Trades Hall Council Executive have all condemned the attacks and called for an immediate ceasefire and access to emergency and relief supplies. These attacks are brutal and their stated aim is to destroy Hamas. The political arm of Hamas is the elected leader of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip is 1.5 million and the UN estimates that 80% of that population are almost entirely dependent on food aid or direct assistance. This dependence largely stems from the Israeli imposed blockade of the Gaza Strip which has brought the Palestinian economy to virtual collapse. These attacks have caused a huge loss of life and destruction to the infrastructure of Gaza, including destroying universities, schools, the parliament, communications networks and religious centres. This destruction of infrastructure will create further Palestinian dependence on international aid.

WHAT WE ARE DOING TO HELP.

Australian trade unions are committed to practical solidarity. The ACTU's international aid agency, Union Aid Abroad-Apheda, has been sending funds to the MA'AN Development Centre in Gaza for the past two years. These funds are for emergency food support for the most vulnerable households. Funds have also been sent to El Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital in Gaza city, which has a rapidly increasing caseload of people with serious injuries and disabilities.

**For more information visit
www.apheda.org.au**

EBA FINALISED AT AIR FRANCE

CITY WORKERS AT AIR FRANCE/KLM HAVE FINALISED NEGOTIATIONS FOR THEIR EBA. THE RESULT OF THE VOTE WAS A RESOUNDING YES FROM STAFF AND WAGE INCREASES HAVE BEEN PAID. THE LEGAL PAPER WORK IS BEING FORMULATED BY THE COMPANY AND WILL BE LODGED WITH THE AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COMMISSION (AIRC) SOON.

The EBA contains a 2.5% pay increase with a performance incentive and a bonus target component, it also includes 6 weeks paid parental leave. The company has said that the negotiations for the Pymont call centre are on hold while head office in Paris observes the new legislation.



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