

Qantas valet parking workers bear the very last days of WorkChoices



THE 28TH MARCH IS A SPECIAL DAY TO BE REMEMBERED BY UNIONISTS.

It is on this day that the ban on new Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) became effective. AWAs lasted a total of 2 years and 1 day before they were swept in to the dust bin of history. This is a great achievement for the trade union movement.

Despite the clear message from the public last November that AWAs hurt hard working Australians, some employers rushed to use AWAs before they were abolished.

In February this year around 170 staff at Qantas Valet Parking across Australia were told they were being made redundant and being offered their jobs back on five-year AWAs that removed their penalty rates and cut their take home pay by up to \$300 a week or \$15, 000 a year.



On the 1 March the workers were out of a job as the new contractor, Equity Valet Parking took over the contract. The workers were told to either accept cuts to their conditions or lose their jobs.

The workers decided not to sign the AWAs because they were not confident that their conditions would be protected. The AWAs removed the workers' entitlements to shift penalties, overtime payments, RDOs and other conditions.

Some have worked at Qantas Valet Parking for up to 20 years and are seeing their hard work and years of continuous service disregarded by this new company. Most workers have lost their jobs as the new contractor hired new workers under AWAs.

It is shameful that Qantas has stood by and let this happen.

This should be the last story we ever have to hear about victims of WorkChoices AWAs. Because of the magnificent campaign of the union movement, future workers will be protected from employers being able to use these contracts to take away their rights at work.

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FROM THE SECRETARY



Airlines, shipping and Travel companies all rely heavily on IT systems which nowadays can or do pretty much everything.

Some of the most stressful times for employees are when companies decide to radically change their IT systems or to implement brand new systems which

always promise the world. Unfortunately it is usually workers who suffer when things go wrong. There is often a yawning gap between what might be in an IT programmer's mind and what works in reality.

Often companies also purchase new IT systems as a means of managing workers. The experience of ASU members at Sydney International Terminal is a case in point. Qantas introduced a new rostering system for thousands of workers called "I-Roster". This system not only produced rosters, but it scheduled all tasks and jobs for workers. It has replaced real life people with a computer programme.

This has led to turmoil at the International Airport and an enormous amount of stress for workers where a computer system has rostered breaks incorrectly, misinterpreted workers rights and sent workers from one end of the Airport to the other whilst queues get longer and longer and the complaints of staff remain unheard.

ASU members have been organising to get sanity back in the system but management seem to be more interested in the view of IT nerds than their front-line staff.

There are lessons in this for all of us. Workers should not be used as guinea pigs to test the faults of IT systems. Sometimes nothing can replace the decision-making and flexibility of real life people. Too bad this obvious fact is lost on some.

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WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?

BAGS ARE PACKED, BUT NOWHERE TO GO

BAGGAGE SERVICES IS STILL LOADED WITH PROBLEMS.

Despite meetings between ASU members and management where OH&S and understaffing issues were raised, baggage services is still riddled with problems. There are a backlog of bags, insufficient fire exits and not enough staff to deal with the workload.

Qantas is not implementing solid improvements, they are just coming up with makeshift solutions. The build up of bags in baggage services has become so big that Qantas created another room to store the bags. Unfortunately the relocation only shifted the problem down the other end of the terminal and the backlog of bags remained.

ASU delegate Paul Rowe says Qantas management are aware of the problems, they just don't seem to be interested in fixing them properly. Meetings with ASU members and management have been attended yet the problems still exist.

"Our workload has blown up. Part-timers don't work between 11am and 5.30pm so that leaves only four permanent staff in the baggage area of terminal B to look after all the bags. That means they do reports, answer the phones, deliveries, process bags – Impossible! Management need to acknowledge that there are no longer peaks and troughs. Peaks spread throughout the day, we simply need more workers" says Paul Rowe.

The common view among ASU members is that Qantas are too focused on cost savings. A major problem stems from Qantas's promotion that they 'through-check' bags. The idea of through-checking bags sounds great to passengers but is causing chaos internally at baggage services. Passengers think that their bags are flown straight through to their final destination but they're not. They have to be



cleared in customs at the stop-over destination and then sent on a domestic flight to the passengers final destination. ASU members continually argue that through-checking bags doesn't work because customs are continually putting restrictions on baggage services. The communication between customs and baggage services is poor and often bags are not processed and flown on efficiently because they are caught up in the backlog at baggage services.

"There is no flow between customs and baggage services" says Paul Rowe. "For the bags to smoothly get cleared in customs and then passed through to baggage services there needs to be communication, not closed doors".

Yet closed doors are exactly what baggage services are faced with. When customs is closed, the door to enter the customs area from baggage services is also locked. This means bags build up in customs and then baggage services are inundated with an influx of bags.

Management needs to fix the problems in baggage services for once and for all. This involves more staff. Baggage services not only looks a mess it is a mess and real solutions are needed.



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DELEGATES SPEAK

ONESKY ASKED YOUR ASU DELEGATES AT SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL HOW THEY WOULD RUN THINGS IF THEY WERE IN MANAGERMENTS POSITION. HERE ARE THEIR RESPONSES.

IF YOU WERE MANAGEMENT FOR A DAY WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?



STEVE CALLEN: I'd get the rosters fixed. If rosters work, staff are happy and if staff are happy they work better. It's pretty simple logic.



MICHAEL BROWN: If I was in a management position my first move would be to ask every executive in my division to explain their actions. I'd have the credentials and experience of all my management staff on my desk within a week and have them prove to me they are experienced to run the company because at the moment the organisation is very poor. I'd ask them to justify their decisions and have it all out in the open on the table.



STEVE KERR: I would change management's attitude and start listening and talking to the staff. I'd listen to their complaints about the same old chestnut – rosters and holidays.



EMANUAL ABELA: I would change my attitude to all of the staff and start listening to their needs and respecting the work they do. The staff work on weekends and public holidays when management aren't around - they know about customer service. Management need to meet staff half way and understand staffs needs in relation to rostering, annual leave, sick leave and resources.



PAUL ROWE: Rostering. It's the number one issue that everyone is crazy about. I would also streamline the amount of managers we have because we don't need that many. If they actually paid us properly and properly handled rosters and annual leave, we definitely wouldn't need that many.



DI HORAFIOUS: I would change the morale of the staff by working with the staff and listening to what their issues are. A lot of staff have roster issues and annual leave issues. I would try and make staff happy within the constraints of the workplace operations because if staff are happy, productivity will improve.

WHAT'S GOING ON OUT THERE?

QIC MEMBERS SAY – TIME FOR CHANGE

MEMBERS AT QANTAS INDUSTRY CENTRE (QIC) HAVE DECIDED IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE. ISSUES HAVE CULMINATED AND WORKERS ARE BEGINNING TO TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION TO IMPROVE THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS.

Delegates circulated a survey to staff and coordinated meetings with management, and the following issues emerged:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDMENT WITHIN QANTAS

- QIC staff who participated in the survey indicated that there were insufficient opportunities for secondment. Secondments are important opportunities for QIC staff to broaden their skills and get experience in other areas of work within Qantas.

APPROPRIATE TRAINING AND SUPERVISION OF QIC STAFF AND IDLE TIME

- QIC staff did not feel as if they were being provided with appropriate training, information or supervision in order to do their jobs. They indicated they did not get feedback from their manager, had not had a performance assessment in the last 12 months and did not have regular team meetings.

ACCESS TO LEAVE

- While staff indicated that their requests for leave were often granted, staff had serious concerns about the availability of annual leave or long service leave at half pay and the period of notice required for leave applications.



ASU delegates Peachy Ravalo and Rita Guazzo ready to work together to improve conditions

UNPAID OVERTIME

- QIC workers indicated that overtime was not recognised and properly paid.

WORK RELATED STRESS

- Fire drills, and;
- Availability of QIC to be contacted by family and friends in an emergency.

The survey worryingly indicated poor morale and treatment of QIC workers by management. One QIC worker said "Most of us feel job alienation and also low morale".

According to ASU delegate Rita Guazzo, "Union membership will help us to improve the working conditions at QIC. Our first step is to make the staff aware of the importance of joining the union and working together. In the process, we will also raise our awareness of our entitlements under the EBA".

By working together QIC staff can improve conditions and make the QIC a better place to work.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND YOUR CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT SO THAT YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR ENTITLEMENTS AND OBLIGATIONS.

Most people know about Awards and Enterprise Agreements. These are collective agreements that set minimum pay and conditions for all workers in a workplace or industry. They are the critical safety net underpinning the rights of Australian employees that the Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation threatened to abolish.

Another crucial part of your employment conditions, which is often less well understood, is your contract of employment. Your contract of employment can contain rights and obligations for you as an employee in addition to your rights under an Award or Enterprise Agreement.

Your contract of employment is fundamental to your employment relationship and without a contract you are not an employee. A contract of employment may contain conditions of employment on matters not covered by the Award or Enterprise Agreement such as your place of work or hours of work for part time employees. A contract of employment may also contain conditions over and above your entitlements under an Award or Enterprise Agreement such as a higher rate of pay than the Award rate or company policies.

A contract of employment cannot contain conditions of employment that are less than the conditions required by an Award or Enterprise Agreement. Awards and Enterprise Agreements set the minimum conditions that apply to a group of employees. The main difference between a contract of employment and an Australian Workplace Agreement was that

under WorkChoices AWAs allowed employers to cut pay and conditions below the minimum required in an Enterprise Agreement or Award. Also you are not prevented from entering a collective agreement if you are on a common law contract.

A contract of employment might not always look like a contract. Often your letter of appointment to a position will be your contract of employment. A verbal agreement or an exchange of emails or letters could also become your contract if they represent an agreement between you and your employer.

To be a valid contract you need to agree to the contract but that doesn't necessarily mean you need to sign it. Your agreement to the contract may be implied if you act as if the contract applies to you. For example you can be taken to agree to the conditions of employment contained in your letter of offer just by turning up for work. That is why it is important to take action immediately if you don't like what your contract says.

Here are some important things to know about your contract of employment:

- Firstly, take a moment to read it carefully, make sure you understand what it says and that you are happy with the contract.
- If you don't understand it get in contact with your workplace delegate or the ASU Organising Members Information Centre to get some advice.
- Keep it! It is important to keep a copy of your contract in order to make sure your conditions are not undermined.
- If your employer offers you a new contract of employment DO NOT SIGN IT until you have contacted the union office to check that the changes are fair.

Supporting Workers Rights

IMAGINE BEING BEATEN, IMPRISONED AND THEN DENIED MEDICAL TREATMENT FOR TAKING PART IN PEACEFUL PROTESTS.



Union members protest at a rally in Hyde park Sydney against the violation of workers rights in Iran

It is almost unimaginable because freedom of speech and expression is a right in Australia and it is an international law. However, unionists, in many countries around the globe are denied this right. Currently in Iran, trade union leaders Mansour Osanloo and Mahmoud Salehi have been imprisoned because of their independent voice defending fundamental workers' rights.

The Iranian state bears many of the hallmarks of a fascist state regime – it does not tolerate dissidents. Mansour Osanloo is the head of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company trade union. Although the organisation is legal it has been violently attacked by Iranian security forces. As a result of his work Osanloo has been beaten, arrested and had his tongue sliced as a warning against speaking out.

Salehi is spokesman for the Organisational Committee to Establish Trade Unions. He was arrested after a peaceful demonstration to celebrate

May Day 2004 but subsequently released on bail. In 2005 he was sentenced to five years imprisonment and three years internal exile. At his trial his union activities and meetings with foreign unions were cited as evidence against him. His conviction was then overturned but after a retrial he was sentenced on 11 November 2006 to four years imprisonment for "conspiring to commit crimes against national security", later reduced to one years imprisonment and a three year suspended sentence. He was jailed again in April last year.

Osanloo and Salehi were convicted of "endangering state security" and "anti-regime propaganda". This is simply the spin of a regime intent on controlling the minds of citizens in order to obtain total power and control.

They are not the only victims. Several workers in Iran have been fined and flogged in the city of Sanandaj, according to a report by the National Union of Dismissed and Unemployed Workers of Iran. Their crime? Taking part in May Day celebrations in 2007.

On March 6th Australian unions participated in an International response. 'Free Osanloo Action Day' was marked by protests worldwide to demand the release of the imprisoned trade union leaders. The protest coordinated by the International Transport Workers Federation took

place in more than 45 countries and demonstrated global solidarity.

In Sydney, a number of unions joined together in Hyde Park to stand up for the fundamental rights of all Iranian citizens.

David Cockroft, International Transport Workers Federation general secretary said: "The Iranian government's continuing mistreatment of Mansour is a running sore. He has asked only for his basic rights and has been answered with fists, truncheons and manacles – but he has not been forgotten. On March 6 we will once again prove that he has friends and supporters around the world."

We must act to prevent this criminal regime jeopardising and harming working people suffering in Iran.

People around the world have protested against the repression and violation of human rights. Political parties and labour organisations, trade unions, human rights organisations and institutions - Red Cross, Amnesty International for example, have all condemned the violations of the rights of workers, teachers, students, women and children in Iran. They are actively exposing this regime at global level. The international support and solidarity with social movements in Iran is growing strongly and actively more than ever.

QANTAS' ANNUAL LEAVE SYSTEM A DISASTER

TO GET ANNUAL LEAVE AT QANTAS, WORKERS ENTER A BIDDING SYSTEM. IF THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL THEY GET THE HOLIDAYS THEY ARE AFTER. IF THEY DO NOT SUCCEED THEY GET PLACED ON A WAITING LIST WITH NO INDICATION OF WHEN THEY WILL FIND OUT IF THEY GET THEIR DESIRED HOLIDAYS.

Steve Kerr, ASU delegate and customer service worker at Qantas SIT for 20 years is frustrated with this system. He says things at Qantas have never been as bad as they are currently.

"I can't plan or book anything – it's ridiculous. At one stage we were bidding for leave two years in advance which is unfair because people don't know what they're doing in two years time".

The leave system has recently changed, but not for the better. It used to be based on seniority, but this was traded off in exchange for an agreement that the roster would be

released 6 weeks in advance. Qantas now wants to pretend this agreement does not exist. At Christmas, workers were lucky to receive their rosters 10 days before their roster began.

The new system means that there is an inability to bid for 1 week leave at a time, only being able to bid for 2, 3 or 5 week leave blocks, no crossing over of leave bids and no ability to cancel leave. There has not been consultation with the ASU, even though there have been ongoing discussions regarding leave at all the delegates meetings.

ASU delegates at SIT have demanded that Qantas reconsider their position on the implementation of this new system.

ASU Secretary Sally McManus says, "Qantas management have let problems build up to an unacceptable level. In the end, this affects morale and stress levels. ASU members will only put up with so much. The fact they cannot plan their holidays is ridiculous".

ONESKY SPEAKS TO NEIL SCHUMACKER, ASU DELEGATE FROM AUSTRALIAN AIR EXPRESS



How long have you been a member of the ASU?

About 13 years since 1995. I've been in the union movement since about 1977.

Why did you get involved with the union movement?

I think it was necessary in those days. There was a lot of dictatorship going on. The first union I joined was the BWIU – Builders, Workers, Industrial Union, when union membership was expected on building sites. But there were a lot of reasons why we still chose to join the union. Safety issues were a big push. In those days a lot of people got killed when they shouldn't. There were also a lot of big profits that weren't passed onto employees and there were a lot of stand over tactics. You really had to be part of the union to be safe.

Why do you think union membership is important these days?

I think the whole fabric of the union movement is changing. In aviation for example we've got a lot of overseas players coming into Australia, hence there are a lot of joint ventures happening, and they don't really like playing industrially with Australia because of our Industrial Relations system. You really need to be in the union to feel secure, knowing that if anything does happen you have back up. And you do have back up.

How has the union been helpful in your workplace? Have there been any pressing challenges where the union has been helpful?

We have a high union density at Australian Air Express and the union has helped on a national scale with our EBAs. Without them we probably wouldn't be as successful as we are and we'd probably be a lot less financially well off. The union was particularly helpful in a situation where we had a worker threatened with dismissal we were able to save his job. In those instances the union is very important.

A lot of younger people are not connected with the union movement mainly because they have not experienced life without the benefits the union has fought for.

How would you encourage younger people to get involved in the union movement?

Go and ask a person on the dole - a person that has been sacked, what it is like. If they're not a member they face intimidation by a lot of employers. If you're a small business operator you can terminate at the drop of a hat and do whatever you like basically and if you're not in a union you're not going to have that backing and support that you need. And I would know being the owner of a small business myself, trust me.

What do you see as the major challenges facing the union movement in the future?

I think it's keeping government's honest. They say a lot but whether they deliver is another thing. Membership's an issue. Because I sit on the committee of management I know this. I think the attempt to attract members should come from the workplace itself. If you've got 20 people that are members and 10 that aren't I think that it's up to the 20 to convince them to join. In a collective workplace it is up to the members to convince non-members that this is the correct thing to do. Convincing young people to join is very difficult but I think the old attitude – if you want to know about life insurance, ask a widow, works. It's the same thing – if you want to know about unions go and ask the person who got sacked and he'll tell you – go and join the union.

The union will always be the brunt of criticism. The history of the union is coated with the bully boy tactics. A delegate is seen as a Scottish bloke with a big battering ram that wants to harm people. That's been hard to change over the years. Those things take a long period to change. I think that if our union works smarter rather than harder then we can tackle these issues. By smarter I mean seeking the younger people through the electronic mediums they are used to and I think we are doing this.



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