

Upcoming public discussion evenings

The Wellington and Christchurch branches of AWSM are organising monthly discussion evenings on the first Wednesday of every month. The next meetings will be on May 5th.

The details of the topics to be discussed, time and location of the discussion groups can be found on our website, <http://www.awsm.org.nz>.

In Wellington, the April 7th meeting watched the film Harlan County USA, a documentary about a gruelling yet inspiring coal miners' strike in a small Kentucky town in the 1970s, described as one of the five best documentaries of all time by the International Documentary Association.

In Christchurch, the April 7th meeting, co-organised with Beyond Resistance (<http://beyondresistance.wordpress.com>), looked at current attacks on the working class in New Zealand. We are under attack in our workplaces, our communities and as beneficiaries, and the meeting discussed some possible methods of resistance to these attacks. The May meeting will look at **anarcho-syndicalism, industrial networks and new forms of workplace/community organising**.

What is AWSM?

The Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement (AWSM) is an organisation working towards a classless, stateless society: anarchist-communism.

We are made up of revolutionary class-struggle anarchists from across Aotearoa / New Zealand. For now, we are a small organisation with local branches in Auckland and Wellington and members in a few other centres.

As class struggle anarchists our priority is active involvement in workplace struggles and industrial action as well as community based campaigns in our neighbourhoods. We are currently involved in the struggles against residential water metering in Wellington, the 90 Day "Hire & Fire" Act nationally, strike support and more.

We publish a monthly newsheet (which you're reading right now!) and a less frequent but more in-depth theoretical magazine as well.

To be a member of AWSM, you must agree with our Aims & Principles (available on our website, <http://www.awsm.org.nz>), and be involved in the life and activity of the group. If you're interested in joining or just finding out a bit more about us, email or write to us via the contact details at the bottom of this page.



Subscriptions

If you want to make sure you don't miss an issue of Solidarity, you can subscribe to either the print or electronic version.

To subscribe to the AWSM announcements list, put your email address in the form on the top right of each page on our website, <http://www.awsm.org.nz>.

Subscribers will be sent .pdf copies of Solidarity each month, along with other publications produced by AWSM and occasional information - we promise we won't spam you with a ton of useless stuff though! The electronic copy is identical to the print version.

Or, you can subscribe to the print edition to receive a copy of Solidarity in the post. \$8 for 12 issues. Mail a cheque to our PO Box listed below, or contact us to organise an alternative method of payment.

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SOLIDARITY

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Newsheet of the Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement



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. Petitions and marches on Parliament are not the answer, self-organisation and direct action are.

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.

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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 (MoJ) workers, who have been engaged in industrial activity against their

employers for about 6 months. This activity has included work to rule (including overtime bans), pickets, rallies and strike activity (including semi-wildcat strikes). While their union, the Public Service Association (PSA), 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 Government's attempted 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



Chile



Corporate Welfare



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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.

Various community services

have experienced major or complete funding cuts, and some are being forced to close. In Christchurch, 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, and other services like it, find the funding it needs to ensure its survival.



Corporate Welfare - Alive and Well

Shortly after Valentine's Day John Key was cornered by \$15 Minimum Wage Campaigners who asked the question, "Could you live on less than \$15 an hour?" unsurprisingly he admitted that he couldn't. Key was quick to argue that increasing the minimum wage to \$15 would lead to another 9000 people losing their jobs. Since National took office tens of thousands of jobs have already been lost, with over 5000 lost in May 2009 alone!

The \$15 minimum wage campaign began in the same month and stories of people working 40 hours plus each week and not having enough left to pay for even the basics leaving them with no choice but to use their credit card to pay for groceries and fuel have become the norm.

Whilst Key skulked away, Social Development Minister Paula Bennett was busy finalising her 'welfare shake up'. Since her recent announcement of 'tightening things up' Beneficiary Advocacy Federation spokeswoman Kay Brereton says there are just not enough jobs at the moment to make the Government's plan a feasible one.

"They're blaming the poor for being poor and for being unemployed or for being sick or for being solo parents," said Ms Brereton. "They're not investing in finding jobs and in helping these people."

Taking the \$15 minimum wage petition to the streets, we occasionally get a rant from someone about 'welfare cheats' and that 'you're only paid what your worth' but when we begin to investigate who is really cheating the welfare system it becomes obvious that it doesn't matter how hard you work whilst the fat cats are pulling the strings.

Rio Tinto is the World's biggest miner and operates the aluminium plant in Bluff. The company currently absorbs over 15% of the country's generated power but pays a fraction of the cost. The discounted amount is a heavily guarded secret, but someone has to pay the remaining balance and guess who foots the bill? The tax payer.



Corporate Welfare - Alive and Well cont..

are out of the Earth it's anyone's guess where it's processed.

The cost is further added to by the Trade and Emission Scheme. In 2006 Rio Tinto threatened to uproot its factory and leave the NZ if the Labour Government continued on its plans to implement its regulations on green house gas emissions. The mine is actually harder to find minerals within the rock – the Government, if it wants to keep Rio Tinto in NZ, will have to subsidise further by giving out free emission permits to the company. In Australia, just like here, nothing is free - Rio Tinto is set to receive A\$462 million in free permits this year alone!

New Zealand's largest multi-national corporation is Fonterra controlling 30% of the World's dairy exports. Its environmental record in NZ is disgraceful with the use of palm kernel based feed, supplied from striped native rainforests, dirty Lignite coal used to power the milk hydrators at Edendale and the methane gases produced by cattle and intense irrigation of the land. By being exempt from the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), until 2015, agricultural greenhouse gas emitters are currently receiving a \$1.1 billion subsidy from taxpayers. This is only set to rise as Fonterra tightens its grip on the economy and further exploits the land.

When the Government attacks an 'unknown' number of beneficiaries who are supposedly ripping off the honest citizen of New Zealand and when we hear the anti-worker, prejudiced rubbish parroted by a handful of people we come across when we pass around the \$15 minimum wage petition I can't help think about the recent news of the planned mining in our national parks, the water privatisation schemes, ACC cuts, backhanders to McDonald's, pay freezes and attacks on welfare and community centres. There is a big fight on the horizon and we better begin to prepare ourselves.

Workers Suffer the Hardest Blow in Chile

The massive earthquake which struck Chile earlier this year has resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe of epic proportions. With hundreds dead and many more left injured, sick or homeless, it is clear that those affected will spend years trying to rebuild their former lives. However, as is often the case, it is the working poor who suffer the hardest blow. Not only has this earthquake torn apart people's lives, it has also ripped apart the carefully woven social fabric of Chilean society.

Left without basic supplies in the aftermath of the quake, residents of Concepción and other badly affected areas began entering supermarkets and small businesses in order to gather food along with other essentials and set about distributing them according to the needs of the local community. One eyewitness stated "people organised themselves spontaneously – giving out milk, nappies and water according to each individual's need, with attention paid in particular to the number of children within each family."

Yet the situation soon changed drastically, with working class neighbourhoods coming

under attack from armed gangsters. These opportunists were attempting to take advantage of the devastation by not only stealing from shops but also people's homes, sometimes setting them ablaze before fleeing. Such attacks were not met passively however and many working class neighbourhoods, armed only with sticks, knives and a desire to continue living, began organising self-defence squads in order to protect themselves from the Mafioso thugs who had been terrorising them.

In the midst of this conflict the army has been sent in to restore 'order'. For the bulk of people this order means a brutally enforced 9 pm to 6 am curfew, and being forced to continue living in houses which are on the brink of collapse. Public officials, including the ex-mayor



of Concepción, have publicly stated that working class areas will receive aid last, as collective punishment for the 'looting' which took place soon after the earthquake. As such ordinary Chileans are being forced to choose between staying in dangerously damaged houses, and risk being crushed, or breaking curfew, and risk being shot or detained. Eat little or no food, and risk starving to death, or expropriate food from shops, and (you guessed it) risk being shot or detained.

With the exception of the more wealthy neighbourhoods in central Concepción, few people have actually received aid from the government. That human beings should be seen as expendable in our current society ought to be little surprise, ultimately the vast majority of us are nothing more than resources to be exploited by the capitalist class. Nevertheless, with an earthquake looming on the horizon in Wellington, the disaster in Chile should teach us two things; first, that we should never underestimate the ability of working class people to organise together in order to meet their own human needs. And second, that the State will inevitably aim to crush such displays of solidarity and self-organisation.