



Enough waiting!

Fight back and defend the CFMEU!

It has been weeks since the “Building Bad” media hitjob launched against the CFMEU’s construction division. The Labor government, with the backing of the ACTU, is moving to put the union into external administration. A state-appointed administrator, to be in place for years, will be empowered to sack all elected officials and to seize union assets at will. New and existing CFMEU EBAs are now subject to a Fair Work monitored “special process.” This is the culmination of years of attacks from Royal Commissions to the ABCC—threatening not just legal action against a few union officials but a hostile takeover of the union itself. A CFMEU “under administration” would send a chilling message that any union sticking their neck out could be subjected to a similar fate. This is an outrage! The attack on the CFMEU is an attack on the entire working class and must be defeated—which can only be achieved through class-struggle action against the Labor government.

What has the CFMEU leadership done instead? Victorian Secretary John Setka jumped ship, resigning immediately. The sharpest response has been from Queensland Secretary Michael Ravbar who rebuked Albanese and other “ladder-climbing politicians in the halls of power,” declaring “We will defend each other to the ends of the earth.” Fine words! But the only line of “defence” that the CFMEU leadership has had to offer is National Secretary Zach Smith’s attempt to placate Labor by taking over the Victorian branch in the name of cleaning out “criminal” elements. This course is leading the union to disaster!

It is no secret that the moves against the CFMEU have nothing to do with “stamping out corruption” in the construction industry (developer corruption will continue in spades) but are about crushing a “problem union” which has been able to extract higher wages and better conditions by regularly defying the bosses’ anti-strike laws.

The attack on the CFMEU is an attempt by the bosses to gut the union, an effort to cut the “costs of doing business” in increasingly uncertain times. Neither the bosses nor their Labor government are going to be satiated by anything less than that.

Zach Smith’s “investigation” attempts to sidestep a real fight against the government takeover while acceding to the ruling class’s *casus belli*. The CFMEU tops hope to appease the Labor government (which could only succeed if Smith completely guts the union himself) or at best to rely on challenges in the bosses’ courts (the same ones that have buried the union in tens of millions of dollars in fines for years). The government has already responded to the latter option, promising new laws to frustrate any potential legal challenge from the CFMEU. The union tops’ strategy paralyses the CFMEU just when a struggle is so desperately needed.

In fact, the CFMEU leadership’s strategy of wheeling and dealing has even led them to oppose public demonstrations of opposition. A recent statement by the Victorian Building Industry Group of Unions (BIG, composed of CFMEU, AMWU, ETU and the plumbers union) denounced a subsequently canned 5 August demonstration in defence of the CFMEU, demanding members not attend. Even the most elementary expressions of defence are stymied in fear of alienating the Labor government and ACTU. Instead, BIG promises that “in due course there will be a joint delegates meeting to discuss the next steps forward.”

By dragging their feet and dangling a fight at some undefined future, the CFMEU leadership keep members waiting...waiting...waiting...preventing any action that would hurt the weak Labor government which they are so attached to. At the end of the day, the CFMEU leadership’s strategy is to support and influence the Labor Party in an effort to “make capitalism work” for its membership. Today, this ties the workers

movement to Albanese just as he is bringing down the hammer.

To try and prevent a fightback, the ruling class has attempted to use working-class frustrations as a battering ram against the supposedly “privileged CFMEU.” “Thuggery,” “corruption,” etc. paint a tall tale of CFMEU membership living lavish lifestyles funded by gangsterism and backroom deals at the expense of the taxpayer. But soaring costs of living, the housing crisis, the lack of decent jobs, are the product of a decaying social order which the Labor government defends and administers for. CFMEU officials convey the impression the union is isolated. But waging the struggle as a fight for all working people against the hated Labor government is the only way to rally broader sections of the working class to the CFMEU’s side and repel this attack, putting the ruling class on the back foot and opening the door to a broader fightback.

The entire working class has a vested interest in defending the CFMEU from this attack. A gutted CFMEU would mean ETU, MUA, any union showing hints of combativity in the face of worsening living conditions would now be under threat. The bosses would only have a freer hand to tighten the screws on the whole working class.

Fight back now!

Today the workers movement is at a crossroads. We say: act before it’s too late! The Labor government is

putting in place machinery to implement the takeover. These moves can only be defeated by mobilising the immense social power of the working class against the bosses. BIG has declared that there will be joint delegates’ meetings “in due course.” Construction workers must demand their officials put their money where their mouth is and fight to organise meetings immediately, both within and across unions, for the defence of the CFMEU. Over the past few weeks, there have been scores of CFMEU site meetings in Sydney voting on their EBAs. Picketing workers on the Cross River Rail project in Brisbane are fighting rotten conditions for a better EBA themselves. But the fate of all EBAs and the whole union is on the line right now—these meetings and pickets need to be turned into a platform to organise a defence of the CFMEU against the takeover.

We propose that all CFMEU and construction union members, and workers more broadly, fight for the following motion in their union meetings:

The Labor government’s move to take over the CFMEU is an attack on our union and a threat to the union movement as a whole. We need to fight back. To defend the CFMEU we must effectively mobilise unions for a common struggle against the Labor government. The union must send delegated members to fight for this perspective by fraternising with workers of other unions in order to forge the broadest class-struggle defence possible.

Make real the CFMEU slogan “touch one, touch all”!

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