

National Workers Union



Workers of the world unite!

**TO DEFEND OURSELVES
AGAINST THE ONE PERCENT
WE MUST TAKE BACK OUR
UNIONS!**

The employers, led by the one percent, have launched the most vicious assault on the rights, entitlements and interests of working people, both unionised and non-unionised, since the 1980's.

Unlike the 1980's when the trade union movement launched a decade long fightback and fought the employers, blow for blow, working people find themselves, today, almost defenceless.

The leadership of the trade union movement, today, is the weakest it has been since the 1930's. In effect, the weakest it has been in its history. This weakness is precisely why the one percent has decided to launch their attack at this time.

The vast majority of workers (some say close to 90%) are not unionised and union membership continues to shrink as workers are retrenched and the employers are smelling blood. They are no longer afraid of the power of unionised workers, because they have succeeded in compromising many trade union leaders.

There is an alarming lack of capacity and inefficiency in handling the fundamental tasks of dealing with workers' grievances and disputes. Education and training from the shop floor level up is no longer a priority. Many of the top leaders are afraid to have knowledgeable, informed, trained and conscious officers around them - especially on the shop floor.

Those leaders who have not been compromised (SOLD OUT) are showing an embarrassing inefficiency and incompetence and are unable, and in many cases, unwilling to protect, defend and advance their members' interests and seem only concerned with their personal interests, even at the expense of the interests of their members and working people in general.

So what is it that the employers and the one percent want? The objective is to maximise their profits during this economic downturn. Of course the only way they

can do that is to minimise their labour costs by demoralising their workforce through retrenchment, wage suppression and the cutting back of hard won benefits.

The Joint Chambers of Commerce held a meeting in late March where they decided certain things. Because of their understanding that resistance from the trade union movement would be more in word than deed, they decided that they would concentrate their fire on the industrial court.

Ninety percent or more of the matters that are decided in the Industrial Court are from workers who have not been members of a recognised majority union bargaining unit. They have come up with a strategy that involves further weakening the unions while ensuring that non-unionised workers know and stay in their place.

- They want to remove the provision in law that says that a worker, whether previously unionised or not, must be represented by a union in the industrial court.
- They want to have the right to examine unions' financial status (the books) when unions make applications for recognition.
- They want what they call small and micro enterprise employers to be exempt from punishment for unfair dismissals and from the procedures that apply to other employers when it comes to trade disputes.

- They want to make it illegal for the Recognition Board to grant recognised majority union status to a bargaining unit of less than twenty workers.
- They want unions to be decertified for bargaining units that fall below the magic number (twenty).
- They are against domestic workers being treated like “workers” under the law, despite the government supporting ILO recommendation 189 and promising to enable it through legislation.
- They are “vehemently” against contributing toward a severance fund, such as applies in Barbados and have vowed to resist it.
- They want unions to pay costs in matters that employers win in the industrial court.
- They are against workers who have been unjustly dismissed being re-instated.
- They want to be able to retrench so-called “contract workers” at will.
- They want to cut back on leave provisions in collective agreements.
- They have developed legal mechanisms to delay and frustrate the already long drawn out process of recognition which they tried out in the frustration of the RBC recognition struggle by BIGWU.
- They want restrictions on appeals against industrial court judgements to be removed.
- They want judges in the industrial court to come largely from the “private sector”.

They have set up a high level legal team to oppose and obstruct judgements coming out of the industrial court that are not in their favour and they have decided that the President of the Industrial Court must be removed.

On the other hand the Labour Movement is in a horrible mess. Most trade union leaders are unable to mobilise their members, are unable to convince them about most things, are unable to organise anything useful and have lost the respect of their members and the broad masses of working people.

The leadership of the labour movement has lost credibility and trade unionists are being seen as smartmen, confidence tricksters and hustlers along the likes of insurance agents, lawyers, bankers,

policemen, politicians and priests.

Leading trade unionists act as watchmen, as security guards, for the employers and the State. They warn our enemies when we get restless and they collaborate with the employers to disarm and demobilise us. They use their organisations as tools of personal aggrandisement, of personal enrichment and as mechanisms to curry favour with political parties and governments which are fiercely opposed to the advancement of the interests of the working class

The end result is that we continue to eat the bread that the devil knead in these times of spiralling inflation and deteriorating conditions of work and of life, while the employers rake in obscene profits and the State loots and plunders our patrimony and buries our society in a cesspool of inequality, oppression, corruption, despair and criminal barbarism.

The primary purpose of many trade union leaders seems to be to propagate division in the trade union movement and to attack each other rather than the employers.

If we are to be able to defend ourselves, as workers, against the renewed attacks from the employers, led by the one percent, then union members must take back their unions from the mocking pretenders posing as trade unionists.

We must develop a culture of collective leadership and strengthen the democracy in our unions. We must put check and balances on our leaders, encourage a culture of debate and pressure them to show respect to the least among us.

To be a loyal trade unionist does not mean we have to support every word that comes out of the mouth of the Leader, when we know that he/she is spouting foolishness. To be a loyal trade unionist means that we must do all things incumbent upon us to ensure that our unions are fighting fit organisations that can defend the working people against the attacks on our livelihood.

If we have to get rid of the baggage that is weighing down the trade union movement in order to start up the machinery of resistance to the one percent, then so be it!

