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The need for a rank and file movement

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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February 3, 2015

Retrieved on 12th October 2021 from anarkismo.net
From 'The Anvil' newsletter of Melbourne Anarchist Communist
Group (MACG), issue 4/1, Feb. 2015.

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Take Back Our Unions, Take Back Our World

The organised rank and file necessary to build the general strike against the Abbott Government is also necessary to fight subsequent attacks on the working class by Australian capitalists. The union bureaucracy must be shattered and those genuine elements within it must dissolve into the rank and file movement. By its nature, capitalism continually attacks workers and siphons off ever more wealth and power to those already rich and powerful. To end the attacks for good, our rank and file movement must link up with similar movements overseas and rise up in worldwide revolution against capitalism.

We have seen it already under Hawke, Keating, Rudd and Gillard. Now the ALP serves Big Business even more slavishly. Anybody who thinks Bill Shorten would chart a substantially different course from Abbott, let alone reverse his attacks on workers, has rocks in their head.

The Union Officials Won't Save Us

Virtually the entire union bureaucracy is loyal to the Labor Party (most of the exceptions having thrown in their lot with the Greens – good luck with that!). The limit of their ambitions is a return to a Labor government, with the more photogenic of their number landing plum parliamentary seats for themselves.

The officials will not challenge the neo-liberal consensus unless their own positions are threatened – and not necessarily even then. They quake in fear before the State apparatus and have no faith in their rank and file members. They cannot even defend the institutions over which they preside, let alone mobilise a movement that can stop broader government attacks on the working class.

We Have to Save Ourselves

Only by organising a movement at the base of our unions can we fight back. We have to mobilise a rank and file groundswell in favour of a general strike to stop all of Tony Abbott's attacks. Once the movement is strong enough, we must be prepared to act independently of the union officials. When we create facts on the ground, the officials will be forced to either lead the struggle against Abbott or be bypassed.

Contents

The Senate Won't Save Us	5
The Labor Party Won't Save Us	5
The Union Officials Won't Save Us	6
We Have to Save Ourselves	6
Take Back Our Unions, Take Back Our World	7

The Campaign for a General Strike to Stop Tony Abbott is developing, but needs to go a lot further and a lot faster. Each day that goes by without an organised working class response is a day that Liberals harm working class people and democratic rights in Australia further, a day to destroy the environment, torture refugees, wage imperialist war in West Asia, stoke reactionary social forces and stack public offices with Right wing zealots. To wait till the next election is to concede Tony Abbott the right to commit any crimes, no matter how appalling.

The Senate Won't Save Us

Firstly, many of the atrocious measures contained in last May's Budget were waved through because they were part of the appropriation bills which give the government authority to spend public money. This is how cuts to school and hospital funding for the States, cuts to higher education and many program cuts have gone ahead uncontested.

Secondly, relying on the Senate allows the Government to wangle deals with Right wing independents and minor parties if they have to – neither Labor nor the Greens can be trusted to oppose government attacks consistently. The Government got the abolition of the mining tax and its anti-refugee legislation through, so placing faith in the Senate is a recipe for disappointment.

The Labor Party Won't Save Us

The ALP, whatever its previous philosophy, is now a thoroughly neo-liberal party. Many members continue to fight the good fight inside it, but decades of rule changes have ensured that the leadership always wins. Labor's differences with the Liberals are marginal and, left to their own devices, when in power they would implement most of the attacks they now profess to oppose.