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First steps to a better deal at Carmichael Mine

Workers have not had a fair go at Carmichael, the Adani (now Bravus) mine that made headlines in 2019 as the target of anti-coal campaigners. Now, workers are getting organised and have started bargaining for a union collective agreement.

The Carmichael mine in the Galilee Basin won widespread support as an important provider of jobs. But the Union hears from workers at Carmichael over and over again that the jobs should be better. Turnover is high, workers are some of the lowest paid in the Queensland coal industry, and overtime is not properly paid.

There are blatant safety oversights, with little care being given to dust level standards on site or in camp, hot-bedding with sick workers, and even workers being put on planes that are pooling with water and need to turn around due to mechanical failures.

Workers at Carmichael mine have had a gutful of poor treatment and terrible management, so MEU members and workers came together to fight for the right to bargain for fair pay and better conditions.

After extensive work by MEU organisers led by Queensland District Vice President Shane Bruncker, workers undertook a majority support determination (MSD) to express their support for MEU representation in bargaining for an Enterprise Agreement to replace their current individual contracts. The MSD received 70% support from the workforce and the Fair Work Commission (FWC) granted the workforce the ability to bargain.

However, McKellar stalled talks with the Union due to changing their company name to 'M People'. Workers were concerned by this move as they saw it as a ploy to delay bargaining.

Despite this, the FWC ruled that workers at Carmichael mine have the right to bargain for their pay and conditions following the MSD.

On 15 and 16 June, Carmichael workers' representatives commenced bargaining with M People for a collective agreement with terms and conditions that better reflect standards in the Queensland coal industry.



Members after the first day of bargaining.

Workers' reps are seeking a fair pay increase that reflects high coal prices and 4.6% increase in Black Coal Award rates of pay and they pushed 'M People' to take action urgently on:

- shift payments for trades to reflect actual hours worked
- increased overtime for bus drivers
- more light vehicles to alleviate transport
- shortages at shift changeovers
- drug and alcohol testing to be conducted on paid time
- action to address poor accommodation standards at camp
- improved incident report process to ensure matters are addressed.

Workers also want guarantees about the provision of flights.

Shane Bruncker said the initial two days of meetings in Townsville gave bargaining reps the opportunity to outline their claims, but time on the second day was unexpectedly cut short when some delegates were informed their flight times back to site had been brought forward.

He said it was disappointing that progress on the first day was cut short, however the bargaining team representing all production and workshop crews benefited from the experience.

***“They spoke to their claims and gave the company a roadmap for addressing the current high turnover and low morale. We reinforced that if they had come to the table earlier, they wouldn’t be facing the same pressure on wages that we are now seeing across the industry.*”**

“It is great to see bargaining finally underway and we thank all the delegates for their participation.”

Our Union always committed that if the Carmichael mine was built, we would organise it. It’s great to see these workers are now negotiating for a collective agreement to replace substandard individual contracts and bring their pay and conditions in line with standards across the Queensland industry.

Underground for 55 days: What was it like?



Some of the sit-in strikers attended the unveiling.

The Mineworkers Trust and our Northern Mining and NSW Energy District funded this wonderful monument to the Preston sit-in strike, which was unveiled in May in the village of Curlewis near Gunnedah.

The protest began when the RW Miller Preston Extended Colliery sacked 83 of its 106 mineworkers with no warning. Sixteen miners began a ‘sit-in’ strike in the underground mine, although two had to return to the surface for urgent medical and family reasons.

Their action persuaded the NSW Government to take action on the orderly development of the coal industry and the retention of coal jobs through the restructure of the Joint Coal Board. Fifty-three of the sacked workers got their jobs back.

We spoke to a former MEU member who was part of the sit-in strike, Geoff Rose.

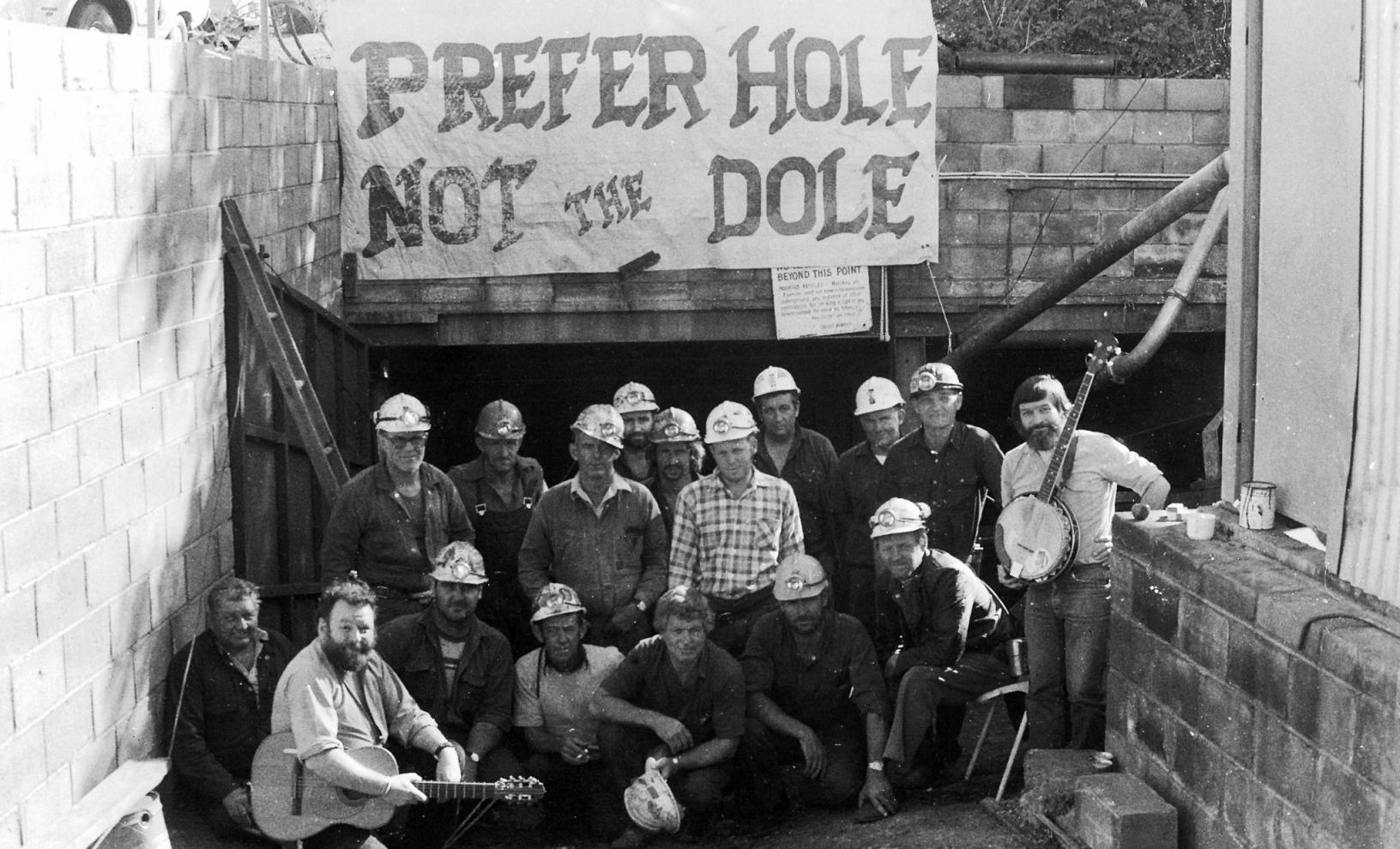
Q: What was your experience taking part in sit-in and being underground for 55 days?

A: One of the first challenges was that one of the Managers from the Head Office told us that RW Miller was threatening to turn off the fans, which would mean that there wouldn’t be any air going down the drift. The Union, as well as other Unions stood up for us and made demands to RW Miller to keep the air on, and the community got behind us which meant that we would have air and power while being underground.

After that, the first couple of weeks were alright, although we were all missing our wives and kids. Things improved when we were able to go to the mouth of the pit and we developed ways to communicate with our family.

When we were all able to, our wives would meet us at the top of the pit and give us sandwiches and tea and bring the kids to visit, which helped a lot. We even had people bring us hot water because there is only cold water in the mines to wash and shower in. We would get hot water from the mouth of the pit and walk the water into the pit and put the water into a makeshift shower.

We never left the pit, and no one from the



Geoff can be pictured sitting third from the left.

outside ever came in, but the camaraderie was really there, and the community and our families got behind us.

Q: Being underground for 55 days had to be challenging. What did you all do to raise your spirits during tough or even mundane times?

A: We would do things like play card games. We played various games of solitaire and other games like scrabble. We would also go for two-to-three-kilometre walks in the mines, fixing the lights.

Something I do reflect on, is that I was in my early thirties at the time, and there were some workers in there with us who were older. It must have been much tougher for them, but the thing that kept us all going is that we had the support from people outside.

Q: After the sit-in strike, what happened next?

A: We came out of the mine, and we got our jobs back. It took some time to adjust to normal life

and some people even chose not to go back to those jobs. Some people called us heroes, but we weren't heroes. We were just people who wanted our jobs back.

There were some people in the community who didn't support what we did, although that was only a small number of people, and for some of the workers, I think that affected them. But after we got out, the Union organised an event for us. They put us all on a bus and took us to the Showgrounds and put on a big do, with all our wives, kids and the community. That really helped those people who were feeling unsure, and when we saw the event and all the people, we really had a great sense of solidarity.

Q: What do you think of the monument?

A: I think it's a great tribute to the people who were there. They were fighting hard. It's good for people to know the struggle we went through because after we did that, the mine continued for another ten to twelve years and created employment for many people. I'm very proud of

being a part of it, and I think it's great that it's being recognised.

Q: Do you still live in the area?

A: I live in Gunnedah which is around 20km into town. There are still a few people around from the sit-in strike who still live around here. I'm not planning on leaving.

Q: And finally, what advice would you give to mine workers today who are facing their own battles or adversity?

A: Stick together. If you stick together, you have a far better chance of winning the fight. When you're on your own, they'll pick you off one by one. You need to keep people around you when you're going through a battle. You need your family and the community, and you need to stick together and stick with the Union. Stick with the Union and you'll have a shot at winning.

Mt Arthur closure: BHP must support workers and communities



BHP must invest in supporting the thousands of mineworkers at its giant Mt Arthur mine in the Hunter Valley after announcing it intends to close the mine in 2030.

General President Tony Maher has written to BHP head of Minerals Australia to seek urgent talks about investment in support for workers and for the region surrounding Muswellbrook.

BHP announced that it would stop operating the mine in 2030 after failing to find a buyer for the mine, which is the largest thermal coal mine in Australia. Up to 2000 direct jobs will be affected, with many more businesses and jobs affected,

Bayswater Lodge Secretary Matthew Howard said younger mineworkers were worried about their futures, with some just recently securing permanent jobs they thought would be for life.

“It's ok for workers who may be planning to retire within the eight-year timeframe, however there are many young men and women including the current crop of trainees looking forward to a career in coal mining.

“Although eight years is a reasonable timeframe, people are also aware that there could be further changes that affect BHP's plans. Some people looking for longer-term security may consider their options if they can find permanent work elsewhere.”

Northern Mining and NSW Energy District President Robin Williams said the eight-year timeframe would cause concern for workers and the company must reassure them about steps being taken to invest in their future.

“BHP has made and is continuing to make enormous profits from the Mt Arthur mine, especially with current high coal prices.

“We will be advocating on behalf of our members and their families that BHP mustn't just cut and run, they must invest in a plan for the future of jobs and economic activity in the area.

“Workers were taken by surprise by the announcement. BHP must be upfront and engage with their workforce and local communities to develop a plan that protects their interests into the future.”

The Union will be seeking Just Transition measures for the Mt Arthur workforce including early retirement and redeployment.

Survey reveals widespread sexual harassment

A survey of our QLD members shows that mineworkers are experiencing sexual harassment at unacceptable levels, and employers are not doing enough to protect workers from instances of sexual harassment or support them to report abuse and harassment.

The MEU held a survey to inform our submission to the QLD Government's Evaluation of occupational health risks in the Queensland resources industry. The survey had over 600 workers participate.

Of survey participants, 43% of women and 18% of men said they have experienced or witnessed some form of sexual harassment within the last 12 months.

When it comes to employers putting in adequate protections, around one-third of women (32%) don't believe that there are adequate protections put in place at their worksite to deal with sexual harassment, compared with 59% of men.

The majority of women and men are unsure or negative about whether they would be supported throughout the process when reporting instances of sexual harassment in their workplace. Among women, just 22% believe workers are supported throughout the reporting process. Among men, just 34% believed they would be supported.

Another significant finding was that the majority of workers (60% overall) also believe that contractors are more vulnerable and less likely to report instances of sexual harassment than permanent employees.

In 2021 we provided a submission to the Western Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Sexual Harassment against women in the FIFO mining industry through the Western Mineworkers Alliance. The results from QLD are not as dire as those in WA, particularly in regards to physical rates of sexual harassment, verbal sexual harassment and some



MEU Submission to the Evaluation of occupational health risks in the Queensland resources industry

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inappropriate behaviours. This is likely due to the QLD industry being more unionised and less remote.

However, the results from the survey in QLD confirm concerns about problems in the industry, and the MEU will work with the government and employers on practical proposals to stamp out sexual harassment.

If you are experiencing bullying or harassment, please contact your Lodge or District for assistance.

You can read the full submission [here.](#)



End of an era – Collie power station and mine closures

National Research Director Peter Colley writes about the closure of WA's coal fired power stations.

The state-owned coal power stations in Western Australia join the list of those around the country closing by 2030, but at least there has been some planning for it.

The Premier of Western Australia, Mark McGowan, announced on 14 June that the remaining state-owned coal power generators would close before 2030. While the closure of the Muja C units in 2022 and 2024 had been previously announced, the new statement puts closure dates of 2027 on the Collie power station, and 2029 on the Muja D units.

The only remaining coal power will be the privately-owned Bluewaters 1 and 2 stations. They have no closure dates set, but have been in significant financial trouble in recent years along with their principal coal supplier, Griffin Coal. The prospect of the end of coal mining and coal power in Western Australia is very real.

The coal for Muja and Collie Power comes from

the Premier Coal, and its closure must be tied to that of the power stations. Many hundreds of jobs are at stake.

WA has cheap gas (compared to the eastern States) by virtue of its domestic gas reservation policy, but the real driver of the closures is the enormous amount of renewable energy being deployed across the State, and even by heavy industry such as mines.

There is no picture postcard solution for the workers and community of Collie, but at least these closures have been anticipated for some time and the Labor Government has been working since 2019 to assist the people of Collie through the transition. At the highest level, there has been a Collie Delivery Unit within the Premiers Department, and in 2020 the first Collie Just Transition Plan was delivered.

Rather than denying that big change was on the way, and hoping that the economics of coal power would survive the challenge of renewables – and national emission reduction goals – the union in Collie has been an active participant in the plans being developed and implemented for the town.

Before the recent announcement that WA government had already invested over \$115 million in various project to stimulate new industry in Collie – from tourism to mining industry training facilities. There has now been a further half a billion dollars of funds committed to the region.

The power stations and the coal mines themselves will require substantial remediation work – providing ongoing jobs for many years.

The WA announcement follows other recent “brought-forward” closure announcements with respect to Yallourn, Loy Yang A, Bayswater and Eraring. There is zero prospect of any new coal fired power being built – there is simply no private investor interest, and even a publicly owned power station would need endless protection from the competition from renewables.

There is some prospect that “capacity

payments” in the National Electricity Market – paying dispatchable generation to be available rather than actually produce power – might sustain some coal power for longer, but that is more likely to boost gas, hydro and battery storage that can be turned on and off easily.

The domestic coal power generation industry is in far more trouble than the export coal industry, which is currently benefiting from super-high prices. However, the very high prices (in part at least a temporary spike due to the Russia-Ukraine war) are not stimulating new investment in coal mining here or in other countries. And the announcement on 15 June by BHP that it will run its very large Mt Arthur thermal coal mine to closure in 2030 – and thereby joining Glencore which has also committed to running its mines to closure – means that signs of major change are appearing for export thermal coal.

With a new Labor Government in Canberra we have an opportunity for federal leadership in fair and just transition for coal power generation over the next two decades. And we better develop much greater expertise and experience in doing that because it will be needed for other industries (not just coal) facing major change later on. In various forms the union has been saying this for some years now, and the future is getting closer.

Scott Brittliffe is retiring but he's still got plenty of fight

All the best to Scott Brittliffe on his well-deserved retirement. Scott is retiring from a long career in the Northern District coal industry and his role as President of the United Wambo Lodge.

Scott started out at Liddell Underground Mine in the 1980s aged 21 – he was doing some construction work at the mine and his Dad helped get him a start underground. Born and

bred in Singleton, Scott's father and brothers worked as coal miners too.

When the reserves ran out, he moved across to Liddell State Mine and later began his open cut mining career, which finally took him to Wambo with a rotation of employers along the way as mines changed hands.

Scott was always active in the union and was a long-term delegate before taking on the role of Lodge President about 10 years ago. He says the safety and conditions have improved significantly since he started – but only because of workers standing together through the Union and taking on the companies.

“We stuck together and fought for things and we got them. Nothing was ever just given to us, not at all,” he says.

Along with the hard but satisfying work of representing members day to day, Scott has enjoyed being involved in the union's charity work – like the time in 2001 17 underground miners shaved their heads to fight children's cancer; and supporting coal miners across the District in their industrial battles like supporting the 2019 picket line at Boggabri mine: “They thought they were on their own out the back of nowhere but we're all in it together, it was important to show our support and help them keep morale up.”

Scott has been a committed mentor for a new generation of unionists at United Wambo and across the District and although we'll miss him, we know he'll keep fighting the good fight for mineworkers and his community. All the best for your retirement, Scotty! (pictured on the left)



Message from the General President

What's next for Same Job Same Pay?



The election of the Albanese Labor Government means we can now look forward to progress on new laws to implement Same Job Same Pay for labour hire workers in the mining industry and across the workforce.

Before the election, Labor committed to introducing Same Job Same Pay laws within its first year of government and now it has a mandate to do so.

Before legislation is drafted, the Government will undertake a consultation process with employers and unions to make sure the legislation is workable and meets its intended purpose of stopping labour hire being used to undercut Enterprise Agreements.

We have all seen how the mining industry has embraced outsourcing purely to cut pay and conditions for mineworkers back to rates barely above the Black Coal Award, when decades of union collective bargaining has delivered industry standards typically 30-40% above the Award.

We are optimistic that Same Job Same Pay laws will result in real wage increases for labour hire workers and an increase in direct, permanent employees as the cost incentive to outsource jobs is removed.

We know that mining companies and other major employers who have embraced the labour hire business model will lobby hard to limit the scope of the legislation.

But we know that after a decade of the labour hire rort becoming entrenched, a significant change in employment practices is needed.

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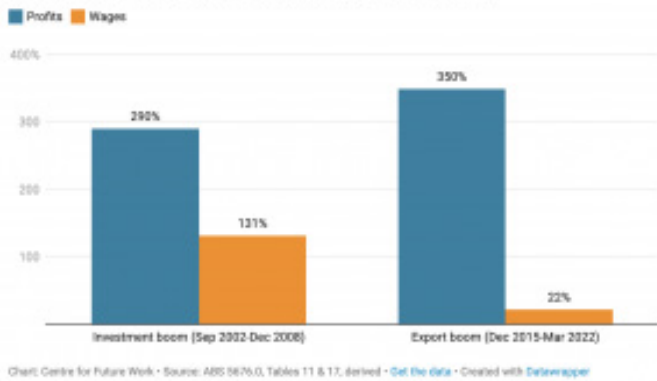
Profits are growing faster than wages across the economy, with the share of national income going to corporate profits at record highs.

As the Centre for Future Work's Greg Jericho explained "The shift in national income from wages to profits has been in place for over 40 years now... It is not an accident of economic conditions, but a feature of the system."

This trend has accelerated sharply in recent years, partly because of commodity price booms. Mining profits have jumped dramatically since 2019. Mining profits have surged so

dramatically that they now exceed profits from all other industries combined. The current mining export boom has not delivered wage growth in the industry – and that is in large part because of mining companies using labour hire to undermine union collective bargaining and drive wages down.

Mining profits & wages growth in the two booms



It's true that mining is a relatively well-paid industry. But what most people do not understand – apart from the long shifts, time away from home and dangerous nature of the work – is that the average mineworker

contributes around \$1.2 million per annum in output to their employer.

In other words, they return roughly eight times the value of their wages to the company bottom line. Because labour hire workers are paid considerably less, their contribution to profits are even higher.

At a time when the relationship between profits and wages is completely out of kilter, we need Same Job, Same Pay to restore some balance. Same Job, Same Pay is not a radical idea. It has existed in Europe and the United Kingdom since the late 2000's, including under a Conservative Government.

The campaign run by our Union during the federal election means the new Government now has a mandate to introduce Same Job Same Pay laws. Our Union will certainly be holding them to account for delivering on this commitment and we will be at the table working through the issues to make sure the new legislation is in a form that will boost wages and permanent jobs for mineworkers.



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