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Common Cause.



REMEMBERING MT MULLIGAN 100 YEARS ON



New Lodge President Tony Dowler and Secretary Beau Knihinicki

Our Union's newest Lodge at Moolarben Underground

COAL MINERS AT MOOLARBEN UNDERGROUND COAL MINE IN NSW HAVE FORMED OUR UNION'S NEWEST LODGE, WITH MEMBERS DETERMINED TO IMPROVE THEIR BELOW-STANDARD PAY AND CONDITIONS.

The underground mine at the Moolarben complex near Mudgee in the western coalfields began operating in 2016, in addition to the existing open cut. Union Lodges are already in place at the open cut mine and washery. However when the underground mine was established, operator Yancoal struck a non-union Enterprise Agreement with a few hand-picked workers.

Since then, a determined organising campaign – helped along by hostile management – means the underground mine now has nearly 90% union density, with members establishing the new Moolarben Underground Lodge about six weeks ago.

Newly elected Lodge President Tony Dowler said that like many of the other coal miners on site, he hasn't had much union experience in the past. But with a new Enterprise Agreement due, workers knew they wanted a better deal.

The current Enterprise Agreement for the underground mine includes hourly rates which are the lowest in the District and below Yancoal's other mines, including the Moolarben open cut across the road and Yancoal's Ashton underground mine in the Hunter Valley.

"Our pay rate was way behind others. We are \$6 an hour behind Ashton with no entitlements," said Tony.

"It has just been a matter of approaching people and giving them the option to join the union so we can start getting fairly treated and compensated.

"We said, 'let's move together as one' and about 90% have taken that option."

Moolarben workers have already voted down two proposed Enterprise Agreements put forward by the company – with strong no votes of 99% and 95%. They are now in the middle of a protected action ballot in preparation for an industrial campaign.

Members' priorities include a better pay rate and bonus system, sick leave paid as at work and more certainty over rosters.

In less than four years at the mine, Tony has had his roster changed five times already. The latest roster change cut tens of thousands a year out of the pay packet of many workers due to a reduction in overtime.

Moolarben underground mine is highly efficient, with lower manning numbers delivering higher output than other operations in difficult underground conditions, says Tony.

"We produce twice as much coal with half as many blokes. We are working flat out in wet conditions.

"The seam itself is very good strata but to manage the water when you're cutting the coal is extremely difficult. As soon as you start cutting coal the water pours in ... my workmates are getting drenched every shift. You get water through your gum boots.

"It's a tough job and we just want fair compensation and treatment."

Yancoal appears worried about the prospect of industrial action at the underground mine. Contractor PIMMS has started advertising jobs at Moolarben underground and mine deputies are being trained to cut coal.

"It looks like they are trying to lock in an alternative workforce in preparation for our members taking protected industrial action," said South Western District Vice President Craig Carberry.

"If the company is worried, that's good. They know the workforce is united and willing to fight for the pay and conditions they deserve.

"Members at Moolarben Underground can be reassured that they have the support of our whole union behind them.

"Standing together through the union and being willing to take on the company is the only way for mineworkers to get a better deal. With a new Lodge in place, I have every confidence that our members are up to this challenge."

TASSIE COAL MINERS FIGHT TO PROTECT CONDITIONS



Cornwall Colliery is a small coal mine with a long history. Mining at the site began in 1886 and while there were once several coal mines across the state, Cornwall is the last remaining underground coal mine in Tasmania.

Cornwall is a small operation with about 70 coal miners producing about 350,000 tonnes a year, which is mostly sold to parent company Cement Australia's Railton plant, fuelling the furnace that heats the limestone for cement production.

Our members at Cornwall have just begun negotiating a new Enterprise Agreement for the site, as management attempts to overturn long-term roster arrangements that would extend their fixed roster and reduce overtime. At the same time workers are pushing for a pay increase and fair bonus scheme closer to those in place at mainland coal mines.

Tasmanian District President Ricky Gale, who has worked underground at Cornwall for 14 years, said management is using the impending end of life of the mine as an excuse to try and cut workers' pay and conditions – including cutting back paid breaks and union meetings.

Substantial investment will be needed to establish a replacement mine and Cement Australia is threatening workers that their pay claim will put that investment at risk. But as Ricky points out, the cost of establishing a new mine will dwarf the relatively modest cost of an annual pay rise for the small workforce.

While the Cornwall miners earn a decent hourly rate, their bonus scheme is well behind mainland coal mines and they work in difficult conditions underground.

"We've got some of the worst conditions for underground coal mining, the strata is very fragile and we've had several roof falls," said Ricky.

Cuts in recent years have made it harder to coal production consistent.

"They try to cut costs all the time," says Ricky. "They got rid of the two shifts and we are now mining a single section. Downsizing the workforce and getting rid of some of the machinery restricts us from being able to produce more coal and relies on the machinery working all the time – which it doesn't. We are in a poor coal seam at the moment. They are expecting us to get the coal out, but if the coal is not there you can't work to get it out."

EA negotiations for the Cornwall miners have just got underway, we wish them all the best!

MT MULLIGAN 100 YEAR ANNIVERSARY



On 23 September 1921 a series of explosions at the Mount Mulligan mine killed 75 miners. It was Queensland's largest industrial disaster.

Our latest podcast commemorates the 100 year anniversary of the disaster. Locals talk about the impact on their families and the community.



<https://commoncause.cfmeu.org.au/podcast/>



The recovery was very complex and difficult due to the strata conditions, meaning it took four days for his body to be safely recovered.

District Check Inspectors arrived at the site near Emerald early on 15 September and are conducting their own full, independent investigation.

Queensland President Stephen Smyth said he was shocked and saddened to receive news of the death, which occurred as 'safety resets' were taking place across the industry and just days before the centenary of the Mt Mulligan mine disaster where 75 mine were killed underground.

"Our hearts go out to Graham's family and other injured and affected workers. This catastrophic roof fall must have been absolutely terrifying.

"Events like this make me question how far we have really come in the century since Mt Mulligan. Our Queensland mining industry has seen nine deaths since 2018 and I fear that for some of our employers 'safety first' is just a slogan.

"As a union, we will continually reaffirm our commitment to safety and make sure all aspects of safety culture and employment arrangements are considered in the drive for safer coal mines."

The Gregory Crinum mine complex was sold by BHP to Sojitz in March 2019 – with Gregory being the open cut part of the operations and Crinum an underground mine. Sojitz has contracted out the operation of Crinum underground mine to Mastermyne.

Tragic death at Crinum

The Queensland coal industry has been shaken by a tragic fatality, with the death of Graham Dawson at Crinum underground mine. The union has offered Graham's family our support and deepest condolences.

The shocking accident occurred overnight on 14 September. Graham and two workmates were preparing to install roof support in a conveyor drift, when they were caught up in a massive roof fall. Graham and one workmate were trapped in the basket of the loader they were operating, while the third coal mineworker who was working in an adjacent area initiated the emergency response.

Due to the size of the roof fall it took a couple of hours for mines rescue teams to reach the trapped pair. A 25-year-old worker was rescued but Graham was already deceased.



Vale Bill Chapman



He was active in his local lodge, becoming Lodge President in the 1950s and then progressing through the ranks of the Miners Federation, serving on the Board of Management, and as a Vice President of the District before being elected President of the Northern District in the 1970s. He was a member of Central Council for many years.

Bill was President in 1975 when news came that the Nymboida Colliery was to close and the miners there were to be left without their entitlements.

Former Northern District President Bill Chapman has sadly passed away. He had just celebrated his 90th birthday.

A giant of our Union, Bill's life was committed to the welfare of mineworkers and their communities.

He started his working life at Abermain No 1 Colliery aged just 14, driven by family need after his father had suffered a serious injury at Hebburn No. 2. It was years before any compensation was paid to his Dad, which sparked his commitment to pursue justice for his fellow workers.



Bill at Nymboida

The passing of a Legend - Bill Chapman

Under Bill's leadership the workers refused to take the sack and the mine owners eventually signed the lease over to the Miners Federation. After the closure of Nymboida Bill was instrumental in securing a replacement lease and the establishment of the United Collieries Joint Venture in 1980. He became the first Chairman of the Board of Directors.

Bill Chapman was also instrumental in setting up the United Collieries Mineworkers Trust to ensure that profits from the venture would be channelled back to the mining community. The Trust continues to support mining families and communities through the scholarship program and in grants to local schools, hospitals and community groups throughout Australia.

In 1983 Bill Chapman was appointed the first coal industry employees' representative as a Director of the Joint Coal Board. He played an active role there in ensuring the safety and training of coal miners and also the operation of the industry's Coal Mines Insurance. He served on the Board until his retirement in 1988.

In retirement, Bill continued to play an active role in the Retired Mineworkers Federation and was a regular presence at union events.

He was awarded an Order of Australia in 2015 recognising his contribution. Our General Secretary, Grahame Kelly, said of the award that "Bill deserved recognition for the outstanding service he gave to mineworkers and our communities for decades. He is a giant in the proud history of our Union."

Our hearts go out to Bill's family, especially his beloved wife Betty. Theirs was a team effort, and Betty deserves our thanks for the huge contribution they made together.

Vale Bill Chapman, may you Rest In Peace.



Bill & Betty Chapman with Bill's OAM



From CFMEU to MEU

President Tony Maher

We have had a setback on giving members a say over our future in the CFMMEU, but in the meantime we plan to move ahead with changing our name to reflect our operation as an independent Mining and Energy Union.

On 14 September, we received the disappointing news that the Fair Work Commission had dismissed our initial application for a member ballot on whether to demerge from the CFMMEU.

The decision based on the narrow technical issue of the relevant date of our Division's amalgamation with the CFMMEU - whether 2018 as per our application or the earlier date of 1992. The Commission ruled we could not rely on the 2018 date.

The following week, a Central Council meeting reaffirmed our commitment to give members the chance to vote on demerging from the CFMMEU and based on legal advice we lodged an appeal in the Federal Court on 21 September.

We have asked the Federal Court to consider our matter as soon as possible, given the dysfunction within the CFMMEU national office and the Construction Division's determination to derail our efforts to give members a say through a democratic ballot.

We will continue to pursue all available legal options to carry out the unanimous decision by National Convention in March to vote on demerging and moving forward as an independent union.

Central Council has backed a rule change to formally change the name of the Division to 'Mining and Energy Union'.

Lodges will be asked to also consider approving the change which will mean the Mining and Energy Union will be the new name for our remaining time as a Division of the CFMMEU and - should members approve the withdrawal when they finally get the chance to vote - this will be the new name of our independent union.

We are hearing loud and clear from many of our members across all Districts that they no longer wish to be associated with the CFMEU brand. Changing our name will be a small but symbolic step, showing that even as we work through the complex and lengthy legal process towards a ballot we intend to operate independently as a Mining and Energy Union.

The proposed name change reflects our efforts and intention to operate as an autonomous union for mining and energy workers. Lodges will be given an opportunity to have their say on this issue and all members are encouraged to raise views through their Lodges and Districts.



Lodges will be asked to have their say on moving to a new name

China and Australian coal - whither the giant?



By Peter Colley, National Research Director

In the second half of September the President of China, Xi Jinping, announced that China would no longer invest in new coal projects in other countries. What does that say for the future of Yancoal, one of the biggest producers in Australia?

There are many reasons for uncertainty about the future of the Australian coal industry, mostly relating to measures to reduce global warming. But among these the difficult relationship of China with coal (in general) and Australia (in particular) poses both immediate and long-term uncertainty.

China has long been the world's biggest producer of coal – close to 4 billion tonnes per year. Dwarfing Australia's 470mt. But for a long time now it has not produced enough for its own needs and so has become a major importer. Even though those imports (around 300mt) are tiny compared to its own production it is a large part of the market for internationally traded coal and has (or rather, had) become Australia's 2nd biggest coal customer after Japan, buying 93 million tonnes in 2019.

All that has already changed. China has shown its displeasure with Australia's diplomatic efforts in Asia (or rather, the lack of them) by imposing bans or heavy tariffs on Australian products – the most valuable one being coal. That ban began in the second half of 2020 and shows no signs of being lifted.

This has caused chaos in international coal markets, but the amount of coal demanded in the market has not changed. China has been seeking to buy elsewhere and so the international market has been reconfigured, with Australian coal being redirected to other markets while coal from other sources is redirected to China.

This has caused a lot of inefficiencies, which is one reason why thermal coal spot prices in particular have tripled in a year and are nudging all-time highs of over US\$170 per tonne.

But there's more. China's effort to punish Australia have rebounded, pushing up China's domestic coal prices above the international price. There is a cold winter forecast, and coal stockpiles are low. There is the real prospect of certain industries being curtailed and power blackouts.

But one-party authoritarian states are not known for changing their minds.

The China ban on Australian coal extends to its own Yancoal business in Australia. It is one of the biggest producers of coal in Australia alongside BHP and Glencore with 38.3mt in 2020 from around nine mines.

Yancoal can't export to China either. Which calls into question the rationale for Yancoal's growth and continuing presence in Australia. As recently as September 2017 Yancoal was financed heavily by its 62% shareholder and parent company – the State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) Yanzhou – to buy the Rio Tinto mines in the Hunter valley for US\$2.69 billion, which it then shared with Glencore. Through Yancoal, China was doing what other nations have long done before it – notably Japan. China sought to control its reliance on overseas minerals by investing in them. The concept was called “resource security”; where foreign minerals were needed they were invested in so that the importing nation could mitigate some of the risks of reliance on overseas resources.

But China is not only continuing its ban on Australia coal, it has now announced to the world that it will not invest in coal projects in other countries. This is on top of its announcement last year that it would seek to achieve net zero emissions by 2060, and would seek to reach peak emissions by 2030.

This action, and the announcements, do not amount to a withdrawal of investment. But if Yancoal can't export coal to China and it has been told not to expand into any new projects – and it would be a very foolish State-Owned Enterprise that would ignore President Xi Jinping – the longevity of the current amount of ownership has to be questioned.

It's one reason why Yancoal doesn't appear to be on the shortlist for buying BHP's large Mt Arthur coal mine in the Hunter Valley.

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Got a story? commoncause@cfmeu.com.au