

Upcoming public events

The Wellington and Christchurch branches of AWSM organise monthly discussion evenings on the first Wednesday of every month. The next meetings will be on July 7th.

The details of the topics to be discussed, the times and the locations of the discussion groups can be found on our website, <http://www.awsm.org.nz>.

In Wellington, the June meeting will be replaced by a public talk introducing the ideas of anarchist-communism, and a screening of the film *Living Utopia* about the Spanish Revolution in the mid-late 1930s. In July, the Wellington branch will be **screening the film *Choropampa***, about a communities fight for justice following a destructive mercury spill at a gold mine in Peru in 2000. It will be held at 7:30pm at Thistle Hall, 293 Cuba Street.

In Christchurch, the June 2nd meeting, co-organised with Beyond Resistance (<http://beyondresistance.wordpress.com>), will discuss women and work. Issues to be discussed include those around the paid and unpaid labour that is done by women in our society, the impact of sexism and patriarchy and more.

What is AWSM?

The Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement (AWSM) is an organisation working towards a classless, stateless society: anarchist-communism.

We are made up of revolutionary class-struggle anarchists from across Aotearoa / New Zealand. For now, we are a small organisation with members in the cities of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch and in a few smaller centres in between.

As class struggle anarchists our priority is active involvement in workplace struggles and industrial action as well as community based campaigns in our neighbourhoods. We are currently involved in the struggles against residential water metering in Wellington, the 90 Day "Hire & Fire" Act nationally, strike support and more.

We publish a monthly newsheet (which you're reading right now!) and a less frequent but more in-depth theoretical magazine as well.

To be a member of AWSM, you must agree with our Aims & Principles (available on our website, <http://www.awsm.org.nz>), and be involved in the life and activity of the group. If you're interested in joining or just finding out a bit more about us, email or write to us via the contact details at the bottom of this page.



Subscriptions

If you want to make sure you don't miss an issue of *Solidarity*, you can subscribe to either the print or electronic version.

To subscribe to the AWSM announcements list, put your email address in the form on the top right of each page on our website, <http://www.awsm.org.nz>.

Subscribers will be sent .pdf copies of *Solidarity* each month, along with other publications produced by AWSM and occasional information - we promise we won't spam you with a ton of useless stuff though! The electronic copy is identical to the print version.

Or, you can subscribe to the print edition to receive a copy of *Solidarity* in the post. \$8 for 12 issues. Mail a cheque to our PO Box listed below, or contact us to organise an alternative method of payment.

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SOLIDARITY

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Newsheet of the Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement



JB Hi-Fi: Always cheapest wages

On the 16th of April retail workers at JB Hi-Fi Wellington, part of a nationwide electronics chain, walked out of their workplace and went on strike to protest their meagre wages. The workers have struck several times since and are now bracing themselves for a bitter struggle against bosses who want them to carry on working long hours for little money. The Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement speaks to Shanna Olsen-Reeder, a JB Hi-Fi worker and Unite Union delegate, about her involvement in the industrial action.

Could you briefly explain the present working conditions at JB Hi-Fi?

The present working conditions are very difficult. Like many workers in New Zealand staff are working long hours. 8.30am - 6pm are the regular hours for most people and the majority of staff are on their feet for all that time. The culture at the company can also be quite challenging. The attitude is quite old-fashioned, the attitude that the Managers are a different class from the other workers and that they must be obeyed at all costs. Anyone who is seen to be challenging that idea has an automatic target on their back. The class difference is also quite apparent when it comes to money. Some people at the company are

well paid but the ones at the bottom are really finding life difficult. Workers are expected to turn up to work and be on their feet all day, greeting customers with a friendly smile within seconds of them entering the store. But it can be pretty difficult when you are literally wondering how you're going to pay for the bus home.

- still support the ideas behind it and would like to see us reach an agreement.

Is support for the strike the same now as it was when you started taking industrial action? More, Less?

The support for the strikes is growing stronger and stronger every time as people become more comfortable doing it. I don't think support will ever die down. We're just asking for what the workers deserve. We've had lots of support from the public, as well as other unions and their members. Metiria Turei has spoken in support of us as has reggae legend Tigi Ness and his band Unity Pacific. We expect that support will grow as we get our message out there.

How successful do you think the strikes have been thus far?

In terms of getting our message out there and gaining public support it's been great. People are really interested in what's going on and we've had customers approach staff asking about how it's going and whether or not we have got our pay rise yet. One guy offered to stop shopping at JB Hi-Fi until we get an offer. And when we're out on the street we get toots and waves all round. It's a great feeling to know that

How widespread is support for the strike action amongst JB Hi-Fi workers?

I believe support is very strong for the strike action and the reasons behind it. The union members are committed to seeing this through until we reach an agreement. I've had many positive comments from non-member workers who - although they haven't joined the union



JB Hi-Fi Strikes

IN THIS ISSUE



Methyl Bromide



Greek Protests

JB Hi-Fi: Always cheapest wages (continued)

people care and will get behind a good cause.

The reaction from the company has been interesting. After our strike media outlets both in Australia and New Zealand were hounding them for comments but they were keeping quiet. Then the share price dropped and the next day the CEO issued a comment calling the industrial action “absurd.” Not surprising that they weren’t impressed but I thought the wording was interesting. I’m not sure why asking for better conditions and pay is absurd. It’s a basic right. And taking industrial action to make that happen is entirely lawful so it was an interesting wording choice. It



just shows that there is a lot of emotion behind the action we are taking so I think we’re definitely making a difference.

Has there been much effort on the part of Unite to involve workers in the organizing of the strike?

Workers are involved in all aspects of organising the strikes. Unite have been really helpful in advising us in what we can and can’t do and giving us ideas but ultimately it’s our members deciding what action they’re comfortable taking. We have strike committees in each store and they play a big part in the organisation of the campaign and help to ensure that all the workers’ ideas are represented.

So far you have been taking short and infrequent action, what are the

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prospects of this being escalated into more prolonged walk outs?

In the Wellington store our members prefer to take short and random acts of industrial action. This keeps the company on their toes and keeps it fun and exciting for the workers. Other benefits to keeping the action short and sharp are that the workers lose less money as they are unpaid for the time they are on strike. Our view is that strike action should cause maximum harm to the company and minimum harm to the workers. Union members are currently brainstorming new and different ways of taking industrial action. Of course there is always the possibility of more prolonged walk-outs and strikes in the future if we deem it necessary depending on any new developments.

What is your relationship with other JB Hi-Fi stores? Do you know if they are sympathetic to the strike action? If so, have there been efforts to spread the strike action to other stores?

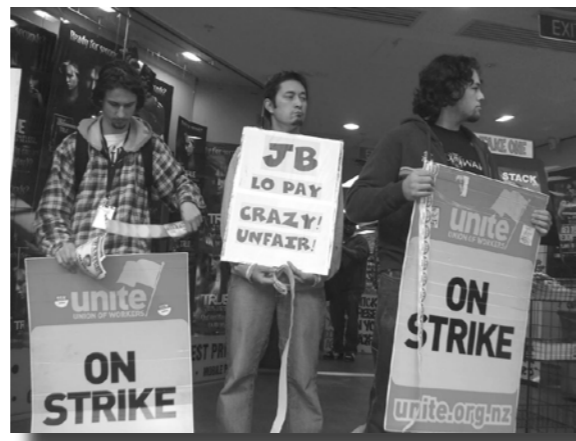
I’ve been through the bargaining process with a couple of delegates from the Auckland stores, and visited and recruited at Auckland stores also. We have very strong stores in Auckland with very high membership. Unfortunately they have

been suffering a lot of harassment and intimidation regarding their union membership so it has taken them a little longer to find their feet. They have gained a lot of confidence from Unite’s weekly picket outside the Queen St store and took their first strike action on Tuesday 25th May which I think they can be really proud of. From now on it will just get stronger and stronger. We have around 100 members in Auckland so they’re going to make a big difference to the campaign.

Where do you think this struggle is heading? Is JB Hi-Fi any closer to capitulating?

I think we all know that this is going to be a long hard road. But it’s something we are all committed to, most of all because we know that we aren’t asking for anything unreasonable or unattainable. All we ask is for reasonable conditions including wages that workers and their families can live on. There are small independent businesses who pay their staff higher wages than JB Hi-Fi. For them to say they can’t afford it is “absurd.” We will continue to take action, for as long as it takes and Unite have made long-term plans for this campaign. We’re in this for the long haul and we know we will get a good result in the end- not just for ourselves but for all the future JB Hi-Fi workers.

If you have been involved in an industrial dispute, or have any other work related stories you would like to share, email us and let us know at info@awsm.org.nz.



Methyl Bromide: The toxic gas killing port workers and communities

The Environmental Risk Management Agency (ERMA) undertook a series of consultation meetings across Aotearoa in mid-May into the use of methyl bromide. The highly toxic gas, which has already been banned in the EU, is used for the pre-export fumigation of logs. A coalition, made up of the Maritime Union of NZ, the Rail and Maritime Transport Union, the Council of Trade Unions, the Pesticide Action Network and a couple of political parties, has been campaigning in recent months to have methyl bromide banned.

Coalition spokesperson Steffan Browning said: “At present methyl bromide is used in an extremely primitive way, and released directly in the environment where it can drift to nearby port workers or residents living near ports. The gas is squirted onto logs under a tarpaulin and then the tarpaulin

is removed allowing the gas to escape into the atmosphere and surrounding environment.”

New research is being carried out at Canterbury University where toxicology professor Ian Shaw has been reported as saying a link had been found which involved a reaction when mixing methyl bromide with a protective chemical found in human cells. Dr Shaw has stated a study by the Nelson Medical Officer of Health should have looked further into the rate of port deaths from motor neuron disease which was many hundreds of times higher than normal. Joe Fleetwood, president of the Maritime Union of NZ, says that if it is proved in future research there is a link between methyl bromide and motor neuron disease, or any other illness, then the Maritime Union will be involved in any efforts to hold employers, Government

and individuals accountable and liable for any harm to workers.

Sue Lindsay told the ERMA hearing in Nelson she was representing those who had died from motor neuron disease and had been exposed to methyl bromide through their work at Port Nelson. Her husband, Mike Bull, worked as a marine biologist and died eight years ago. His exposure to methyl bromide at Port Nelson contributed to him developing motor neuron disease. He worked near a fumigation shed, and logs were fumigated near his office.

While the bosses sit in cosy offices, workers are exposed to hazardous substances on the ports on a daily basis. It is encouraging to see unions and community groups taking health and safety for workers seriously. We know the bosses don’t give a damn.

Anti-austerity protests rock Greece

A wave of protests has hit Greece in recent weeks in response to a massive attack on the working class by the Greek Government. In what has been described as “acute fiscal terrorism”, the Government has sought to force the cost of the massive economic crisis that has hit Greece onto the working class while protecting the profits of the rich.

Tens of thousands have taken to the streets. Strikes and other forms of industrial action have hit workplaces across the country as the resistance and solidarity has spread across many sectors of the Greek working class and poor.

The major trade unions in the country, belonging to the GSEE (private sector) and ADEDY (public sector) federations, along with the Communist Party union PAME, have attempted to maintain control over the protests and strikes. In 2008, during the uprising following the Police murder of teenager Alexandros Grigoropoulos, this control was at least partially broken as demonstrated by an occupation of the

headquarters of the GSEE by employed and unemployed workers. It is too early



to tell if these organisations will be able to control the anger of the Greek working class this time.

The struggle against the austerity measures has shown that even in a period of economic crisis, through self-organisation and direct action, we are able to impose our needs onto capital and the state. This struggle must be organised on a class-wide basis, encompassing both employed and unemployed, waged and unwaged workers. Collectively, we have the power to build a new society that reflects our own needs and desires.

For more info:

LibCom Greece Category
<http://libcom.org/tags/greece>

In critical and suffocating times
<http://libcom.org/news/critical-suffocating-times-tptg-10052010>

There’s only one thing left to settle: our accounts with capital and its state
<http://libcom.org/news/tptg-%E2%80%9Cthere%E2%80%99s-only-one-thing-left-settle-our-accounts-capital-its-state%E2%80%99%E2%80%99-16032010>