

## The artisan is partisan

Reith's seldom right  
he's not too bright.  
In fact he's f—ing stupid,  
fallen in love with Corrigan  
John Howard's playing cupid.  
Blood on the street.  
Blood on the stair.  
Blood in your eyes  
and blood in your hair –  
industrial resolution.  
World best practice in asset stripping.  
Bottom of the harbour skinny dipping.  
I know indeed  
just what we need –  
a worker's revolution.

“WORLD'S BEST PRACTICE” is a favourite mantra of those who accuse the wharfies of indolence on the job, while “relaxed and comfortable” is what John Howard said he hoped Australians would feel if he was elected. “Bottom of the Harbour” was a corporate strategy of companies to illegally divest themselves of responsibilities and tax burdens by setting up special shells that were artificially sent bankrupt while the parent companies lived on in style. These schemes were revealed in 1980 by the Costigan Commission, and the judge in that investigation, Frank Costigan, recently likened the tactics of the owners of Patrick to those “Bottom of the Harbour” schemes. John Howard was treasurer at the time of the original schemes yet seems to have forgotten the stench they left on him and his fellow Liberals.

John Coombs the wharfies' leader proposed a new definition of World's Best Practice at the May Day rally, one that includes social responsibility such as decent health, safety and education systems, security of employment and ending child labour. He also points to another kind of Globalization, one of workers' internationalism against the onslaught of multinational corporations.

AS I WRITE THESE WORDS the union has won back the right to the jobs on the wharves in the High Court. The day before this historic decision saw the biggest May Day celebration for many years, where many of

these songs were sung along with the traditional repertory of union songs. Every capital city in Australia has a Trade Union or Solidarity Choir along with assorted folk singers to sing this kind of material, and we have seen a great outpouring of new and refurbished songs to meet the needs of another campaign in union history.

The tradition of union songs is as old as unions themselves – now approaching their third century. It borrows from the popular traditions of the broadside ballad and the folk song. There is the sense of the expression of views of a vibrant community, a culture. The means of collection and dissemination quite naturally include the latest technologies, the Internet and the World Wide Web. Such songs are a hardy breed and resurface from their underground streams or untapped seams when most urgently required. Typeset on a page they may not look much but a song exists for the singing and the printed version is never much of a guide to its qualities.

I leave the last word to John Warner with a song inspired by the May Day march in Sydney while he was on his way to perform for a wharfies fundraising concert.

### Tribute to John Howard

John Warner ©1998 (May Day March 3/5/98)

Dear Johnnie Howard, we thought we ought to say,  
How much we appreciate the things you've done today.  
You've really done us well, old lad,  
You've treated us alright,  
You only had to flap your gob to make us all unite.  
Ten thousand folks were on the street,  
You should have heard the cheers,  
More union solidarity than there has been for years,  
Take on another union, lad, before it disappears,  
Johnny Howard, the working man's delight.

Dear Johnnie Howard, receive our vote of thanks,  
Likewise Mr Corrigan, his businesses and banks,  
If you'd not schemed and plotted,  
To bully, cheat and rob,  
If you'd not sent the wharfies out,  
Without their rightful job,  
We might not have united in the way we did today,  
To celebrate our victories, this merry month of May,  
So call the next election and we working folk will say,  
Goodbye Howard and your thieving Liberal mob.

# MUA Here to Stay



with these  
ARMS

Songs and Poems of the MUA

Visit Union Songs web-site <<http://www.chepd.mq.edu.au/boomerang/unionsong>> and send me some more songs!  
visit – [www.unionsong.com](http://www.unionsong.com) for more examples of union songs

## Songs and poems from the pickets



*If you'd not sent the wharfies out,  
Without their rightful job,  
We might not have united in the way we did today,  
To celebrate our victories, this merry month of May,  
So call the next election and we working folk will say,  
Goodbye Howard and your thieving Liberal mob.*

JOHN WARNER'S SONG 'Tribute to John Howard' (see page 48) arrived in my e-mail, shortly after he wrote it on the Sydney May Day march. Within a few minutes it had joined a dozen other 'MUA Songs' on my 'Union Songs' web site.

Union songs have been a special interest of mine ever since I heard Paul Robeson sing 'Joe Hill' when I was ten. More recently, I began to build my Union Songs web site at the start of 1997, after some months of rehearsal with Bill Berry for a Blue Mountains Folk Festival union songs workshop. We concentrated on Australian union songs as much as we could, an extensive seam dating back a century or so. Lawson and Paterson were there of course along with Tex Morton, Dorothy Hewett, Helen Palmer and Merv Lilley, so were the more contemporary works by folk revival songwriters like Don Henderson, Harry Robertson and many more.

In our workshop for the 1998 festival we also 'showed off' a brand new song that Maurie Mulheron had written, a song about the wharfies called 'Right That Time'. By then my Union Songs web site had links to unions across the world and I was getting regular e-mail from unionists in many countries including North America, Sweden, Britain, Thailand and Malaysia.

I had been aiming to expand and internationalize my collection of songs, hoping to learn something from traditions outside the Australian, British, Irish and

### Right That Time

Maurie Mulheron © 1998

They speak about it proudly, it's now union folklore  
How wharfies wouldn't load any pig-iron for war  
Japan was a threat so they walked off the job  
They wouldn't help the fascists for old Pig-iron Bob

They were right that time and they're right again now  
But the strength of one isn't much of a power  
So united they stand against all odds  
Fighting for us all against the little tin gods

Indonesia's young and fighting to be free  
But the Dutch had different plans for their former colony  
When the people rose up with freedom on their lips  
The wharfies stopped loading any Dutch bound ships

Korea was in trouble, overrun by the Yanks  
Wharfies told to load rifles, guns and tanks  
Why get involved in this bloody civil war?  
We're not gonna ship any weapons any more!

Pig-iron Bob's back, says we're off to Vietnam  
Tugging his forelocks for good old Uncle Sam  
The seamen wouldn't work on the war ship 'Boonaroo'  
And the wharfies held the line when they sacked the ship's crew

The struggle's moved on, mass sackings overnight  
The union's survival is the heart of the fight  
We'll defy your threats, your thugs and court  
We're standing united, no wharfie can be bought!

History's on our side, we'll see this battle through  
There's too much at stake for the profits of the few  
Our fathers, before us, stood on every picket line  
Keep their mem'ries alive and we'll win every time.

They've been right ev'ry time and they're right again now  
But the strength of one isn't much of a power  
So united they stand against all odds  
Fighting for us all against the little tin gods

PATRICK HAS DOCKS AROUND AUSTRALIA. This includes Brisbane, where the following three poems seem to originate – if the e-mail address is anything to go by. I discovered John Tomlinson's poems at the 'Support Australia's Wharfies' web message board in Melbourne at <<http://www.insidetheweb.com/messageboard/mbs.cgi/mb63212>>

These poems (John Tomlinson ©1998) give this union struggle, in many ways a very old struggle, a modern beat or rap. They remind me of Rock Against Racism performances by John Cooper Clark or maybe the *Making History* recording of Linton Kwesi Johnson.

### What sort of Practice?

World best practice so they say.  
Wharfies working without pay.

While wharfies picket one more day  
Patrick's seeks another stay.

World best practice so they say  
taking all the jobs away.

World best practice it is now  
coming to a job near you.

World best practice made for you  
coming soon to your job too.

### Picket Line

Oh we're relaxed and comfortable  
Yes we're doing fine  
we are relaxed and comfortable  
out on the picket line.

I know you said you'd govern  
you'd govern for all of us  
we'd be relaxed and comfortable  
and there'd be no fuss.

Well we are relaxed and comfortable  
and so say all of us:  
yes, we're relaxed and comfortable  
we're feeling mighty fine  
we are relaxed and comfortable  
out on the picket line.

The rain might fall the wind might blow,  
hard times come and hard times go,

there might be hail there might be snow,  
but we're relaxed and comfortable  
out on the picket line.

'Cause in our hearts we're smiling  
and we know we'll see sunshine.  
Yes we will see sunshine  
at the ending of this struggle  
when we lay our banners down  
we'll be relaxed and comfortable  
there'll be no need to frown.

Because we stand together  
and together we will win.

We won't scab or lie or cheat  
so in the end you face defeat.

Together we will win.

We don't need guard dogs  
nor come in the dead of night  
we struggle for each other  
and we try to do what's right.

Oh we don't need to lie and cheat  
we don't need to steal.

We try to tell it like it is  
we try to make it real,  
and in our trust of others

we have forged a force of steel.  
You might look in wonderment  
you might smile and sneer  
but the picket line is stronger now  
the end is coming near.

We don't lie to judges  
we won't lie to you  
we don't lie to each other  
we will build a world anew.

We are relaxed and comfortable  
I say we're doing fine  
we are relaxed and comfortable  
out here on the picket line.

Standing shoulder to shoulder  
supporting one another:  
brothers, sisters, children, wives,  
fathers, daughter, mother.

Yes, we are relaxed and comfortable  
out here we're doing fine  
yes, we are relaxed and comfortable  
out on the picket line.

Oh you can stick best practice,  
and you stick your hate.

We're never voting for yer  
once we're back inside the gate.

A VIEW OF THE JUDICIARY comes from one of the most prolific of the songwriters to have taken up the pen in the MUA cause, John Warner. His song 'Justice Delayed' (below) won immediate acclaim. Written prior to the Federal Court and High Court decisions, it's a powerful vehicle for the basic demand of the wharfies: reinstatement.

## Justice Delayed

John Warner 25 May ©1998

Tune: Mixture of Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre and Bonnie Dundee/Billy of Tea

Justice delayed is justice denied,  
Four judges have ruled that the right's on our side,  
Now give us our jobs back and fling the gates wide,  
For justice delayed is justice denied.

We've maintained the peace as we stood for our right,  
They brought in the dogs and armed thugs for the fight.  
They went to the courts and the courts ruled our way,  
Why are we still standing outside today?

It's comic to hear businessmen crying poor,  
They can't pay fair wages yet they pay for the law,  
The law goes against them, as rightly it ought,  
And still they have money to try the next court.

They say they can't pay us, the company's broke,  
And we'd all be laughing except it's no joke.  
They're still paying scabs on the big hired bus,  
But they've stripped all the assets, there's no cash for us.

We're sick of injunctions, we're sick of the wait,  
While scabs wreck equipment we see through the gate.  
Our trust in the law's wearing weary and thin,  
It's time to do justice and let us back in.



## The Fighting MUA

Tune: the Wild Colonial Boy

There was a foolish stevedore  
And Patrick was his name  
It was owned by a scab named Corrigan  
To our great nation's shame  
He was a liar and a cheat  
A puppet some may say  
But never could he bluff or beat  
The fighting MUA

It was in the night that Patrick's came  
Like burglars at their trade  
With guard dogs, scabs and Canberra spies  
Coming to their aid  
While Peter Reith and his little mate  
Fanned the flames all day  
In London, Cooktown and Dubai  
They'd smash the MUA

Chorus  
So come away my Comrades  
On the wattle we'll have no stains  
We'll scorn to live in slavery  
Bound down by iron chains  
We'll link our arms and stand and fight  
Forever we shall try  
We'll fight beside our fighting mates  
The fighting MUA

The judge in England said he could not  
Countenance this lot  
A nasty scheme was all worked out  
A filthy dirty plot  
And comrades from around the world  
Will now come to our aid  
To fight and organise  
Beside the fighting MUA.

North American ones I had studied for years. I also hoped to get songs as they were being written. After Patrick sacked their workforce in a quasi military operation on 7 April 1998 that second wish came true. From that time it seemed each week brought a new harvest of songs about the MUA's fight for reinstatement.

Maurie Mulheron, author of the play *One Word We* describing the life of Pete Seeger, wrote this song after hearing one of Peter Reith's diatribes against waterside workers in February. "After a bout of road rage" as he describes the muse that compelled him to write. He has since sung it many times on the various Patrick pickets, and he sang it at the Sydney May Day rally. The wharfies love the song and of course it has particular interest for a whole new generation who began to turn up to the extraordinary 'community pickets'.

A NUMBER OF MY FAVOURITE union songs come from the Kentucky mines in the 1930s. Songs from Sara Ogan Gunning, Aunt Molly Jackson, Jim Garland and Florence Reece. I changed a few words of 'Which Side Are You On?' and came up with the song on the right.

JOHN DENGATE, ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S most revered songwriters and a parodist without peer, phoned Chris Kempster with a new song he'd written to the tune of 'Abide With Me' (see next page). Legend has it that the hymn was sung by the band as they went down with the *Titanic*, and it seems that Minister Reith may be caught in a similar kind of undertow as a result of his inability to unhitch himself from Patrick, so when Chris sent me the words I was only too happy to include it in my growing collection. Almost immediately I heard the song sung to great effect at the special Peter Reith picket in Wentworth Falls. Five hundred Blue Mountains residents came along to face the drizzle and an even grimmer Reith (the Grim Reither as one banner had it!).

SCABS HAVE LONG BEEN the target and subject of union songs. Jack London penned the most famous description of scabs:

When God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad, the vampire,  
He had some awful substance left with which he made a scab . . . the modern strikebreaker sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children, and his fellow men for an unfilled promise from his employer, trust, or corporation.

Industrial Workers of the World organizer, songwriter and martyr Joe Hill wrote about scabs in songs such as 'Casey

## Join the MUA

Come all of you good wharfies  
Good news to you I'll tell  
Of how that good old MUA  
Has come in here to dwell

Chorus  
Join the MUA  
Come and join the MUA  
Join the MUA  
Come and join the MUA

My daddy was a seafarer  
And I'm a sailor's son  
I'm sticking to the MUA  
Till every battle's won

On wharves around Australia  
There are no neutrals left  
You'll either be a union man  
Or a thug for the NFF

Oh, workers can you stand it?  
Oh, tell me how you can  
Will you be a lousy scab  
Or will you be a man?

When Patrick sacked the wharfies  
They thought it was a joke  
But worldwide solidarity  
Is causing them to choke

Don't scab for the bosses  
Don't listen to their lies  
Us working folks haven't got a chance  
Unless we organise

Jones'. The pitmen from the mines of Newcastle in England had a particularly fierce song about them called 'The Blackleg Miner'. One verse ominously advises:

*So join the union while you may  
Don't wait till your dying day  
For that may not be far away  
You dirty blackleg miner*

Geoff Francis and Peter Hicks, recent emigrants from the mainland to far away Tasmania, e-mailed me their new song on the subject (see page opposite). The authors added "We are pleased to donate this song to assist the MUA in their struggle. Please use it widely and pass it on. This song borrows proudly from folk history, and in particular from 'Casey Jones, Union Scab'. At the Sydney May Day rally, gathered on the historic 'Hungry Mile', Peter Hicks was there to sing this song.

**I**N THE AUSTRALIAN TRADITION, no songs loom larger than 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. The swagman was very likely to have been a member of the young Shearers Union and while Donahue may not have been a member, the song about him inspires unionists to this day with its defiant lines like "I'll fight but never surrender said the Wild Colonial Boy". So it was no surprise to find parodies of those songs dealing with the wharfies' struggle as we approach the end of another century. I found 'The Fighting MUA' (see page 46) on a wharfies support web site in Melbourne, a site called "Songs and chants for the MUA & Community Assembly Picket Lines" at <<http://www.users.bigpond.com/Takver/soapbox/muasongs.htm>>



## I Can't Abide

John Dengate ©1998

I can't abide the government's front bench, send them away to the Germans or the French  
I can't abide Costello's shallow sneer – won't someone make the bastard disappear?

I can't abide that bloody awful Kemp, bring back the gallows, the hangman and the hemp  
Take Peter Reith and dump him in the tide. Him I particularly can't abide

Poor little John deserves our sympathy, born neath the star of mediocrity  
Pat his wee head and send him off to bed, then hide the key lest he abide with me

I can't abide the government's ministry, Senator Vanstone's worse than dysentery  
Send her away without the least delay – don't pour the tea lest she abide with me

Sink them the swine, an iceberg would be fine. Far, far away in distant Hudson Bay  
As they go down they'll warble while they drown, flat and off-key, they'll be despised by me

I can't abide the government's front bench, send them away to the Germans or the French  
Take Peter Reith and dump him in the tide. Him I particularly can't abide

## The Slimy Patrick's Scab

Geoff Francis & Peter Hicks ©1998

Tune: works well with 'The Sydney Market Boys' – or try your own!

There's vampire bats and sewer rats, there's pubic lice and crabs,  
But the lowest form of life on Earth is the slimy Patrick's scab.  
There's vampire bats and sewer rats, there's pubic lice and crabs,  
But the lowest form of life on Earth is the slimy Patrick's scab.

An hour before the sun comes up, he crawls out of his pit,  
You wouldn't get too close to him for the smell of slime and . . . other little bits,  
Beneath the cloak of darkness he sets off, all clad in black,  
To serve his wretched masters goes the slimy Patrick's scab.

And when his treachery is done, on his knees he crawls back home,  
His kids don't want to know him, so he eats his tea alone,  
They haven't been to school for days, they're ashamed that he's their dad,  
"Tell me, what's your father do?" "He's a slimy Patrick's scab."

There's vampire bats . . .

He's not dared step inside a pub or an RSL for days,  
'Cos when you're a slimy Patrick's scab the world don't seem too safe.  
He sits at home and counts his hoard to find out what he's worth,  
But what value would you put upon the lowest slime on Earth?

Alas, accidents do happen, in the wharves and on the shore –  
A crash, a smash, a flash, a splash – and our scab's a scab no more,  
Nobody mourns his passing, no-one's even slightly sad,  
Upon his grave these words inscribed – "Here lies a Patrick's scab."

There's vampire bats . . .

So he walks up to the pearly gates where the heavenly bell he rings,  
Says he, "I've worked hard all my life, you'll surely let me in.  
"I've always done the boss's will, to have served him makes me proud,  
"So please give me my halo now, and my little fluffy cloud."

Saint Peter slowly shakes his head and looks him in the face,  
"What makes you think that I've got room for scabs inside this place?  
"You've robbed your neighbour of his job and his children of their food,  
"You've stabbed your brothers in the back and betrayed your sisters too.  
"My angels would lay down their harps, do you think that I'm that mad?"  
And to burn in hell forever he despatched the Patrick's scab.

There's vampire bats . . .