

AMWU

News

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union



AMWU

Spring 2021





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Editorial

I want to extend my solidarity to every member and their family at this difficult time. Supporting each other during times of struggle is exactly what it means to be union. Don't be too proud to accept a helping hand and contact us for support.

Time doesn't stop just because we're in lockdown, we still need to meet life's challenges, even though we can't come together in person to respond to them.

I wanted to share a story about a remarkable AMWU member who, like all of us, is enduring life's challenges without being able to connect in person.

My friend, and retired AMWU delegate, Dennis Noel, is currently undergoing chemotherapy.

I can't share the story of every exceptional AMWU member, but I plan to celebrate as many as possible.

I wanted to share Dennis' story because, like so many of you, Dennis served as a leader in our union without expectation of praise or reward, because he valued that connection to our union and his workmates.

I first met Dennis when I was a young organiser in 2003. He was a very experienced, well-connected delegate for our members in the sugar mills in northern New South Wales. Dennis was also a representative on the State Council and highly regarded as a leader by our national educators.

There's something intimidating about meeting someone as experienced as Dennis when you're a new organiser, because you know that they can run rings around you, but you are eager to show them the respect they deserve and learn from them. At the same time, you want to prove to them that you've got what it takes to take up the fight on behalf of AMWU members.

Dennis put his arm around me, introducing me to everyone I'd need to know to be able to keep our union strong on the NSW north coast. He offered many encouraging words of advice and was keen to get involved in seeing the AMWU play a stronger role in his workplace and region.

He made sure that I became a part of his extended family. Every six weeks, I would drive from home to Newcastle to visit members. Dennis insisted I call in for coffee, breakfast, and a chat on my way up. On the way back, he'd have me over for dinner to talk union over a couple of beers.

There's a level of professionalism that comes with the relationship between delegates and organisers – union comrades become friends, sometimes family. This is the case with Dennis.

A lot of what I know about how to be strategic and strong as a unionist was shaped by Dennis and his passion for the AMWU. He never let the boss - or his lackies - push him into taking a backwards step, because he had the absolute backing and confidence of AMWU members and delegates.

I wanted to take the time to talk about Dennis, because he deserves to know how much of an impact he has had on our union, particularly during this difficult time for him and his family, but also because the dedication of active union members is the glue that

holds our union together.

Dennis' story is more than just thanking a delegate for their decades of work, it's also about sharing his wisdom and experiences with the rest of our membership, who are at varying stages of their time with our union.

I will never forget the speech Dennis made at his last State Council meeting before he retired when he said, "you know, the AMWU is one of those rare organisations where, no matter how much time and effort we put in, we will always get more out".

Thank you, Dennis Noel, for giving so much to our union and to your workmates. Our union is always behind you, mate.

Steve Murphy,
AMWU National Secretary



National President Andrew Dettmer on a recent visit to see Dennis.



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AMWU News Spring 2021

The AMWU News is authorised by the National Secretary of the AMWU, Steve Murphy.

Win! McCain workers unite over same job, same pay

While almost 60 per cent of the country was in lockdown, 90 essential food workers in the remote far north-western corner of Tasmania were locked out. They asked frozen food giant McCain Foods for pay and conditions in line with workers on the mainland doing the same work.

It's the middle of a freezing winter's day in Smithton - it's the second time in two weeks essential food workers at McCain Foods have been locked out by their employer in sub-zero temperatures.

Workers on an afternoon shift noticed the company making moves to lock them out before they had taken any industrial action. They weren't unloading trucks and they began doing an unplanned defrost. When they asked management what was going on, they replied: "you'll find out in due course".

Then the notice came - the bosses were preemptively locking them out - even though they had not taken any industrial action. These essential food workers kept our favourite Aussie made foods on the table during a pandemic.

Delegate Sam Facey is first to arrive outside the McCain Foods potato processing factory gates each day and the last to leave during the lockout. In the seven years she's worked on site - five as a delegate - it's the first time she's been part of any industrial action like this.

Taking on the frozen food giant is a big deal. She arrives outside the gates at 6:30am each day of the lockout and has been part of a crew helping to set up the gas heaters and a portable fire pot so that everyone stays warm. It's freezing most days, and often wet.

"It's been in the minuses for a couple of days so it's been a real struggle to push through," says Sam.

"I love being a delegate - knowing we're helping our work mates get the results they deserve is rewarding," she laughs.

Sam has been working with other delegates to organise food to eat for the locked out workers.

Workers are doing whatever they can to keep warm - huddling around heaters and a fire while sitting on folding chairs wearing AMWU beanies and ugg boots. Others are playing footy to keep moving. The Olympic games are playing on a big screen.

At lunchtime a wave of media arrives, including Channel 7 who had driven five hours from Hobart.

Workers risk losing their jobs if they speak to the media because McCain Foods company policy gags workers from speaking with a journalist.

This means AMWU state secretary John Short and organiser Mick Wickham are busy speaking to the media. Despite the restriction on media, news of their plight travels far and wide. Workers across the country who are in lockdown have tuned in on social media to support them online.

On day one of the lockout, lunchtime approaches and the huge trailer barbeque is fired up.

The lockout lunch menu of homemade chicken and vegetable, and pumpkin soups, alongside sausages is shared across Twitter. Locals get behind the workers too - one has dropped off a plate of fresh scones which John is handing out to workers.

John is also on coffee duty.

"The solidarity with this lockout has been fantastic - between the workers themselves, the Tasmanian public and nationally.

"McCain workers have been fighting for the recognition and respect they deserve - the days of Tasmanian workers being treated as the poor cousin are over," says John as he hands out one of the freshly delivered scones.

On a nearby street corner, another delegate dressed in a giant potato suit waves a corflute saying "Are We Part of the Family, Or Just a Number? Shame." at the small number of passing cars.

Comrade Potato Head has also become popular on social media as the McCain Food workers' campaign for pay and conditions equal to workers at McCain doing the same work on the mainland escalates and gets national attention.

Workers from McCain Foods in Ballarat were the first to send over messages and photos of solidarity.

"Their campaign is our campaign: their fight is our fight.

"We work for the same company - what affects the workers in Smithton, ultimately affects us," says McCain Foods Ballarat worker and delegate Michelle Owen.

Michelle can't understand how the same work for the same company can be valued differently.

"Equal pay and conditions within the same company should apply without question - let alone in comparison with rival companies in the same area doing the same work."

She says it's outrageous such a profitable company can justify less than equal pay and conditions for Tasmanian workers. Mainland McCain workers have taken industrial action around a dozen times.

"The support from McCain workers in Ballarat has been awesome, it really helped keep us going," says Sam.

Being locked out in the cold and refused pay and conditions that bring them on par with mainland McCain workers is grueling.



Comrade potato stands on a street corner in the Tasmanian town of Smithton as McCain Food workers have been locked out of their workplace nearby.



Workers stand outside the potato processing plant in Smithton in what was found to be an unlawful lockout.



The trailer barbecue gets a decent workout for cold and hungry locked out workers.



Snacks, beanies and uggs – locked out workers were keeping warm head-to-toe, even the smallest comrades.



McCain Foods workers in Smithton were locked out in sub-zero temperatures twice in under two weeks.



McCain Foods workers from Ballarat showed their solidarity with the locked out Smithton essential food workers.

The workers' same job: same pay campaign has been shared widely on social media, with a call for donations generating over \$20,000 of support.

"Something like this can truly get the morale up and I am so proud of every single one of our members for showing up and sticking it out," adds Sam.

The AMWU decided to challenge the lawfulness of the McCain lockout at the Fair Work Commission. The AMWU's national legal team challenged the lockout saying workers in Smithton had been unlawfully locked out before they had taken action.

The Commission issued its initial ruling on a Sunday, saying the lockout by McCain Foods had been lawful - a decision that ignited outrage across the country from unions and officials, legal experts and workers who said the decision would set bargaining rights back decades.

AMWU National Secretary Steve Murphy says appealing the Commission's decision was the only option.

"We need to protect what we have. Our bargaining system already makes it difficult for workers to take action.

"The initial decision was unfair and if allowed to stand it would have given the green light to bosses to preemptively lock workers out. It would have set industrial relations back more than a decade."

Our union won the appeal. It was not only a major boost for workers in Smithton, but workers across the country rallied around in support.

"This decision is not only a win for these essential workers in the far north-west corner of Tasmania, but for workers and their union nationwide," added state secretary John Short.

After the win, workers renewed their call on the corporate giant who makes a third of the world's french fries to return to the bargaining table.

The decision also sent a message to workers, that preemptively locking them out was unacceptable.

AMWU officials spent over a month in mediated bargaining with McCain Foods. Workers agreed to a deal that will see them paid 3.8% in the first year, and then CPI + 1% (whichever is greater), with a minimum of 3% and a maximum of 5% in the second and third years.

Apprentices will be paid the on-site rate, not the award rate, workers will receive double time on all overtime they work and will receive paid family and domestic violence leave. McCain Foods failed to agree to fair sick leave provisions. ●

Aussie-made parts save jobs during pandemic

While the pandemic was causing chaos across the world, workers at Electrolux in Adelaide showed they can manufacture the components the company could no longer import from overseas.

As the movement of people around the world ground to a halt, so did the supply chains, including the critical parts used in Electrolux's cooktop ovens. Workers at the site, like Matt Hastings, put their heads together to build a plan to replace the imported parts with locally made.

Matt has worked in manufacturing parts for 20 years and has been an AMWU delegate at Electrolux for five of them.

He walks through the factory pointing out the key parts of the assembly line for the cooktop ovens made at the Electrolux site.

Behind the see-through, caged safety fences on one side of the factory floor are tall orange robot bonding cells in full swing pressing the steel fascia for the oven doors.

Today, the Electrolux factory in Dudley Park is alive with workers, but rewind just over a year ago and the site was eerily quiet.

Back then you could walk around this place and hear a coin drop – it was dead but today it's buzzing.



The Electrolux factory came to a standstill as the global pandemic reached Australia and supply chains shut down.



A storeroom packed with Aussie-made Bluescope steel shows Electrolux is sourcing locally.

Matt explains the cooktop manufacturing process.

"A roll of steel comes in and gets loaded at the end there," he says pointing to an electronic assembly process.

"It gets fed into a coil machine there which cuts it into sizes and then it goes through a six-step process that punches, bends, folds, welds it and then it comes out the other side as a completed oven. The process takes about a minute and a half," add Matt.

The Electrolux factory doors were firmly shut for a month as the number of flights coming into Australia slowed and the cost of global freight soared through the roof, with importing parts from overseas almost impossible.

As employers across Australia were discussing stand downs, reducing hours, or job losses, workers at Electrolux were changing the debate

with a solution to make sure workers stayed at work and kept their jobs.

Anthony Lidstone has worked at Electrolux for 37 years on dual handling forklifts and driving buggies in the factory. He delivers key parts to make the cooktop ovens to the assembly line.

He remembers when he started at Electrolux - the company made all of its own parts - but he says the company started outsourcing the production of its parts to China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

"We literally used to make everything, but that changed - it's been interesting coming back full circle," he says.

Matt and Anthony have lived and breathed the reality of supporting Aussie made and making things here.

They were on the frontline, ensuring local manufacturing jobs were secured and workers were looked after.

They began by making parts at the press shop at the Electrolux factory. This meant the site gates opened again and they were able to keep making the cooktop ovens it manufactures during the most worrying periods of the global pandemic.

"Making parts in-house meant we could get through difficult times," says Anthony.

As employers across Australia were discussing stand downs, reducing hours, or job losses, workers at Electrolux were changing the debate with a solution to make sure workers stayed at work and kept their jobs.

"I hope that the company has learnt from this and it will continue to make parts onsite instead of overseas," he adds.

The company has been able to get through over half of the 20,000 backorders it had before the pandemic started. They only have 7,000 now.

Workers at Electrolux knew innovation would be a key way to support Aussie made products and save jobs.

"We can do it here, we don't have to rely on other countries. Let's support what we've got here, we've had it before – we don't need to rely on overseas," Anthony adds.

Anthony says making things at home is part of ensuring future generations will have good, secure jobs.

"If companies keep outsourcing the supply of parts to companies overseas, my sons, who are 18 and 23-years old, won't have work," says Anthony.

"How will they own their own home if there are no jobs here in Australia that they can be proud of, like making Australian made ovens or fridges?"

Matt adds that the pandemic quickly showed us that we are over reliant on getting parts from overseas and that we can and do make things successfully here.

"It wasn't easy, it was hard work - but we kept the factory going during difficult times," adds Matt.

The SA and Australian Governments have persistently ignored the importance of supporting Aussie made, that could be easily fixed by mandating the use of local content in all its contracts.

AMWU state secretary in South Australia Peter Bauer says governments need to maximise their investment in making things locally.

"We need concrete buy-in from both Federal and State Governments when it comes to supporting Aussie made and manufacturing jobs."

It's clear supporting Aussie made is a priority to the company, as Peter and Matt walk into a storage area in the Electrolux factory, it's stacked wall-to-ceiling with giant reels of Australian made Bluescope steel.

Peter says the workers' efforts at Electrolux are a leading example of what can be achieved in difficult times and how when companies are forced to innovate they can.



Electrolux delegate Matt Hastings says making parts in-house was a major game changer for the company as COVID-19 hit our shores.

"We can do it here, we don't have to rely on other countries. Let's support what we've got here, we've had it before – we don't need to rely on overseas."

"Australian manufacturing workers have always been innovative – we've always found ways to keep making our products during difficult times.



Robot bonding cells behind a cage in the Electrolux factory press steel for over doors.

"If there's one thing this pandemic has taught us, it's how urgent supporting Aussie made is. It showed us that good secure jobs in manufacturing are key to our economic recovery."

As Matt reflects on the year that has passed, he says it's been a wake up call for Australia.

"It shouldn't have taken a global pandemic for us to realise we really need to make things here – it's urgent.

"We've lost a lot of jobs in Australia in the last few years, particularly in the motor industry and we need to get those jobs back - we want to make sure we're making things here - we can do it and we are doing it," says Matt. ●

Blockade to save jobs in renewables

AMWU members at Victorian engineering company Keppel Prince are keeping up the fight for renewable energy jobs to remain in Australia.

The Federal Government refused to back local workers when it signed a deal for Snowy Hydro 2.0 that didn't mandate the use of local wind towers and cost the jobs of 42 workers and put another 100 at risk.

AMWU members at Keppel Prince, Australia's only manufacturers of wind towers, have taken to the local waterfront in their ongoing campaign to fight for their jobs in the renewable energy sector.

Earlier this year, workers at the site were told they were to be made redundant because contracts to build towers for two nearby Snowy Hydro wind farm projects went offshore.

The Morrison Government signed the deal to buy 75 per cent of energy generated by the wind farms for the next 15 years to power its Snowy Hydro 2.0, but did not require any Australian steel or for any of its towers to be built locally.

Jamie Wombwell, AMWU delegate at the Keppel Prince workshop, says members held a successful picket at the Portland docks, as the cheap, imported towers that had cost many of them their jobs began arriving in the port of his hometown.

"Not one section left the wharf while we were down there, and we held up on loading for three days. In the end they unloaded the ship but left them on the wharf, and they are still down there now."

As well as the great turnout of members, Jamie says the local community threw their weight behind the workers.

"We had a three-day picket when the imported towers arrived and it was a complete success.

"People were driving past tooting horns. The local service station bought us coffees.

"One older lady stayed up late one night and made us a heap of cupcakes and scones and brought them down. She said we were doing the right thing, as these things (the towers) should be made here, not in China."

Jamie says the imported tower components are being made in places such as Korea and Vietnam by Chinese-owned companies.

He said manufacturing in other countries allowed the Chinese firms to avoid already weak anti-dumping measures.

The Federal Government does not require a level of local manufacturing so big energy companies are moving the fabrication work and steel manufacturing jobs to low wage countries where they have the ability to exploit local workers and maximise their profits.

The AMWU has been pushing for local content levels when using public money so that governments can influence the decisions and behaviour of multinational companies, and establish local industry capability and deliver decent local jobs, particularly in regional areas.



Wind turbines arrive by ship in Portland, but Keppel Prince workers and supporters block them firstly from being unloaded from the ship and later from being moved from the port.

Earlier this year Jamie and fellow Keppel Prince worker Dean Wombwell, accompanied by AMWU National Secretary Steve Murphy and other union representatives, went to Canberra to put their case to government ministers and their opposition shadows.

But Jamie says since then, conservative politicians - federal and state - have done virtually nothing.

"The Federal Government could have stepped in when we went to Canberra to see them - to ensure Vestas gave us some of the Ryan Corner project at Port Fairy - and we would have been okay.

"But Dan Tehan, our local member, has done nothing, and in the media, State Member Roma Britnell just tried to blame the Andrews Government.

Big energy companies are moving the fabrication work and steel manufacturing jobs to low wage countries where they have the ability to exploit local workers and maximise their profits.

"I went on her Facebook page and tried to point out that wind generation and its construction could produce long-term local jobs and growth, but her only response was to block me."

Jamie says the Victorian Labor Government has been far more supportive. Its Victorian Renewable Energy Target ensured projects needed to have 63 per cent local content, and Keppel Prince thrived under the scheme.

But when the VRET expired it left it open for the wind tower companies - Vestas, GEs, Siemens, Messers - to cast skilled workers aside in their pursuit of private profit. Now cheap and inferior components can all come from anywhere.

Jamie says the newest version of the Victorian Government's scheme - VRET2 - could eventually offer some hope, but Keppel Prince will not receive any tower work for eight to 10 months, and by that time it could be too late.

"Portland Aluminum has provided work for 38 Keppel Prince workers transferred there on supplementary hire, otherwise there would have been 15 or 20 more redundancies.

"Keppel Prince is the only Australian mainland manufacturer of wind towers. So if its parent company in Singapore were to decide to close the wind turbine business down, that's an industry lost forever through a lack of federal support."

As investment in renewable energy is set to sour over the next decade, the AMWU and its members need to build pressure on all politicians to commit to building our future energy needs in Australia.

You can get involved in our campaign to Support Aussie Made at www.amwu.org.au/support_aussie_made ●

Spotlight on secure jobs

Until recently, Rob Foot worked as a highly experienced crane driver at the Hail Creek coal mine in Central Queensland. He was forced into retirement too early as a result of being cornered into labour hire work.

Rob worked for United Group Resources in Mackay, and was subcontracted to Hail Creek four years ago. "One day they came to us and said every contractor on site had to join the casual labour hire firm WorkPac.

"I was earning good money at the time but I was told my earnings would halve," Rob says.

Not only did his pay halve, it meant his medicals, uniforms and safety gear were no longer paid for.

"There were also cuts to travel pay, no overtime, plus no holiday or sick pay."

Rob enjoyed his job and planned to stay on for a few more years.

"This was the straw that broke the camel's back, and overnight I retired. I told them they could stick it."

Insecure work like labour hire is one of the biggest issues AMWU members across all of our industries face. The impacts on workers and their families are alarming - it creates inequality, financial insecurity, it limits career development and training, and it affects personal and family relationships, while also jeopardising workplace safety.



Rob Foot went into early retirement after being forced in to labour-hire work.

2020 was the fastest growing year for casual work in our history. The rise in the number of people in insecure work means our underemployment rate has climbed to nearly eight per cent leaving millions of workers without access to basic workplace rights and job security.

A recent Australian Council of Trade Unions survey has found 88 per cent of workers like you think it's a serious problem and one in four are casual workers.

Insecure work has become a business model used by bosses to keep downward pressure on wages and to boost company bottom lines.

Rob, alongside Chris Kirkby, spoke to the recent Senate Select Committee on job security chaired by Tony Sheldon.

The committee is looking into the impact of insecure work on the economy, wages, social cohesion, and workplace rights and conditions.

Rob told the committee that until recently United Group Resources had just over 8700 people working permanently in their central Queensland mine. Now there are just six on the floating crew. The rest are all casuals.

Mining-industry casualisation is happening across the country, and is creating extremely dangerous outcomes.

"You have casuals working there who have no experience in working in these dangerous jobs - the accident rate has gone through the roof," adds Rob.

"One day you are working with an experienced bloke on good money, the next day you are working with someone with no experience on half the benefits and wages."

Rob says it is a disgrace the industry is forcing employees to sacrifice their employment security.

"There are working people with young families, who have mortgages and loans.

"When you're on a casual rate you can't get a bank loan to buy a home - you never know when you will next get paid."

Chris Kirkby has been in the construction and maintenance industry in Western Australia for 23 years.

He has a full-time job, but says insecure work is hurting workers.



Chris Kirkby told a Senate Select Committee on job security how harmful rampant insecure is for workers.

"Today we're talking about a new group called the permanent casuals - this has a detrimental effect on workers and their families," he told the committee.

When Chris started working, he said you were the odd one out if you were casual.

"Most agreements had a conversion clause

and a probationary period of around three months, after that you had the right to request or convert to full-time employment," says Chris.

"This is all gone - conversion clauses either don't exist or aren't respected by companies."

Chris says it's impossible to plan ahead, it cuts out any ability to plan schools runs, holidays, being there for birthdays.

Insecure work pushes down wages and makes it harder to fight for better working conditions. It's harder for casual workers to speak up and fight for better wages and conditions in bargaining, while the ever-present threat of permanent jobs being replaced by casual ones serves as a brake on demands by permanent workers.

"It puts pressure on full-time workers at bargaining time, not knowing if their jobs will remain secure," Chris says.

Most workers don't want to be in insecure work.

Chris adds that most workers don't get the option and if they were given the choice they would always choose secure jobs.

Our National Conference will look at political asks on casual work, labour hire and contractors, and "same work, same pay". ●

If you want to share your experience of insecure work, send it to us at communications@amwu.org.au

WA workers power up for a win

Workers at Muja Power station in Collie in the South West of Western Australia have ensured they won't be left behind when the coal fired plant shuts down in coming years.

Workers were told they would receive individualised transition plans to help them retrain and find new jobs when half its capacity is switched off in October next year and the remaining capacity in October 2024.

Muja is the oldest of three coal fired power stations in the area. Synergy, which runs the plant, is paying for workers' university and TAFE courses and giving them time off work to complete new qualifications.

But, there was a catch – while the 270 staff employed directly by Synergy were included in the plan, long term contractors, who make up 40 per cent of the workforce, weren't.



Delegate Phil Massara and apprentice Leath Lynn from UGL have been part of the push to ensure a secure future for all workers.

Some of the workers who have been at the station for over 20 years and are from external contractors UGL, Kaefer, and Monadelphous were told they would not receive transition plans, tuition support or time off work to attend classes.

Monadelphous workers run the coal handling plant transferring coal from the mine to the station, UGL do pressure part welding on the steam systems for the boilers and turbines, after scaffolding,



External contractors from UGL, Kaefer, and Monadelphous got together and called on management to ensure they were part of the company's transition commitments.

rigging and sheet metal lagging insulating hot steam pipes with pink batts and metal.

"We were worried guys who've spent their lifetime doing this job would be abandoned without any retraining or upskilling, it was totally unfair," says Sean Emmett, a heavy diesel fitter with Monadelphous and AMWU delegate.

"The Synergy workforce have had two years of transition planning, they have individual meetings with their managers and Synergy's transition team, so if they want to do a university course Synergy will pay for it and give you time off work.

"If they want a crane driver's license or a certificate 3 in training and assessing Synergy will pay for them to attend that training on work time.

"We spoke to AMWU members from other contractors and then together we wrote a letter to the WA Energy Minister which we all signed asking for inclusion into the transition planning.

"We also used internal processes to press our case and lobbied other politicians, and it worked.

"It shows you if you run an informed and constructive campaign you can make sure no-one gets left behind," adds Sean.

Daniel Graham from Kaefer says his number one tip for AMWU members in disputes is to stick together.

"We've got a couple of guys looking into transitioning into emergency services after the closure, they're looking at becoming paramedics, firefighters, or becoming part of a mine emergency response team and getting work on mine sites up north," he says.

Workers were told they would receive individualised transition plans to help them retrain and find new jobs when half its capacity is switched off in October next year and the remaining capacity in October 2024.

"We've got another guy who's got a little cattle farm - so he'll use the transition to make sure he's completely ready and prepared to go full time at the farm."

Phillip Massara from UGL says the key to the win was having solid membership density amongst contractors.

"Getting your density up is so important, Kaefer is 100 per cent, Monadelphous is 100 per cent and so is UGL, so we presented a very united front," he says.

"We also got some great assistance from the AMWU's Alex Cassie, Steve McCartney and Dan Hannan; they've been great through all of this." ●

A helping hand in hard times

When additional COVID-19 restrictions came into effect suddenly in NSW at the end of July, retired member Agnes Raper called on the union for some help. NSW organiser Nathan, living just nearby, was more than happy to go on a grocery run and stay for a chat.

"Being in touch with our retired members, even if it's just a small interaction like this, being able to find out a little about their involvement in the union, it's a great reminder that we do have a rich history," Nathan says.

Agnes worked in the print industry from the age of 14, beginning in England when she left school, then in Australia for the last 31 years of her career, joining the

Printing and Kindred Industries Union before it amalgamated to become the AMWU we know today.

"I was a letterpress feed in England and then I came over into the binding in Australia plus the printing part. I was pretty good at the stitching machine. When it'd go wrong, I'd fix it myself, although it was the men that were supposed to do that," she says with a laugh.

Until recently, Agnes was still heading into the Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia that shares a building with the AMWU, and of which she's a life member.

Agnes's husband was a boilermaker and sadly passed away from complications with asbestos related illness, but he and Agnes were there as the AMWU campaigned against asbestos use in Australia and held James Hardie to account in the early 2000s.

It's something that stayed with Nathan after his visit, "that's the kind of retired member I'd like to be, still involved in the movement and helping out younger generations where possible." ●



When additional COVID-19 restrictions suddenly came into effect in NSW at the end of July NSW organiser Nathan helped retired member Agnes Raper out with a grocery delivery.

Cover art and colouring in competition

In this edition we've commissioned the awesome artist Sam Wallman to create a colouring in competition and the cover of this edition of the AMWU News.

We've included a colouring in competition in this mail out and instructions are on the back.

Every day you're making the things Australian needs - food, ships, trains, buses, newspapers and medical supplies to name a few. We're keen for your kids to get involved in our support Aussie-made campaign and to be proud of what you do!

About the artist

Sam was an NUW delegate and later an official. He now works as an illustrator and comics-journalist, primarily for the labour movement. He works out of an art studio in Victorian Trades Hall, which he shares with other members of the Workers Art Collective, a group of about a dozen progressive artists who produce art on grassroots struggles.

"For the cover of the AMWU Journal I wanted to make something that was kind of hectic and turbo-charged, but also buoyant and in-charge, cause that's how I see the AMWU and its' members.

"It's a proud militant union.

That militancy manifests in a lot of ways. I've tried to present some of that on the cover. The AMWU doesn't just respond to issues on the back foot like some unions do, I think the union leads the charge on a lot of fronts, whether it's pushing for a just transition, insisting on strike action in the face of repressive legislation.

"The worker on the cover is reaching through outer space to do their work. This references the way we can be alienated from our work sometimes, but through unionism we can kick back against being cut off from each other and from our work.

"I look at lots of old union banners from the early 1900s and try to use some elements of those designs in my work. A lot of my composition comes from them. I drew the rope in there because it symbolises collectivism, after all rope is just a lot of strings woven together." ●

Sam's first longform comic book 'Our Members Be Unlimited' is coming out next year through Scribe Publications. The book is built around the time he spent working as a picker at the Amazon warehouse in Dandenong South, but also covers union history and theory.

National Conference rescheduled

The National Conference is the supreme governing body of the union. The meeting of the union's elected conference delegates will set the direction of the union and decide on our priority political and industrial campaigns.

The National Conference has been unable to convene as previously scheduled due to COVID-19. Agenda items for the rescheduled meeting of the National Conference should be marked 'National Conference' and sent to the National Secretary, AMWU, PO Box 160, Granville NSW 2142 or by email to ns@amwu.org.au. Submissions must be received by close of business on 11 March 2022.

State Conferences - Rescheduled Meetings in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia

The State Conferences in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia have been unable to convene as previously scheduled due to COVID-19. Details for the rescheduled conferences are as follows:

NSW - Wednesday 2 and Thursday 3 March

Closing date for Agenda Items to be sent to the NSW State Secretary: 14 January 2022

VICTORIA - DATES TO BE ADVISED

Once confirmed, the dates for the

rescheduled Victorian State Conference will be published on the AMWU National and Victorian Branch websites.

QUEENSLAND - Thursday 24 to Friday 25 February 2022

Closing date for Agenda Items to be sent to the Queensland State Secretary: 8 January 2022

SOUTH AUSTRALIA - DATES TO BE ADVISED

Once confirmed, the dates for the rescheduled South Australian State Conference will be published on the AMWU National and South Australian branch websites: www.amwu.org.au/sa ●

CONTACTS

AMWU National Office

Level 4, 133 Parramatta Road, Granville
Postal: PO Box 160, Granville, NSW 2142
(02) 8868 1500

2nd Floor, 251 Queensberry St,
Carlton South, VIC 3053
(03) 9230 5700

NSW Branch

Location:
Level 3, 133 Parramatta Road, Granville
Postal:
PO Box 167, Granville, NSW 2142

(02) 9897 4200

Albury/Wodonga (02) 6024 1099

Newcastle (02) 4954 3215

Wollongong (02) 4229 7611

VIC Branch

1st Floor, 251 Queensberry Street,
Carlton South, VIC 3053

(03) 9230 5700

Albury/Wodonga (02) 6024 1099

Ballarat (03) 5332 2910

Bendigo (03) 5442 5101

Dandenong (03) 9701 3044

Geelong (03) 5229 9358

Latrobe (03) 5134 3306

Portland (03) 5523 4272

Shepparton (03) 9230 5700

QLD Branch

366 Upper Roma Street, Brisbane
QLD 4003

(07) 3236 2550

Gladstone (07) 4972 5319

Mackay (07) 4953 0550

Rockhampton (07) 4927 1487

Townsville (07) 4771 5960

SA Branch

53 - 61 Dale Street, Port Adelaide 5015
(08) 8366 5800

Whyalla (08) 8645 7115

WA Branch

121 Royal Street, East Perth, WA 6004
(08) 9223 0800

Bunbury (08) 9721 7933

TAS Branch

28 Station Street, Moonah, TAS 7009
(03) 6228 7099

Devonport 0408 773 900

ACT Office

Canberra (02) 6273 2412

NT Office

1st Floor, 38 Woods Street, Darwin,
NT 0800
(08) 8941 1511

www.amwu.org.au
email: amwu@amwu.org.au

Lessons from the pandemic

After 60 years as an AMWU member in the print industry, Neville Hinde still looks back most fondly at his early days as an apprentice.

Neville began his letterpress apprenticeship as a 17-year-old in the late 1950s.

The school he attended in North Melbourne "was the only one in Victoria, so all the kids came down from the bush or some used to come from Tassie," he recalls.

"It was a good school."

During the first four years of his apprenticeship, he learnt on the job and spent one day a week in the classroom. He says the comradery between apprentices meant he always looked forward to that day at school.

Neville's advice to apprentices today is to, "stick with it and make sure you stand up for the trade you're in."

Eventually following in his footsteps, Neville's nephew also learnt the printing trade.

He's certainly still passionate about his trade today though the job looks a little different than when he started.

"It used to be more of an art.

"You were also pretty fit, you had to be. There was a fair bit of running around and climbing a lot of steps," adds Neville.



Neville Hinde in his garden in Victoria.

Throughout his six-decade career that began at Mason, Firth and McCutcheon and finished at Bambra Press, Neville always knew he had the union on his side.

"I never had much trouble but if I did, I'd just ring up and could get onto someone."

But just as it was then, "printing is everything, not just newspapers," and he hopes that the lessons learnt during the pandemic lead to a reset for our investment in local manufacturing. ●



Worried about something?

- Are you losing interest in work?
- Are you having relationship problems?
- Have you experienced a major loss, such as the death of a loved one, unemployment or divorce?
- Are you drinking too much or using drugs?
- Have you contemplated suicide?
- Do you just need someone to talk to?

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Talk to someone in confidence today. On the Line telephone counsellors are trained to respond to crisis calls, as well as offering emotional support for everyday problems, relationship issues and stress, for all ages and backgrounds.




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