

STAY

How we win back workers' power

So far, 2023 has been an exciting time for our union. We've celebrated some major legislative and workplace victories in the first half of the year that have made working people's lives better.

In April, the union movement won 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave for every worker in the country. In May, we won a commitment from the federal government to establish a National Net Zero Authority to support traditional energy and mining workers through the energy transition. We also won an increase to the minimum wage of 8.6% - the largest increase in history - and 5.7% if you're on award wages. And we're working towards some of the first new multi-employer agreements in the country since enterprise bargaining was made the centrepiece of our industrial relations system in 1993.

It's important to celebrate and reflect on our wins when they come. Our union has a long and proud history of being on the side of workers and has led the progressive struggle for generations. Feeling pride in continuing that legacy connects us to our past and expresses hope in our future. And every victory is a chance to celebrate our solidarity.

But there's more to work towards. The balance of power in this country is still unfairly weighted towards big business and the very rich. Soaring corporate profits are driving inflation, making it harder for working people to afford the basics we need to live stable and dignified lives. And workers who join unions to collectively bargain for better wages and conditions are still targeted by biased and outdated laws.

With Labor governments in office in almost every state and territory, we have an opportunity we don't get very often. We need to work with those governments to advance the rights of working people and hold them to account whenever they fail in that duty. And we can set our sights higher than winning small.

The balance of power in this country is still unfairly weighted towards big business and the very rich.

We have the potential to shift power back towards workers in a major and lasting way, undoing the damage big business and their mates in Canberra have inflicted on working people over decades and laying the foundations for a more equal and prosperous society.

Winning better wages and conditions is at the heart of what we do, but it's not all we do. We also have the chance to build the industrial organisation and power of the working class and to show workers how exercising that power, in the right moment and the right way, can achieve great social and political change.

It's an enormous task - but taking up hard fights to win real change for workers is what it means to be union. As the rest of this year unfolds, I'm full of anticipation at the thought of what we can achieve together.

On another note, you'll notice this edition of our quarterly AMWU News is a little bit different. There will be a slight pause in its publication until next year when it'll be back with a new design.

To stay up to date with what we're working on, make sure you're following the AMWU on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

In Unity,

Steve Murphy
National Secretary



MAY DAY 2023

Our members made a big showing at May Day and Labour Day rallies all over the country.

It was a first-time experience for one of our members, but this year's May Day and Labour Day rallies were ones to impress.

The biggest day in the union calendar had a special feel to it this year. Many states and cities were throwing their first proper marches since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. That combined with some big victories for the union movement in the last 12 months - the return of multi-employer bargaining, winning 10 days paid domestic and family violence leave, big minimum wage rises and the election of Labor governments in Canberra and NSW among them - made for big crowds and a festive mood.

"I've been a union member for probably close to 50 years, and this is fantastic," says Sam at one of the rallies.

It wasn't all celebrating though. Unionists turned out in droves to call for cost-of-living relief, wage rises over and above inflation, expanded rights to protected industrial action and the repeal of oppressive anti-union laws.

Sydney's march reflected that mood - half party, half protest. The crowd's jubilation at seeing off the state Liberal government in March was tempered by anger over controversial anti-protest laws passed in April 2022. While new Labor Premier Chris Minns has promised an end to privatisation, a return to local public transport manufacturing and wage rises for healthcare staff, he has refused to repeal the laws, which have made obstructing roads or blocking entrances to train stations and ports punishable by up to two years jail.

The Illawarra May Day march also attracted a large crowd, in part driven by union opposition to Port Kembla being earmarked as a potential future site for a nuclear submarine base. Unions moved the march from Wollongong to Port Kembla to show solidarity with the local community and warn the federal

**“This is May Day.
Never heard of it
before. Love it!”**

government that the eight nuclear-powered submarines set to be delivered under the AUKUS defence treaty were not welcome in the town.

Victorian members braved some wild and woolly weather, with those in Melbourne warming up beforehand with a BBQ organised by the branch. Rallies all over the state expressed solidarity with AMWU members at Visy, who have been taking protected industrial action since January to win fair wage rises.

"It was great to be down [in Melbourne] for the march, and it's so good to come down and help support the union," Visy member Craig Martin says. "They've been doing a lot to support us here at Visy since we've been on strike, and it's been really good to give back."

Queensland unionists marked the Labour Day long weekend in style, organising marches and family days in Brisbane, Bowen, Bundaberg, Cairns, Gold Coast, Gladstone, Ipswich, Mackay, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba and Townsville.



VICTORIA



WESTERN AUSTRALIA



NEW SOUTH WALES



QUEENSLAND



TASMANIA



SOUTH AUSTRALIA



In Perth, AMWU members and comrades across the movement celebrated the first May Day since the easing of lockdown restrictions. Our WA branch turned out a massive and colourful contingent for the march and the May Day Festival, where the AMWU kids t-shirts proved a big hit.

"May Day is always a great opportunity to catch up with all of our comrades throughout the union movement," says Chris Kirkby, an Alcoa Pinjarra delegate. "It's a way to celebrate workers and make our voices heard."

Adelaide's May Day march and family fun day started in pouring rain, but spirits were anything but dampened. Our South Australian branch marched in full voice and with banners flying from Victoria Square Tarntanyangga to Victoria Park Pakapakanthi, and the sun came out in time for speeches, barbecues and face painting for the kids.

Our Tasmanian branch took advantage of the fair weather by dusting off some vintage banners from decades past. Members raised the standards of the old Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union, the Printing & Kindred Industries Union, and the Association of Draughting, Advisory and Technical Employees to honour our collective history and the different industries we come from.

It wasn't all nostalgia though - the Tasmanian branch had much to celebrate. Our members at Opal in Mowbray were honoured at the Tasmanian Unions Awards for their successful protected action against a hostile employer looking to strip away worker's hard-earned conditions.

A big thanks to everyone who turned out to make May Day 2023 one to remember! •

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

South Australia photos by Ben Searcy.

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Tassie Opal members honoured for winning big

Members at Opal Mowbray stared down the company last year - and have picked up a prestigious award for their efforts.

Members at Opal Mowbray had a big win late last year when they saw off the company's attempt to strip away workers' hard-earned conditions. Now they've had another win - this time at Unions Tasmania's annual awards.

Neil McClymont works at the Mowbray site and was on-hand to receive the Local Workplace Campaign of the Year award in May, alongside state secretary John Short, state president Tim Ring and former AMWU national secretary Doug Cameron.



Tim Ring, AMWU organiser Jacob Batt, Neil McClymont, Doug Cameron and John Short.

"I found out it was cocktail attire, which was a bit daunting because that's not really me, but I decided to get dressed up and play the part," Neil says. "It was a good experience to have though - I gave a speech and Michele O'Neil, and Doug Cameron and a few other people came over to shake my hand, so I must have done an okay job."

Workers at Mowbray voted to take four days of industrial action and ban overtime, setting up a picket line and barbecue outside the worksite and organising shifts to keep it staffed. Even with Christmas coming on, workers stood strong, endorsing further strike action.

Their persistence paid off. Opal was forced to the negotiating table and workers won a 10.5% wage rise over three years while keeping all their existing conditions.

It was just one of the industrial actions taken by Opal members all over the country late last year. More than 7000 Opal workers at eight worksites across the country voted to take protected industrial action in November 2022 after the company tried to rewrite the EBA,

lengthen the work week and pay new starters less than existing workers.

Mowbray is one of the smaller sites, but workers drew on support from the wider Launceston community.

"It's an industrial area, so we had a lot of workers driving past and honking their horns," Neil says. "The Examiner showed up and put us in the paper, and we had the odd person walking past who was happy to see us standing up for ourselves and our conditions."

That support helped members get through what could have been a very difficult time. Taking protected action in the weeks before the end-of-year break is a big commitment for any worker - but the cost-of-living crisis made what Opal Mowbray workers pulled off all the more remarkable.

"There were a few people who were a bit apprehensive, especially with inflation the way it is," Neil says. "No one had gone on strike before, even people who'd been there for 30 years, so it was pretty new to everyone. We got a really good result though - Opal didn't

get anything they wanted, so they ended up wasting a lot of their own money."

Congratulations to Opal Mowbray members! •



Workers at Opal Mowbray hit the grass in November 2022.

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AMWU National Secretary, 2023.

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