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WORKING LIFE

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Photo: ACTU/Mark Phillips

Don't take away my weekend rates: Disability support worker Matt Osborne works a 50 hour week, boosting his ordinary pay with the extra money he earns on weekends. Full story: Page 10.

As the Budget backlash grows, unions say...

Make the bosses pay

UNIONS have launched a new attack on the Federal Budget, with an audacious move to directly hit employers for increased costs incurred by workers.

While employers have signalled they will strongly resist the push from unions, it will put further heat on a government already reeling from a massive public backlash against its first Budget in May.

The ACTU this month has endorsed inserting an extra log of claims in enterprise bargaining negotiations to offset the increased living costs faced by workers and their families following the Budget.

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Opinion

Because of my union, I now have a voice

WHEN I reflect on the people in my life, the decisions I've made and the values that have brought me here today, I can't help but think of two people.

The first is my Mum: Juliet Rakosi.

The second is my union organiser and my friend: Doumuoa Howcher

I grew up in a little Housing Commission unit in Mt Druitt in western Sydney.

We didn't have much but Mum made me feel like I had everything. She let me use our linen cupboard as storage for all my craft materials, my books, my blocks... all the great open-ended materials that I now provide children with as an educator.

She was the one that instilled in me a lifelong love of learning and a passion for expressing myself creatively.

When I was eight, I lost my mum, my world, to cancer. But, before she passed away, she asked her 21-year-old sister to move from the Philippines to Australia to look after me.

What I learnt from her was the value of hard work, education and relationships. Fast forward and it's no surprise I end up as an educator.

And then one day, a union organiser named Doumuoa Howcher, walks into my centre and lights this fire of social justice in me. Ever since then I have been on a steep political/union learning curve.

From the day I joined my union, United Voice, I learned that the meaning of power was simply the ability to act.

I decided to stand up and speak out for our 97% female-dominated profession that had been historically undervalued and underpaid as "women's work".

I sought out and seized every opportunity to advocate for early

The battle for professional recognition for early childhood educators is symbolic of a new unionism, says Marian Rakosi

childhood education and care as:

- the foundation of education for children;
- an essential service for families to return to the workforce and;
- a profession in itself.

This is what has led me to where I am today.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, union membership is declining but it is the first time that there are more female workers currently at 19% compared to male workers at 17.5% that are members of a union.

For me, unions are about uniting people with the same issue and who want to fight for social justice and equality in our world.

You only get out what you put in. *Because of my union*, I have had the opportunity to meet like minded people in my profession from across the country and build what I know are lifelong friendships.

Because of my union, I literally sat at a table with just four other educators with the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and shared my concerns and vision for our profession.

Because of my union, I had the



opportunity to jump the fence and work a union organiser myself for 14 months so that I could spark fires of advocacy in educators across the state as Doumuoa had done for me.

Because of my union, I have a voice.

I believe the only catch with unions is that: you only get out what you put in.

This is an edited version of a speech at the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne on Thursday, 3 July 2014 on 'The New Unionists: Early Childhood Education and the Big Steps Campaign'.

GET IN TOUCH

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Textile workers' entitlements' left high and dry once again



Gutted: "I feel like they're getting away with a crime," says Reg Carmody. Photo: Luke Plummer/Wangaratta Chronicle

by **MARK PHILLIPS**

HISTORY is repeating itself with the owner of a northern Victorian fabric mill that has left 60 workers high and dry also involved in the infamous collapse of National Textiles more than a decade ago.

The liquidation of Bruck Textile Technologies is again raising questions about the inadequacy of Australia's Corporations Law in protecting workers from company collapses.

The 60 workers at the Bruck factory in Wangaratta were made redundant on 11 July as a result of a corporate restructure that has seen the business transferred for \$1 to a new company controlled by the same people.

They were informed that Bruck would be placed in liquidation and was unable to pay them any of their accrued entitlements, including redundancy pay, long service, and annual leave.

In a complicated sequence of events, it has since emerged that the new owner of Bruck, Australian Textile Mills, was only registered as a company last month.

Australian Textile Mills has taken over all the assets of Bruck, but only about 130 of the original workforce of 190 were offered jobs with the new company.

In a further twist, the principal shareholder and chairman of both Bruck and the new Australian Textile Mills, Philip Bart, was also the main shareholder of National Textiles, which collapsed in 1998, owing \$11 million to 340 workers at its mill near Newcastle.

The public outrage over National Textiles, which was chaired by Stan Howard, older brother of ex-Prime Minister John Howard, forced the then-Coalition Government to introduce a taxpayer-funded safety net for workers, the General Employee Entitlements and Redundancy Scheme.

BRUCK is among the largest private sector employers in Wangaratta, a rural city of about 17,000 people, near the Victorian-New South Wales border.

The fabric mill began operation in 1946, and produces specialist textiles for clothing – including industrial workwear, emergency services protective

clothing and army and police uniforms – automotive trim fabrics, and furnishing fabrics.

Reg Carmody, a fabric inspector at the Wangaratta factory who has worked at Bruck for 16½ years, said the announcement came out of the blue.

Mr Carmody, 37, is one of the 60 workers who have been made redundant. He said workers were summoned to a mass meeting, told the news, and then the 60 retrenched staff were told to leave the premises.

"It was a very, very, very cold, and almost cruel, way the company did it," he told *Working Life*.

"There's a lot of people worse off than me, guys and girls who have worked with the company for well over 25 years who have shown loyalty to the company, and to be treated in such a manner I think is disgusting.

"They [the owners] knew exactly what was going on well before it happened and gave us no time to respond or act in any way. I feel like they're getting away with a crime."

Continued next page

At Work**Textile workers left high and dry once again****Continued from page 3**

In a written statement, the chief executive of Australian Textile Mills, Geoff Parker, said the transfer of the Bruck business to the new company was the “correct decision”, as the alternative would have been a full liquidation and the loss of 300 jobs.

Under the transfer, Australian Textile Mills has taken on about \$20 million in liabilities and 130 jobs retained at Wangaratta, he said.

Mr Parker said the company was losing money, and despite regular injections of funds from its main shareholder, was “simply not sustainable”.

“With the demise of the local automotive industry and the offshoring of key government contracts, it was not a sustainable business and was incurring ongoing, significant losses,” he said.

Mr Carmody said workers were told that there was no money available to pay out their entitlements, and they would have to apply to the Federal Government’s Fair Entitlements Guarantee for help.

The FEG is an improved version of the GEERS scheme established by the Howard Government following the collapse of Mr Bart’s National Textiles in 2000.

Under the FEG, workers can claim for unpaid wages, up to five weeks pay in lieu of notice, annual and long service leave, and four weeks redundancy pay per year of service.

Textile Clothing & Footwear Union National Secretary Michele O’Neil said the company had failed to properly consult with its workforce about the restructure, and there were many unanswered questions about the future of

their entitlements and how it chose which workers would be made redundant.

“The question we’re asking is how can they legally do it? How can they strip a company of its assets and leave workers in a shell with nothing?”

“There’s a lot more questions and a lot more investigations to be done about how this company has avoided paying these workers their entitlements.

“This union is going to do a lot more campaigning to try to get to the bottom of how this has occurred and make sure that those workers urgently get their money.”

MR Carmody said the TCFUA had been “absolutely brilliant” but workers were facing an uncertain future as job prospects in Wangaratta were limited.

““ *The real issue is about toughening the Corporations Law.* ””

“At the moment, people are just scratching to get by because we were not given severance pay at all,” he said.

“People were left high and dry and are postponing their mortgage payments and things like that. We’ve had to get money through Centrelink because we will have to wait for the FEG.”

But the Fair Entitlements Guarantee itself is under a cloud because of a decision in the May Federal Budget to significantly reduce the amounts that workers can claim under the scheme to generate Budget savings of \$88 million.

Taking on a recommendation from the National Commission of Audit, the Abbott Government plans to cap the

amount that redundancy pay at 16 weeks. In Mr Carmody’s case, this would reduce his pay out by tens of thousands of dollars.

Employment Minister Eric Abetz said he was concerned at any allegation that the company may have contrived to avoid its legal obligations to pay employee entitlements.

“The Government ... expresses the hope that the company and its directors have done, and will continue to do all that they can to ensure that workers are not ripped off,” he said.

Senator Abetz said his department had referred the allegations to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

An ASIC spokesperson confirmed that the regulator was monitoring the Bruck case, but it would wait until the results of the liquidation before determining whether any action would be taken.

Ms O’Neil said the Bruck case had strong similarities to National Textiles more than a decade ago.

“I’m shocked that any person could be involved in the collapse of one business that left workers without their entitlements, and then be part of what’s happened to the workers at Bruck.

“And the question we have is what needs to be done to Australian Corporations Law that makes directors take seriously their responsibility to workers and their entitlements?”

“Because clearly there is not enough of a deterrent. There is not enough fear that there will be consequences if you don’t properly look after the entitlements of workers, and provide for them.

“ASIC does not have a good track record in terms of dealing with companies that avoid workers’ entitlements. So the real issue is about toughening the Corporations Law.”

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Bosses should pay for Budget costs, say unions

by MARK PHILLIPS

UNIONS have launched a new attack on the Federal Budget, with an audacious move to directly hit employers for increased costs incurred by workers.

While employers are likely to strongly resist the push from unions, it will put further heat on a government already reeling from a massive public backlash against its first Budget in May.

A meeting of the ACTU Executive in Melbourne on 22 July endorsed inserting an extra log of claims in enterprise bargaining negotiations to offset the increased living costs faced by workers and their families following the Budget.

Unions will also seek to bargain for increases to employer superannuation contributions after the Government froze the Superannuation Guarantee at 9.5% in the Budget, deferring any scheduled future increases until 2018.

While unions reiterated their main priority will be to stop measures such as the \$7 GP co-payment and the reintroduction of fuel excise indexation from ever being implemented, the new industrial claims are an attempt to shield workers from their impact.

Many cost cuts flagged in the Budget are in limbo, with Senators refusing to allow measures that will hurt ordinary Australian families.

Government plans to repeal the mining tax have also hit a road block, after the Senate voted to retain \$10 billion in income support payments including the School Kids Bonus, along with the Low Income Superannuation Contribution scheme. Other legislation is also at a standstill, while the government's popularity in the polls continues to plummet since the budget.

The ACTU resolution noted that unions believe the social wage should be maintained by the government.

But it also proposes a range of workplace-related responses to Budget measures that would result in increased costs and lower disposable income for



Anger in the streets: Tens of thousands of people took part in the Bust the Budget rally in Melbourne in June. Photo: ACTU/Mark Phillips

households, including:

- EMPLOYERS to reimburse workers for the \$7 GP co-payment if a sick note is required;
- A WORKING parents allowance of \$13.75 per week if the current child care rebate is frozen at \$7500 rather than continuing to be indexed at CPI;
- WORKERS to be paid \$0.78 per km if using their own vehicle on employer's business to compensate for the fuel excise increase;
- WORKERS to claim a 0.5% superannuation increase per year over four years so they are not disadvantaged by the Government's decision to freeze the Superannuation Guarantee at 9.5 per cent for four years.

ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver said if the cuts to the family payment and the new GP payment and fuel tax go ahead, a family with two children and a single earner on \$65,000 will be around \$1600 this year and \$6000 worse off in two years' time.

"The Government is targeting hardworking Australians who can least

afford it, while at the same time giving big business a 1.5 per cent cut to company tax and freezing the increase to the Superannuation Guarantee," he said.

"Unions will not stand by and let hardworking Australians be unfairly targeted by this Government," said Mr Oliver. "The ACTU's new enterprise bargaining toolkit will empower workers to fight back against the Government's cruel attack on hardworking Australians."

Employment Minister Eric Abetz has attacked the proposed industrial claims as "irresponsible", suggesting they would come at a "huge cost to jobs"

"The current ACTU leadership appears intent on taking Australia back to the days of the unsustainable wages explosions of the 1970s and early 80s," he said.

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said employees should "roundly reject" the claims.

TAKE ACTION

Sign up for the Australian Unions' campaign against the Budget:

australianunions.org.au

Opinion

How this painting still helps to define unionism today



by **DAVE OLIVER**
ACTU Secretary

TOM Roberts' painting 'Shearing the rams' is deservedly one of the most iconic images of work from the period of early European settlement of Australia.

Its scenario, dominated by the figure of a shearer bent over a sheep in the foreground, instantly evoked the muscular, frontier spirit of the young Australian nation and helped to establish the image of the outback as the "real" Australia.

When Roberts set out to paint 'Shearing the rams' in 1890, European settlement in Australia was a tick over a century old. Federation was still a decade away.

Shearing sheds like the one on the vast Brocklesby sheep station in the Riverina which Roberts depicted in this painting were the engine rooms of the young Australian economy.

Tens of thousands of men earned their livelihood and supported their families through shearing.

Although carefully composed, 'Shearing the rams' accurately captures the essence of shearing at the time.

This was hard, physical labour: bent over for hours on end, wrestling with large, angry sheep in sheds that were hot and dusty and poorly ventilated. Shearers used dangerous, sharp instruments to ply their trade. Workplace injuries were commonplace.

But there is no hint in the painting of the dramatic changes taking place on sheep stations around Australia at the time.

Within the sheds, confrontation between capital and labour was coming to a head, and militant unionism was being born.

By 1890, the Australian Shearers' Union could boast tens of thousands of members who were organising and agitating, demanding better pay and conditions from the squatters made rich from their labour.

In February 1891, a year after Roberts'



Tom Roberts' 'Shearing the rams', oil on canvas on composition board, 1890 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Felton Bequest 1932)

painting was unveiled to the public, the ultimate showdown took place when shearers in Logan Downs went on strike when their employer attempted to wedge them from the union.

Their demands included continuation of existing rates of pay and protection of workers' rights.

The strike quickly spread across the state, met with fierce and sometimes violent opposition from employers, and continued through autumn.

The strikers were ultimately unsuccessful and returned to work, but their failure prompted the labour movement to turn its attention to Parliamentary politics as a means of advancing the interests of working people.

This led to the formation of the Australian Labor Party underneath the tree of knowledge at Barcaldine, north-west of Brisbane.

Over subsequent decades from the 1890s, many battles were fought and won: battles for weekends, for penalty rates, for sick leave and annual leave, for protection from unfair dismissal, equal pay, workers' compensation and superannuation.

The wages and conditions enjoyed by

the workers of today are the result of the sacrifices and fights of their predecessors.

And unions have changed also.

The influence and power of the shearers today is a shadow of what it was in the 1890s. The tough-as-nails and laconic shearer was the typical unionist of Tom Roberts' day; today's archetype is just as likely to be a young, university-educated, female child care worker.

But the values of unions – fairness, equality, justice – have not changed.

Some would argue that with the battles of the past having been won, there is no role for unions in the modern workplace.

But they would be wrong.

New fights loom on the horizon: the notion of the minimum wage and penalty rates are being directly challenged by employers and a conservative Government.

And alongside traditional concerns like a decent wage and a safe workplace, modern workers face new challenges of casualisation and insecure work, the blurring of work and non-work hours, technological change, and the squeeze of balancing work and family.

As I look again at Roberts' 'Shearing

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the rams', I believe that every Australian owes a debt of gratitude to the courageous members of the Australian Shearers' Union who embarked on that doomed strike action in 1891.

They stood up for what was right.

They wanted nothing more than a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, a roof over their head, and food on

their table. They took a stand not just for themselves, but for a better life for future generations. That much has not changed in the intervening 123 years.

Workers acting collectively have a proud history in this country and the union movement has been the clearest and strongest expression of the values of the Australian people.

In the face of attacks that have attempted to break our spirit and reduce our power, unions have never

deviated from fighting for fairness at work and equal opportunity, and for the wealth of the nation to be shared to the benefit of all.

That is what the shearers stood for then. It is what we stand for now.

• *This is an edited version of a speech delivered by Dave Oliver as part of the Wheeler Centre's Points of View series at the National Gallery of Victoria on Wednesday, 2 July.*

Abbott's Green Army whitewash

by **CASSANDRA DEVINE**

IT sounds like a great idea on the surface: take a group of 15,000 young unemployed people between the ages of 17 to 24 years old and get them working outdoors to save the environment.

But the Coalition's green exterior is merely a mask for a massive whitewashing exercise designed to create a cheap, underpaid source of labour forced into doing our country's dirty work.

The Coalition has championed the Green Army as the main centerpiece of its so-called 'direct action' model, which, if it can get through the Senate, proposes to cut CO2 emissions to 5% below 2000 levels by 2020.

The Green Army, which began on 1 July, is a six-month conservation program administered by external, private or not-for-profit providers and subcontractors.

The government has said that the program will be 'voluntary', but given its new punitive measures to cut off the Youth Allowance to jobseekers every six months, it's hard to see how any young person could avoid signing up for the program if they're desperate for money.

Although it is billed as a great training opportunity for young people, there is no requirement for the providers to give the participants any formal sort of training.

Despite this, the workers in the Green Army program will be paid less than the minimum wage, with rates set at between \$10.14 and \$16.45 an hour, based on the training wage.

On top of that, they won't be able to receive their Youth Allowance while they're on the program, and will be required to work full-time hours, leaving



Photo: flickr/HankyHelper

them no time to attend interviews or participate in job search activities.

Even more concerning, the government has moved to pass a Bill that will exclude the workers from coverage under the Fair Work Act, meaning they're not entitled to the usual rights to annual leave, public holidays, or protection from being unfairly dismissed or discriminated against.

It also looks like they might fall through the cracks of our workplace health and safety scheme, because the government is exempting them from Australia's work health and safety laws too.

If this is truly a genuine training opportunity for Australia's young, then why not put them on a proper traineeship with the possibility of a real job at the end of it? Instead, the so-called Green Army will be forced into picking up rubbish and doing other unskilled labour when they could be out looking for a secure and more permanent job.

These workers deserve proper wages, but the program simply hasn't been given enough funding to make that happen.

To pay for the \$525 million program

over the next four years, the Coalition has engaged in a clever act of switcheroo, by axing about \$484 million from the Landcare budget.

Landcare is a proven conservation method engaging genuine volunteers in environment projects. So, not only is the Green Army a bad employment program, but it's also bad for the environment, by taking away much-needed funds from existing conservation efforts.

The way to get young people into meaningful employment is to give them the skills and training they need to get a leg up in the job market – not to waste their time on picking up rubbish, work designed primarily to keep them busy but for no other meaningful purpose.

If the government was serious about the environment and youth unemployment, then it would keep the carbon tax, put funding back into Landcare, and fund fairly paid traineeships for young Australians who are out of work.

Until then, it's up to the union movement to call out the Green Army for what it really is – just a whitewash.

At Work

This is the reason why we will never take a backward step



by **ANDREW VICKERS**
General Secretary of CFMEU
Mining & Energy Division

AT 11.40pm on 7 August 1994, the ground under Moura in central Queensland was rocked by a huge explosion.

A crew of 11 were working 265 metres in an underground coal mine when the blast occurred. They all perished.

It was the third disaster to strike the Moura community in less than 20 years. Thirteen men had been killed at Kianga on 20 September 1976, and 12 men at Moura No. 4 mine on 16 July 1986 – 28 years ago today.

The Moura community has paid a high price in lost lives for the coal that has come out of the ground there. Early next month, a special 20th anniversary memorial service will be held for the victims of the Moura No. 2 explosion.

As Vice-President of the Queensland District of the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division, Glenn Power, says: “We must never allow the nation to forget the price workers have paid and the burden of death and injuries that their families still carry to this day.

“Our union will always honour their memory and in doing so redouble our efforts to keep this industry as safe as possible for all who work in it.”

Tragically, coal miners are still dying at work – here in Australia, and around the world. This year, three Australian coal miners – two at the Austar Mine in the Hunter Valley and one at Anglo American’s Grasree Mine in central Queensland – have been killed. And 301 miners were killed following an explosion at a coal mine at Soma in Turkey on 13 May.

These tragedies are an emphatic reminder that there is no more important issue for our union than safety and health. Right across our entire CFMEU membership, we work in the most



Terrible toll: A devastated survivor of the underground explosion at Soma in Turkey in May, which killed 301 coal miners.

dangerous industries in Australia.

According to official figures, workers in our mining, construction and forestry industries have a 50% higher rate of injury and death than all other industries combined.

That is why the CFMEU recently launched our new work safety campaign ‘Stand Up. Speak Out. Come Home.’ on Workers Memorial Day, 28 April.

“ We declare it to be the right of every miner, everywhere, to return at the end of their shifts to the loving arms of their family. ”

But a real campaign needs to be much more than a snappy and effective slogan. It needs muscle. It needs determination.

And on an issue like safety that is a matter of life and death for us, it means an unrelenting commitment to making our workplaces the safest they possibly can be.

It means standing up, speaking out and being prepared to take action where it is needed to stop unsafe practices and management demands that put

production ahead of safety.

If left to their own devices, big business will put their economic interests first and foremost. We see it in industries and in countries where there is little or no union presence. Risk taking is part of normal practice and workers pay an horrific price.

We saw it most blatantly in the arrogant disregard of the Turkish Prime Minister a few weeks ago who told the families of the 301 miners who perished in the Soma disaster: “It is the destiny of your profession to die in the mines”. Never as far as we’re concerned, Mr Prime Minister.

We declare it to be the right of every miner, everywhere, to return at the end of their shifts to the loving arms of their family. The Turkish tragedy is the result of continued disregard for workers safety by governments, corporations and management of safety in the mines, just like Pike River was and just as the last spate of US coal mine tragedies were.

That we haven’t fortunately experienced anything on that scale in a long time in Australia is no accident. It is because we have a strong union that will always “stand up and speak out” on safety so that we can “come home” to our families.

The story behind the story of the minimum wage comic

HOW do you turn a complex issue like the history of the minimum wage into a cartoon that people will want to read and share?

That was the challenge faced by Melbourne illustrator Sam Wallman when he agreed to produce an online comic strip for *Working Life* in February.

Fortunately, Wallman was able to draw on years of drawing experience along with a strong union background to produce the strip, which was published in May to much acclaim.

Over 34 frames, the hand-drawn black and white strip explains the origins of the minimum wage in Australia, its contribution to our way of life, and the role of unions in advocating each year for an increase to the minimum wage.

For Wallman, it was a dream project allowing him to combine his work as an illustrator with his passion for unionism, and he leapt at the chance to use a comic strip medium to retell an important story.

“A lot of people are grateful to see something appealing to young people,” Wallman says.

“The union movement, it’s hard for us to connect with young people sometimes because they’re not taught in school about workers’ history or industrial history and sometimes we take for granted the conditions we have, we don’t understand they are the result of years of struggle.

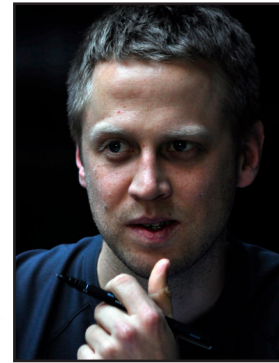
“So people were excited the story was in a medium that was accessible to young people.”

Wallman approached the minimum wage project as he would any other, first mapping out a script in collaboration with *Working Life* editor Mark Phillips, and then visualising in his mind how to make it appear on paper.

The cartoonist’s brief was to provide images that combined would be able to tell the story as a whole, but that each frame could also stand up as individual pieces of artwork.

The comic strip had to be informative, yet entertaining enough to keep the reader’s attention, fast-paced and

Sam Wallman leads a double life: committed union official by day, and cartoonist by night, explains Mark Phillips



The images in the comic came quickly, says Sam Wallman.

Below, a scene from the comic.

logically structured. Wallman says the images came to him quickly, but he spent dozens of hours perfecting the drawings.

Wallman, 28, is rapidly becoming one of Melbourne’s most in-demand cartoonists, but few would realise that he juggles his drawing with a part-time job as an online organiser for the National Union of Workers.

Wallman’s work as an organiser brings him face-to-face with the realities of modern working life. To Wallman, the job with the union is a natural extension of his own personal commitment to social change and workers’ rights.

Despite an increasing amount of commissioned work, he has no intention of abandoning his job at the union to

become a cartoonist full-time. The current arrangement allows him to combine his art with his activism, while also keeping him refreshed in a way that drawing full-time wouldn’t.

“Working in the union has taught me other skills and made me connect with people I wouldn’t normally get to meet, but hopefully there are overlaps between the two,” he says.

You can find Sam Wallman online at peneraserpaper.com

Read the strip online:
workinglife.org.au/minimum-wage-story

My Working Life

'What are my boys going to say about my legacy?'

Matt Osborne is a disability support worker based in Croydon, in Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs. He is the father of two young boys, a proud and passionate member of the Health and Community Services Union, and a campaigner for higher wages in his sector.

I've been working with people with intellectual disabilities for the last 20 years now.

It's good helping people to access the community and assisting them with empowerment and day-to-day needs and things that we take for granted.

It can be rewarding seeing people learn new skills and develop and have fun and enjoy themselves and get out of the old institution-type mentality and get access to the community. And you feel pretty good at the end of the day when they say thanks for helping me, or thanks for supporting me today. You feel like you've contributed something to the well-being of not only that person but society as well, because society are saying that we value people with disabilities and aged care.

So I'm proud that I do that work, proud that I contribute in that way.

I WORK in residential units, so I'll do a morning shift, I might have a few hours off in the middle of the day, and I'll go back in the afternoon to support them when they get home with all their requirements right through to 10 o'clock. Or there might be night shifts when you have to stay overnight, or active nights when you need to be up all night. And also I work weekends.

I work every weekend and the reason I work every weekend is because it's the only way to cut the mustard. I couldn't afford to have the basic standards and the basic things in life if I didn't work on weekends. So in total, I work 100 hours a fortnight; 50 hours a week.



With penalty rates on the weekend, I get time and a half, which is around \$30 [an hour] and on the Sunday it's around \$40. So that 40 bucks on the weekend makes a hell of a lot of difference.

But I sort of miss out in a way because I don't get to spend time with the kids on weekends. I have to take annual leave if there's a birthday party, and sometimes you've got to sort of beg for that. Sometimes things just pop up. There's an event and if you don't give enough notice, you can't go.

But if I did not get penalty rates on the weekend, I'd be working around the clock. I would never get any time to spend with my kids at all. At least at the moment, I get a few hours in the middle of the day which is fine for now because they're only little. I'm worried about when they go to school. They're not going to see me at all.

I'm worried about what I'm going to do at my age in the future in trying to change a job too, to try and accommodate to be with my boys. Because they need their father. Boys need their fathers and I think that's one of the things that are important in life, especially these days.

MY dad was a manual labourer, but he worked really hard and he worked so

he could leave us a little bit of money and send us to an alright school. And I'm proud of him for doing that – when people say what was your dad's legacy, what legacy did he leave, I say he worked hard so he could send us to a good school and stuff like that.

And I sat there and thought, what are my boys going to say about my legacy? I just think all they're going to be able to say is he worked hard. I'm worried they're not going to remember me for anything except not being here.

You do feel like you're missing out, you feel like you're separate, you're apart from other people, you know.

Now, with the way we have to work until we're 70-years-old, I don't know how I'm going to be able to handle doing my work until I'm 70, with all the manual work I've got to do with bending and twisting, plus the stress, although you do get rewards.

People say, "Oh, you must be a special person". No, we're no different to anybody else. We provide a service, and yes, we do have certain qualities which we bring to the job, but it's not a job I don't think that you can do to you're 70. No way. It's very stressful.

Get the full story:
workinglife.org.au

I think I'm being targeted by the boss because of my sexuality



by RIGHTS WATCH

If you are hauled into a disciplinary meeting, whatever the reason, don't sign anything that you disagree with

GOT A PROBLEM AT WORK?

You've come to the right place. Share your workplace issues with our other readers and get free advice from the Australian Unions helpline if you have a problem with your pay, entitlements, health and safety or anything else at work.

Phone 1300 4 UNION (1300 486 466).

PAUL asks: I need some advice – I have a meeting coming up tomorrow and there have been 10 issues raised. I have only been there 3 weeks. I feel I'm being targeted as I think they've found out I'm gay.

There are a few issues going on here, but let's talk about the meeting first. Is there someone you can take in as a support person?

I'm guessing you're not a member of a union (if you are then you need to call them right away), so the person you take in will be able to take notes and be a morale booster for you but they won't be able to advocate for you.

You want someone who will make you feel supported and a little more comfortable – but you also need to be able to rely on them not lose their temper or feel compelled to comment. For this reason sometimes a partner or family member isn't the best person to take – even though they are closest to you.

Do you know what the issues they're going to raise with you? If so, make a note of any points you might want to bring up and tick them off as you go; it's easy in situations like this when you're nervous or anxious to forget important things you want to say.

If they give you a warning (either verbal or

in written) it's important to respond in writing. Not responding doesn't make the warning go away. Keep a copy of anything you send for your records.

If you're asked to sign anything you have the right to take it away to get some advice about it. If you're made to sign it there and then, put down on the document anything you disagree with, that you're being made to sign it under duress and then date and sign it. You're entitled to a copy for your records.

And the golden rule is: don't sign anything you disagree with.

Unfortunately you haven't been there long enough to make an unfair dismissal claim if they sack you (the qualifying time is 12 months for workplaces of 15 or less employees and six months for those with more than 15).

You mention though you feel they are targeting you because they've become aware of the fact you're gay. This is discriminatory and unlawful and you can explore making an unlawful termination claim. You might also want to make a discrimination claim.

Why don't you give the Australian Unions team a call on 1300 486 466? They can talk to you about what's happened and go through with you how to lodge official complaints.

I didn't get paid what I was owed for annual leave when I quit

GAVIN asks: I didn't get my annual leave pay and when I left the job. I asked them but I am missing my pay.

If you're a permanent employee (that is you receive sick pay and annual leave) you should receive the balance of any untaken annual leave with your last pay.

The only exception to this is if you didn't give your employer the required notice that you would no longer be working for them.

This is taken from the day you actually resign to the date you give as your final day of work. Your Award or Agreement would contain the specific amount of notice you would be required to give.

If you don't supply your employer with sufficient warning of your intention to go, they can debit the balance of notice outstanding from

your accrued leave.

Therefore, if you have two weeks of holidays up your sleeve and your Award says you need to let them know two weeks in advance that you want to quit, but you want to leave one week's time in order to start a new job, your boss can debit your two weeks leave balance by a week to make up for the shortfall in notice.

Why don't you give the Australian Unions team a call on 1300 486 466. They can check what your Award says about giving notice.

If it turns out that your boss actually still owes you your holiday pay they can also advise you on how to chase up that money.

Don't forget to give them a call as well when you start your new job. That way they can help you join the right union so you can have the peace of mind of knowing you have union protection right from the word go.

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"I don't know if I'll even make it to retirement now."

Only by standing together can we have a better life.

Authorised by D. Oliver, Australian Council of Trade Unions, 365 Queen Street, Melbourne.

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