

Working class defiance inspires confidence in struggle

by Alice M

In spite of mountains of big business' anti-worker and anti-union laws aimed to paralyse and choke working class struggle, workers' resistance to big business attacks on wages, working conditions, job security and workers' rights is growing stronger and spreading.

More working people and unions are forced to look to their own organised collective action in workplaces and communities for protection and improvement of workers' rights and conditions.

The web of draconian anti-worker laws, all-sided attacks on unions, intimidation, and threats of heavy fines and sackings by big business and their courts, have not succeeded in stopping workers from defying the bosses' laws and pushing forward with their struggles.

Even police attacks on workers' picket lines have not been able to crush workers' resolve to fight for their rights.

In fact, the firm determination and courage by the Baiada Poultry workers in Laverton, Melbourne, and the Victorian nurses has mobilised wider support and inspired confidence in struggle by other workers and unions.

Global crisis of capitalism

Attacks on working people and workers' organisations are spreading across the world. The world is plunging into a severe capitalist economic crisis with big business hell bent to protect their mega super profits.

In Europe and America, monopolies and big business are shifting the economic crisis of their own making onto the working people by slashing hard won workers' wages and conditions, health and safety standards, wiping out job security and enshrining widespread casualisation, contracting and unemployment.

To enable it to do this, the capitalist ruling class of big business directs its governments to attack collective organisations of the working class. This is because genuinely fighting unions, dedicated to the working class as a whole, have the capacity and the will to lead workers' resistance and push forward the interests of the working class.

In Australia, the most recent acts of courageous working class defiance and solidarity standing up against big



Baiada workers unite with union and community supporters and win victory

business' threats and intimidation are the Qantas workers, the Baiada Poultry workers, Victorian nurses and the Spotless shopping centre cleaners.

Experience of struggle will lead the working class to recognition of its own powerful potential beyond the daily battles of resistance to capitalism's relentless attacks on the working class.

The working class is facing its own future task of bringing an end to the exploitative system of capitalism and imperialism and replacing it with socialism.

In Australia, that means the working class and working people taking over from the multinational corporations and the banks and running the country for the people.

Victory for the courageous Baiada Poultry workers

After nearly two weeks striking and camping on a 24 hour picket line, the 240 Baiada Poultry process workers in the Melbourne suburb of Laverton, and their union, the National Union of Workers, have won most of their EBA claims that they unsuccessfully had been trying to negotiate for nearly a year.

Their victory secured them a 2 year agreement that would increase process workers' pittance wages of 4% annually, and improve health and safety, job security, entitlements and permanency

for most of the casual and contract workers who made up over half of the workforce.

It guarantees site conditions for casual and contract workers who were paid less than \$10 per hour, and the promise to stop bullying and intimidation by the bosses.

The company had refused workers' claims and instead demanded cuts to already inferior wages and conditions.

The workers responded by voting for an indefinite strike during the "protected" industrial period and set up a 24 hour picket line.

The company immediately sought help from Fair Work Australia who predictably ordered workers and their union to terminate industrial action on the picket line.

Facing legal threats of heavy fines and sackings, the Baiada workers voted unanimously to defy Fair Work's directive and company's intimidation to terminate their "legally" protected strike action and abandon the picket line.

They stood their ground, more than ever determined to defend their picket line and show their strength and determination.

The courage, grit and unity of the Baiada workers and their union drew strong support on the picket line from hundreds in the wider union movement and the community.

Most of the Baiada's Laverton workers are Vietnamese, African,

Indian and continental European.

Widespread solidarity and support

The sight of a courageous group of the lowest paid migrant workers risking their jobs, family homes and livelihoods, giving their all on the picket line, to each other and their supporters, not for one second cowed by the forces of the state unleashed against them, inspired and instilled courage in other union supporters in the wider union movement and the community.

Not even attacks by the police and company goons could shake the Baiada workers' will to fight.

Baiada workers' confidence and victory was strengthened by wide community support on the picket line and beyond.

Community supporters initiated petitions and rallies at Coles supermarkets and other outlets buying chickens from Baiada during the strike.

The union worked closely with local communities and migrant groups.

The company agreed to drop its \$1.7 million damages claims against the union and some supervisors were dumped by the company.

The unity of the Baiada workers has shown the courage and determination of the working class. This should instil confidence in the union movement to mobilise and harness the powerful potential of the organised working class in the struggles soon to come.