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STOP THE RETREAT! FOR A CONTINUING NATIONAL STRIKE!

The decision of the union officials who run the Metal Trades Federation (MTF) to end the national overtime ban effectively calls off the national campaign for the 1975 log of claims, at least until the resumption of the indexation hearings in the Arbitration Commission on July 29. While the overtime ban was hardly more than a token gesture, the decision to end it in favour of a return to the original do-nothing strategy of individual factory "campaigns" for either the award wage claim or over-award payments confirms the MTF's criminal refusal to mobilise the strength of the rank and file for the only type of campaign that can win -- united national industrial action. The MTF leadership's return to a strategy already proven useless and impotent reveals clearly their intention to *kill* the campaign in the hope that the capitalist state through its Arbitration system will give them a token handout which they can "sell" to the ranks. Even if they meet some success, over-award struggles on a plant by plant basis benefit only the small minority of workers in strong shops, leaving the great bulk of metal workers with nothing. If a serious loss in living standards and more massive retrenchments throughout the industry are to be avoided then metal workers must decisively reject this abject retreat by the MTF leadership.

The union bureaucrats have, throughout the "campaign", quite consciously chosen a strategy of defeat, preferring to rely on the bosses' Arbitration system rather than wage an effective campaign for the log of claims, which was a perfectly legitimate one if inadequate. In the first months of the "campaign" the bureaucrats advocated that shop stewards ask their individual employers to agree to the union claims. This, of course got nowhere, which was apparently its purpose. Eventually it became a bit too obvious that it was getting nowhere, so the MTF tops suggested a more "militant" means of getting nowhere -- a "campaign of action" might be initiated "at the job level". It was no surprise to the bureaucrats who advocated such tactics that the few shops which took action on this basis suffered defeats. Thus our "leaders" dissipated valuable energy in futile isolated struggles and delayed any national campaign at all, hoping that the National Wage Case would grant a token wage indexation handout. To those like the militants from Plesseys, Meadowbank (who at the 9 April Lidcombe Oval meeting denounced these "do-nothing" tactics and called for a continuing national strike run by elected shop-floor committees) Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU) President Dick Scott replied that the campaign would be "sabotaged" if there were such national action. In the light of the decision of the MTF leadership to call off the national campaign it is clear who the real saboteurs of workers struggles are -- Scott and his colleagues in the MTF bureaucracy!

The National Wage decision of 30 April providing for quarterly cost-of-living adjustments based on award rates, with all its conditions and strings, was only a disguised attempt to impose a wage freeze. There was no guarantee that indexation would be granted in the future as the Commission threatened to end indexation if any section of the working class sought wage increases beyond those given by the Commission. The Metal Trades Industries Association (MTIA), the bosses' group, which had earlier opposed indexation in any form, became enthusiastic supporters of this "indexation" wage freeze.

It was only when Mr Justice Moore on 22 June, on the basis of the decision in the National Wage Case, effectively rejected the wage claim that the bureaucrats were compelled to propose some sort of national industrial action to avoid being totally discredited. This took the form of a 24-hour strike and a ban on overtime, designed as a passive protest- or demonstration-type action to dissipate the strength of the ranks. Like the previous individual job actions they were certainly not designed to win the claims although we supported them as an inadequate start, which could possibly have led in the course of the struggle to a strong national mobilisation, having allowed workers to feel a little of their power.

Throughout the campaign the MTF leaders have cautioned workers not to forget the rest of the log of claims, particularly the 35-hour week demand which they have called "very important". Implemented without loss of pay and linked to a sliding scale of

hours so that available work is shared among all those wanting it, the 35-hour week is, along with the refusal to accept the sack and factory occupations of factories closing down, crucial for the fight against unemployment. However the bureaucrats have never offered concrete proposals to fight for the shorter working week and have clearly been content to "forget" it and the rest of the log.

The MTF tops in particular the leaders of the AMWU who like to pretend to industrial militancy continue to claim that they are opposed to any suggestion of a wage pause. But this purely verbal "opposition" to the MTIA and Labor government's pressure for a wage freeze is given the lie in practice by the refusal to launch a real campaign and their present proposal to retreat from even the most minimal national action clearly preparing the ground for a total surrender after the July-August Arbitration hearings.

Of course some "promises" are thrown our way to make this pitiful retreat more palatable. The Minister for Labour, Senator McClelland has said he supports tax indexation and indexation on real pay rather than award rates. McClelland's support is in itself meaningless -- there are no guarantees that these small reforms will in fact be granted and any such gains in no way eliminate the need to fight for the present wage claim.

The Whitlam Labor Government (in alliance with Moore's Arbitration Commission) have on behalf of the bourgeoisie attacked the living standards of the working class through their "indexation" wage freeze. This, and the MTF leadership's miserable retreat before this attack, illustrates the inability of the reformist labour bureaucracy to defend the jobs and living standards of the working class let alone permanently improve them. This inability stems from the total commitment of the Labor Party tops and the trade union leadership to supporting capitalism. What is required is the building of an alternative leadership in the metal trades and the entire labour movement which recognises that the defence of the working class can only be carried through to the end in a struggle against capitalist rule. Such an alternative leadership basing itself on a full class-struggle program will oust the labour bureaucracy. For a real workers Government to expropriate the capitalist class!

The following resolutions seek to halt the retreat by the MTF leadership and go beyond to a united campaign for the immediate needs of the working class:

- I -- We reject the MTF officials' attempt to stall the struggle for the log of claims.
- II -- (a) That the MTF reject arbitration in any form.
- (b) That we demand an immediate 35-hour week without loss in pay linked to a sliding scale of hours to combat unemployment.
- (c) That we seek a flat increase of a minimum of \$20 with provision for an automatic monthly cost-of-living adjustment starting in April based on the highest wage in the industry.
- (d) That if we can't get an automatic cost-of-living adjustment we demand a total \$60 rise instead.
- (e) That we fight to ensure that the entire balance of the log of claims is met.
- (f) That there be a continuing national strike run by elected shop-floor committees in support of these claims.

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