

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine:

089/010705

## Hundreds of Thousands of Australian Workers Rally Against Anti-Union Laws

Brussels, 1 July 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): More than 250,000 people have taken part in public protests over the past two days against the conservative Australian Federal Government's plans to remove protection from unfair dismissal for most workers, impose heavy restrictions on union organising and collective bargaining rights, push workers onto individual employment contracts and weaken mechanisms for setting minimum wages.

Around 100,000 people took part in rallies throughout the state of New South Wales today, following yesterday's 100,000-person demonstration in Melbourne and protests in cities and towns around the country involving tens of thousands more.

"This is about whether or not working people will be treated like commodities and that is the international principle - no worker should be treated like a commodity." said Sharan Burrow in Perth where some 20,000 took part in a rally. Burrow is President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and of the ICFTU.

The ICFTU Executive Board at its meeting last week pledged to generate international support for the Australian trade union campaign, recognising that if the laws proposed by Prime Minister John Howard are implemented, then Australia would find itself at the bottom of the OECD ladder in terms of rights and protections for working people. A case will also be brought to the UN's International Labour Organisation, which has already criticized existing anti-union measures introduced by the Howard government.

The ACTU is also running an extensive advertising campaign to bring home the full impacts of the government's plans, and community and church groups from around the country have expressed serious concern over the prospect of lower wages and even less protection, especially for the most vulnerable and lowest-paid workers.

"Respect for fundamental workers' rights, and the social and economic benefits which stem from this, are the cornerstones on which every country should build its economy. Joining a race to the bottom can only harm Australia's position in the global economy, and will seriously damage its international reputation", said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organizations in 154 countries and territories.

The ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions:

<http://www.global-unions.org> For more information, please contact the

ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0212.

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