

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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Australia: Massive Protests Against Howard Government Labour Laws

Brussels, 16 November 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): More than 500,000 people joined rallies and meetings around Australia yesterday to protest against the conservative government's new industrial relations laws, which will remove fundamental protections from the nation's workforce. The legislation, which Prime Minister John Howard is pushing through parliament with a minimum of debate, will remove protection from unfair dismissal, undermine minimum wage setting and make a range of legitimate trade union activities illegal. Union representatives will face fines of up to A\$33,000 simply for asking employers to agree to protect workers from unfair dismissal, or to include provisions such as trade union training leave in agreements.

The Day of Protest, organised by the ICFTU-affiliated Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), is believed to be the largest ever such mobilisation in the country's history, with a crowd of some 200,000 assembling in the city of Melbourne, and gatherings in hundreds of workplaces and public venues around the country.

Affiliates of the ICFTU and Global Union Federations lent support to the ACTU action, with protests delivered to Australian Embassies around the world. In Brussels, representatives of the ICFTU, World Confederation of Labour and Education International joined European TUC President Candido Mendez and General Secretary John Monks to hand over a letter protesting the Government's action, while other Global Union Federations joined members of the Workers' Group of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in a similar action at the Geneva Embassy.

"These appalling laws pose an immediate and extremely serious threat to the livelihoods and rights of Australian workers. They represent the most serious violations of internationally-recognised labour standards anywhere in the industrialised world, and the ICFTU and its international trade union partners will support the Australian union movement in every way it can", said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, adding "Prime Minister Howard would do well to heed the groundswell of opposition to his plans".

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers through its 234 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. The ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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