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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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Australian Government Targets Workers for Heavy Fines

Brussels, 11 September 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): The ICFTU has protested (Link to the letter:

<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991224984&Language=EN>) to

Australian Prime Minister John Howard over the latest in a series of trade union rights violations, under the country's notorious industrial laws. In a letter to Howard, General Secretary Guy Ryder criticises the launching of law-suits by the government against 107 construction workers. The workers face fines of more than A\$28,000 for allegedly taking industrial action last February in protest at the sacking of a union representative by the company building a rail link between the Western Australian cities of Perth and Mandurah.

Many of the workers have expressed concern that the fines, as well as massive legal costs to defend their right to protest, will leave them unable to pay their home mortgages, with devastating consequences for their families. Sharan Burrow, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and of the ICFTU, has pointed out that the proceedings against the construction workers may take many months, leaving them and their families nervous and uncertain about their futures.

The prosecutions were initiated by the "Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC)", which was set up by the Howard government to police its anti-union laws in the building sector. A call by the ACTU has resulted in a flood of support for the 107 workers, and increased community-wide condemnation of the government's actions.

Ryder's letter points to the "pernicious" effect of the government's legislation, with unscrupulous employers taking advantage of various legal provisions in order to cut wages and conditions and threaten workers with dismissal and legal action. In one recent case, 40 employees of the company "Total Corrosion Control" are being sued by their employer for attending a union meeting which lasted 15 minutes longer than scheduled.

"The Australian Government seems to believe that subjecting workers to threats, intimidation and victimisation is acceptable in an industrialised democracy", said Ryder, who added that "the ICFTU fully supports the ACTU in its efforts to have this legislation, which has been criticised by the International Labour Organisation, removed".

The ACTU is mounting a strong campaign <http://www.rightsatwork.com.au/> against the legislation, with a further day of national protest set for 30 November.

More information about the Australian Government's prosecution and the campaign to Support The 107 can be found at:

<http://www.cfmeuwa.com/cfmeuwa/supportthe107>

<http://www.cfmeu.asn.au/construction/>

The ICFTU represents 155 million workers in 241 affiliated organisations in 156 countries and territories: <http://www.icftu.org> ICFTU is also a partner in Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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