

VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL

888



2021-2022

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A WOMEN'S GENERAL STRIKE

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Massive, economic disruption that is focused squarely on revolutionary change. A women's strike would be a mighty thing.

by VTHC Assistant Secretary Wil Stracke

WHEN
INJUSTICE
IS LAW,
RESISTANCE
IS DUTY WE ARE UNION

#ENOUGH

As a union official and a feminist, rarely a week goes by when I don't daydream about the women of Australia rising up in a large-scale strike; banners blazing bright, standing firm against the oppression we all confront (in very different ways) on a daily basis. Massive, economic disruption that is focused squarely on revolutionary change. The kind of change that benefits all women. The kind of change that only happens with collective action.

A women's strike would be a mighty thing.

Organising as part of the ASU's equal pay campaign was an amazing experience. I'm not sure anything will top the exhilaration of being part of a campaign that achieved significant pay increases for workers in a sector dominated by women and undervalued as a result. It was also a slog. Building consensus around the claim, building agreement around actions, and inoculating workers against the threats from those in power that they would inevitably encounter. That's the work of building collective power. The stuff that never ends up on the news - even when you win - and doesn't end up as part of a cute montage either.

As a union official and a feminist, rarely a week goes by when I don't daydream about the women of Australia rising up in a large-scale strike; banners blazing bright, standing firm against the oppression we all confront (in very different ways) on a daily basis. Massive, economic disruption that is focused squarely on revolutionary change. The kind of change that benefits all women. The kind of change that only happens with collective action.



A women's strike would be a mighty thing.

Working at the ASU, I organised with low-paid women workers in caring industries. Some of them who took the incredibly courageous decision to go on strike. And by strike I mean no pay, stand outside the gates and risk it all kind of strike. Not symbolic protest (as worthy as symbolic protest is - it's a very different thing).

I've organised with workers for whom taking strike action resulted in

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The reality is that - for all our talk of unity - not everyone bears the burden of a strike in the same way.

a glorious victory. I've also organised with workers for whom the outcome was as far from glorious as you can possibly imagine. If you ask any Union women - and we should - we will tell you our stories of the hard yards of organising, the incredible amount of work that goes into our campaigns, our fights, our collective action to win. If you ask any Union women we will tell you about the amazing wins we've seen and we will also tell you about the times we didn't win, had to pick ourselves up, stick together and keep fighting.

The reality is that - for all our talk of unity - not everyone bears the burden of a strike in the same way. Migrant workers taking strike action might be risking their immigration status. Workers of colour know they are more likely to suffer violence from the state. Workers with a partner at home may be able to rely on someone to care for the kids - but disproportionately, women cannot. Workers with savings accounts probably don't love dipping into it, but they're in a different situation to workers who might miss rent or have to go without dinner so their kids get enough.

So a strike - a real strike - requires the consent of all of those workers who are putting it all on the line. That's why it's not union leaders that call a strike but rather the workers who, having reached the end of their tether, make the decision to withdraw their labour by sticking their hands in the air or ticking that box. Ironic, then, that so many feminists (with both economic and social power) calling for a revolution in gendered violence are missing the consent step in calling for a women's strike.

Now, getting the trust and consent of the working class isn't as easy as reg-



istering every sexual dalliance with an app designed by NSW police. But here's how you could start:

1. Organise

The "March 4 Justice" marches were amazing. They came together off the back of a few tweets, some hard work from a handful of awesome feminists, and a genuinely broad discontent. And while we can absolutely bank on this government stuffing up again, this movement should be about more than responding to whatever makes the news. You need to hold meetings (you could start by coming to these ones).

Talk to co-workers. LISTEN to the perspectives of women with less political, economic or social power. Because, sure, society values women at the top who talk about injustice. But society will grind to a f*ckn halt without educators, cleaners, and supermarket workers. In other words, a strike will be led by the working class or it will be bullshit.

2. Build a Broad Movement

Any union organiser will tell you - to succeed, strike action must be supported by enough people that you cause real disruption. That's the fundamental difference between a strike and a symbolic protest. A strike is not about making a statement but rather about genuinely impacting on the ability of those in power to continue to operate their business as usual model. It's not about appealing to power, it's about exercising power. Without this, you fail.

In the case of a women's strike - the kind that I'm talking about - that means lots and lots of women. And to get that kind of critical mass needs claims that will deliver real, tangible change to all of them. They must believe the risk is worth it. So...

3. Define Success In A Way That's Meaningful For All

None of this "things need to change" stuff. No calling for abstract policies that leave the terms of delivery in the hands of those in power. And no calling for greater gender balance in oppressive structures.

If women are going to risk their livelihoods, we're going to achieve something real. Things like free universal childcare, including a living wage for early childhood educators. Addressing the crisis of poverty and homelessness for older women. Fixing unequal pay. Action to stop

black deaths in custody. Oh, and also these 55 things we already know will make safer and more respectful workplaces.

4. Consciously Defend Our Most Vulnerable Sisters

A strike is not just an extension of a protest. In Australia, a strike would be illegal. That means participants face the risk of significant personal fines. And our courts have a demonstrated history of imposing these, even when we argue that workers have very good reasons for stopping work. Unions have been banging on about this for a long time - workers in Australia really have very little right to withdraw their labour. This is especially the case for those already pushed to the fringes, for whom the consequences can be terrifying.

So we need to talk about the very real risks that our sisters of colour and trans women will face. We need to be prepared both on the ground and online to avoid a situation where our mighty campaign against gendered violence ends up further victimising women already excluded and marginalised, or imposing fines on those who can least afford it.

5. Radical Solidarity

There are going to be women with economic and social power demanding much of women with none. Women in secure jobs in big companies asking low-paid women in insecure work to forego pay. In my experience, low paid women are more than willing to do the hard yards but rarely get that solidarity back.

I do not understand how some women can talk about the need to break the glass ceiling whilst simultaneously applauding cutting the penalty rates and outsourcing the jobs of



low paid women workers. I guess it is based on trickle-down economics - the idea that if you give money to those at the top it will trickle down to those at the bottom. It's trickle-down equality.

Trouble is, trickle-down economics has been proven a lie. And I reckon if you can't see the link between the treatment that women get at the top and how we treat women with very little power, then I'm pretty sure you aren't really a feminist. You're more someone just seeking to negotiate the benefits of the patriarchy for yourself and your friends.

Radical solidarity would mean centering the demands of low-paid women and other marginalised groups, and using whatever privilege you hold to lend support the cause of someone with less. And - beyond the strike - applying your freshly re-invigorated feminist lens to broader social and economic concerns.

I'm not saying it's as simple as these five steps. But it's what I'm starting with.

VACCINES KEEP WORKERS SAFE

by VTHC Secretary, Luke Hilakari

This pandemic has been incredibly tough on all Victorian workers. But we can be proud of the way we are working together to keep our workplaces and our communities safe.

If you go on a construction site, you need a hard hat. If you work in the rail corridor, you need hi-vis. If you work in food manufacturing, you need a hairnet and gloves.

Whether it's to protect yourself, your workmates, or your customers or clients, Victorian workers are pretty familiar with the concept of donning personal protective equipment for safety.

Since the onset of the pandemic, many of us have come to sympathise with the workers in medical settings who wear surgical masks all day long. We've even adopted new behaviours, like scanning in via a QR code at work.

And, as at the time of writing, more than two million Victorian workers have rolled up their sleeves to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

Some workers, and some unionists, have their hesitations about getting the COVID vaccine. I get that.





But COVID-19 is a serious health risk to Victorian workplaces, and we have a responsibility as a movement to encourage our members to do whatever keeps you and your co-workers safe.

The vaccine is safe. The vaccine massively reduces the risk that you'll become seriously unwell from COVID-19. The vaccine is available to you for free.

You may personally disagree with our decision to encourage members to get vaccinated - that's OK.

You can choose not to get vaccinated - but as unionists we think that should be an informed choice. So we are going to keep empowering our members with accurate, scientifically established information - and warning them away from misinformation spread online.

People will make their own choices - but that choice may have consequences for how you get to interact with society at work or at play.

For a long time, getting certain vaccinations has been a requirement in some jobs. This is no different. Throughout this pandemic we have followed the advice of the Chief

“You can make your own choice about vaccination, but you don't get to put your workplace and your workmates at risk.”

Health Officer and the public health team, and the work those officials are doing is in the public interest.

You can make your own choice about vaccination, but you don't get to put your workplace and your workmates at risk.

We're also standing in solidarity with the thousands of frontline workers who have been at greatest risk over the past 18 months; health and hospital workers, public transport workers, supermarket, warehouse

and transport workers, cleaners, emergency services, and others.

As we come out of lockdown these workers are once again going to be on the front line of exposure. Our hospital staff, in particular, are likely to be put under extreme stress. So anything we can do to keep union members out of hospital will help lighten their load – and that's real solidarity.

We absolutely understand that this is a complex issue and a lot of people have strong opinions.

But we are not going to let a tiny minority of anti-vaccination members put the rest of the workforce at risk. Nor will we be intimidated by neo-Nazis in construction cosplay turning up at our offices, trying to force their extreme views on our movement and undo the heroic work of Victorians who have kept this virus at bay for almost two years.

We are interested in the genuine concerns of our members – and we want to hear them. We are not interested in conspiracies stirred up by neo-Nazis here and abroad. We listen to the thousands of frontline workers, public health experts and scientists who have experienced the impact of COVID and are charting our way out of it.

Keeping union members healthy and safe at work will always be our priority.



Trades Hall's COVID Safety team working on community outreach in Carlton

AUSTRALIANS FOR A MURDOCH ROYAL COMMISSION

In October, Trades Hall supported the launch of a new campaign for media diversity in Australia.

Sally Rugg admits she's scared. "I've seen how Murdoch operates. They ruthlessly target people to silence opposition. They're not afraid of using their mastheads to whip up hatred against individuals, and just ruin lives."

But Sally also thinks Murdoch should be scared of her. "If there's anything that's going to make the Murdoch empire really scared, it's a young outspoken woman who is also a lesbian," she laughs.

Supported by the Victorian union movement, Sally Rugg - formerly of GetUp! and Change.org - teamed up with former Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull to officially launch Australians for a Murdoch Royal Commission, a people-powered movement to take on Murdoch's effective monopoly over media in Australia.

With seed funding (and some helpful campaign nous) from Trades Hall, the new organisation is hoping to raise

sufficient funds to hire a full-time staff of campaign jets to organise a wave of public pressure, leading eventually to a Royal Commission into Murdoch's media empire.

It's a Herculean task, but Trades Hall Secretary Luke Hilakari considers it essential work for the union movement.

"If we want to make serious change in the world, and we do, then we cannot avoid taking on Murdoch. On so many issues - from climate change, to human rights, to just basic decency - Murdoch's media empire is what's standing between us and our goals".

But Luke is careful to point out that it's not just Murdoch's conservative bias that needs to be interrogated.

"The essential problem is that you have one billionaire - and his son - who has control over the information resources for multiple continents."

"Murdoch is the biggest employer of journalists in Australia, and they are

exploiting that power to chip away at journalistic standards and the whole idea of an independent press. They control what gets investigated and written about, and what doesn't."

Workers rely on a free press for accurate and timely information, so that we can hold the powerful to account. But Murdoch outlets have proven adept at shifting the media narrative away from systemic causes of inequality, towards convenient scapegoats - refugees, migrants, poor people, environmentalists. The wider effect of Murdoch's media domination has been the division of the working class.

A Royal Commission would have the power to investigate the Murdoch empire's commercial interests, links to politicians, and editorial standards. It could recommend new laws to diversify media ownership.

But of course, if Murdoch's media interests are operating in line with Australia's community standards of journalistic integrity they have nothing to fear.

“ If we want to make serious change in the world... then we cannot avoid taking on Murdoch.



WAGE THEFT IS (FINALLY) A CRIME

IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR LABOUR, YOUR BOSS HAS TO PAY YOU THE WAGES AND ENTITLEMENTS YOU EARNED. IF THEY DON'T, THAT'S A CRIME - AS OF 2021.

With the introduction of Australia's first wage theft laws, Victorian workers can finally hold their boss criminally responsible for deliberately withholding their legal wages. So that's:

- The minimum legal hourly rate (\$20.33 per hour or \$772.60 per week on 1 July 2021 - but depending on your role it could be higher)
- For every hour you worked (including opening/closing, and "trial shifts" are not a thing)
- Any paid leave you accrue
- Applicable penalty rates - that's extra pay for working weekends, unsociable shifts or public holidays
- 10% superannuation

Anything less is wage theft.

Until 1 July 2021, there was really nothing preventing bosses from trying it on. Even if you caught them stealing your wages, and even if you went to all the hassle of proving it, all they would have to do was pay you back.

Now, I'm not an international jewel thief. But if I knew that the penalty for stealing was "give it back"... well, let's just say I think I'd look great in a tiara.

Young workers, union members and activists have campaigned hard for years to stop dodgy bosses stealing wages. Bosses found guilty of the crime of wage theft can now face hefty fines and jail time.

How big a problem is wage theft?

In the past three years nearly 1000 young workers have come to the Young Workers Centre saying they've

had their wages stolen. Their bosses thought they could get away with stealing wages, superannuation and other entitlements because they thought they wouldn't face significant fines or penalties.

Audits have found that 84% of fast-food restaurants and 46% of restaurants and cafes aren't paying workers all the wages they are owed.

The problem, in other words, is endemic. Honest business owners are being put at a competitive disadvantage by the shonks.

What do the new wage theft laws mean?

The Wage Theft Act has two goals:

- It creates three new wage theft criminal offences; and
- It establishes the Wage Inspectorate Victoria, a regulatory body to investigate and enforce these offences.

BARRY.

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Young workers, union members and activists have campaigned hard for years to stop dodgy bosses stealing wages. Bosses found guilty of the crime of wage theft can now face hefty fines and jail time.

The Wage Theft Act 2020 amends the Crimes Act 1958 by introducing 3 new crimes into Victoria.

Dishonest withholding of employee entitlements

This means it is a crime for your boss to deliberately fail to pay you your full pay, super, allowances or refuse to give you meal breaks, tips, leave entitlements

Falsification of employee entitlement records

This means it is a crime for your boss to falsify your employee entitlement records to obtain financial advantage or cover up wage theft. This could mean payslips showing you were paid super when you weren't, rosters (for example, showing you took a meal break when you didn't), bank accounts showing a transfer of money which didn't occur. Falsifying a record includes making a record, copying a record or altering a record so that it is misleading, false, deceptive, or providing information that causes a record to be misleading, false or deceptive.

Failure to keep employee entitlement records

If your boss does not make a record, or destroys, defaces or conceals a record to dishonestly make money or to hide that they've made money through wage theft, they could be guilty of failure to keep an employee entitlement record.

These offences have a few things in common:

Your boss must not authorise or permit another person (such as your supervisor) to commit these crimes.

Even if you "agree" to be paid less than the legal minimum or to have your records falsified or destroyed, your boss can still be prosecuted.

To be found guilty of one of these

offences, your boss must have acted dishonestly with a view to obtaining financial advantage. This means if your boss acted honestly but mistakenly, they may not meet the criteria for a Wage Theft crime.

Due diligence is a defence. This means that if your boss can prove that before the alleged offence, they had exercised due diligence to pay the correct entitlement, they will not be found guilty.

Due diligence means your boss needs to do their homework - taking reasonable steps to pay the correct entitlements, such as hiring a lawyer to review contracts and make sure they're legal, or hiring accountants to review the accounts to check everything is in order.

Penalties

Employers who dishonestly withhold employee entitlements such as pay, super and leave will face hefty fines and jail time.

Penalties for these three offences include:

- Fines of up to \$1,090,440 for companies;
- Fines of up to \$218,088 for individuals; and
- Up to 10 years' jail for individuals.

If a director of a company commits a wage theft offence, the company must be taken to have also committed the offence and may be prosecuted and found guilty. Proceedings can also

be brought against public bodies as employers. Fines will increase each year with inflation.

How do we prosecute wage theft?

The Wage Theft Act also establishes a new regulatory body, the Wage Inspectorate Victoria. This Inspectorate will be tasked with investigating crimes under the Wage Theft legislation and working with the Office of Public Prosecutions to bring court proceedings against bad bosses suspected of wage theft.

If inspectors believe wage theft has occurred at a workplace, inspectors will have the power to execute search warrants and enter workplaces to investigate and collect evidence.

The Inspectorate will also publish guidelines and monitor compliance with the Wage Theft Act.

Unions will be bringing cases of theft before the Wage Inspectorate and we'll be pushing for prosecutions.

What's next?

While the passing of the Wage Theft Act marks a significant step forward for wage justice and workers' rights in Victoria, the fight is not over. We must continue holding bad bosses to account. The best way to do this is to stick with your workmates and join your union. If you suspect your boss is guilty of wage theft, call your union or the Young Workers Centre.



**WAGE THEFT IS
NOW A CRIME
IN VICTORIA.**

JOIN YOUR UNION & SEND A BAD BOSS TO JAIL.

A banner by iStock. Secondary Income from Bill Content. 14. 10. 2013. Printed by Europrint. J.J. Rood. 31. 09. 2013. 10. 2013.

WHY WE NEED PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

By mid-2022, Victorian Health and Safety Representatives are expecting to see the results of a long-running campaign for the introduction of psychological health regulations. As elected Health and Safety reps (HSRs) will know, regulations around a hazard make it much easier to exercise HSR powers, and WorkSafe is much more likely to take action.

There is a real need for change in this area. HSRs across all industries report that psychological health is not an obligation their employer takes seriously.

Jenny, Disability Services

Jenny (not her real name) is a newly-elected HSR in disability services. She says that disability workers feel their demands for psych health protections are brushed off by employers.

"The shifts are very long. They start at 6 in the morning and go until 9:30, then we go home, and come back

for 2:30 to 7:30. On weekends, we do 7am until 7pm.

"It's so exhausting, especially the weekend shifts. And even when you finish at 7pm on a Sunday you might find yourself starting at 6am on the Monday. That's barely any time to rest.

"When we raise it through the roster consultation, we get told, 'It's not about you, it's about the customer.' And that's the end of the conversation. We've been threatened with having our shifts shortened to two hours if we pursue it further.

"We hate the split shifts because... you don't get to see family or get kids to school, and then the same thing happens in the afternoon. When you do your training, the Certificate IV, work-life balance is a big consideration. But when it's put into practice it's not happening.

"We're dealing with really serious exhaustion and isolation. It's not healthy.

"Anything that will get employers to take our psychological health seriously will be most welcome."

Work-life balance, shift work and fatigue are expected to be exactly the types of hazards that will be addressed by the new regs. Employers have always had a duty to control psychological risk factors, but psychological health regulations will mean more specificity about how they are expected to control these hazards, or face repercussions from WorkSafe.

Brett, High-Risk Electrician

Brett (also not his real name) is a high-risk electrician and a very experienced HSR, who reports similar problems in a wildly different industry.

"I raised mental health as a concern last year when they were trying to change our rosters in the middle of a pandemic, but they came back and tried to say I was mentally unstable. It was pretty serious bullying and harassment.



Until the new regulations are announced, you can put this psychosocial hazard standard to work in your workplace. It has been developed by the Victorian union movement, and we hope the new regulations will be similarly thorough.

ohsrep.org.au/psychosocial_hazards

"After I raised mental health, the only thing they did was run through some PowerPoint presentations on the job. They talked about fitness and provided us with fruit boxes. They don't do anything to actually help, especially when they're constantly bullying and harassing HSRs.

"One of my fellow HSRs has actually been stood down, after raising a health and safety issue."

In a high-risk industry, HSRs have to be very well-versed not just in the Act, but also in all the relevant Regulations. Importantly, Regulations will make it easier for HSRs to issue Provisional Improvement Notices.

"I'd probably issue a PIN on mental health if there was something in the

Act that I could depend on. You'd need solid ground. At the moment, I'm not sure where it fits in the Act, but if it was clarified I'd definitely do it."

This is exactly what psychological health regulations will provide: solid ground.

Regulations tend to follow a standard structure.

There will be risk factors outlined (like bullying, harassment and work-life balance) for which employers must carry out a risk assessment and demonstrate the controls they have implemented. They will need to follow a prescriptive approach, which means there will soon be far less wiggle room for bosses to squirm out of their responsibilities.



THE PEOPLE'S PALACE GETS RESTORED AND REPAIRED

For over 150 years Victorian Trades Hall, rising grandly from the northern edge of the Melbourne CBD, has given form to dreams of a better life for working people and their families. It is not only the birthplace of organised labour in Australia, but also of Victorian Labor and the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

After the successful Eight Hour Day campaign of 1856, it was decided that a 'People's Palace' should be built as a monument to this victory and also as a forum for all union concerns.

But for decades, the "People's Palace" has felt more like a time capsule. Trades Hall was an homage to 1960s interior design, a chaotic archive of left-wing campaign detritus, and an increasingly impractical organising space. Exposed scaffolding held up the ceiling in the main Lygon Street entranceway for over a decade. Volunteers giving tours would point

out spots in the "New" Council Chamber where the Brill cream from delegates of the 1960s had stained the plaster as they snoozed with their heads against the walls.

Thankfully, this heritage gem has benefitted from world-class heritage restoration works over the past three years. With funding from the Victorian State Government and the expertise of Lovell Chen heritage architects, Trades Hall is looking better than ever.

The first Trades Hall building, a modest timber shed that once stood just north of the current Lygon Street entrance, opened in 1859. It was financed by workers and built by their own labour, using local materials where possible.

In the early 1870s, plans were developed for a more substantial building. The foundation stone of the present building, designed by prominent architect Joseph Reed,



The restored "New Council Chamber" has become "Solidarity Hall", named by Facebook poll.

was laid on 26 January 1874.

Trades Hall as we now know it was built in stages from 1874 to 1925, by the architectural firm Reed & Barnes (who also designed the Exhibition Building, Melbourne Library, Melbourne Town Hall and Rippon Lea).

In 1963, the 1890s New Council Chamber was significantly damaged by fire, with the roof above the chamber collapsing.

The rebuilding of the chambers resulted in the complete reorientation of the space, with seating reorganised in more of an auditorium pattern, resulting in the removal of the horseshoe layout of the seating, and the loss of the original stalls and gallery.

The room was also re-lined with aluminium cladding, obscuring the remaining original brick walls.

The 1890 chamber was not completely burnt out in the fire of 1963 however. Two of the original honour panels, listing past Chairs on the Trades Hall and its councils, remained behind the 1960s cladding, and could be seen through gaps in the green aluminium.

As Stage 1 Heritage Works began, workers on site were blown away to discover the extent of the original paintwork preserved in the New Council Chamber. Effectively an entire hand-painted wall was intact, except for a few spots where, heartbreakingly, our predecessors had carelessly drilled screws through the plaster.

Stage 1 of the restoration, encompassing the New Council Chamber (now "Solidarity Hall"), the Old Council Chamber, the Old and New Ballrooms (Common Rooms bar and the ETU Ballroom), was completed at the end of 2019 with a grand opening. It was hoped that visitors would be welcomed into the new "Workers Museum" on tours beginning in January 2020.

Instead, lockdowns emptied the building for much of 2020 and 2021 as Stage 2 works progressed.

"Undoubtedly the biggest challenge was working in a COVID environment. In the early part of the project the construction industry was still at full capacity. However later on with limited numbers allowed on site and a full two week shutdown, managing the logistics on a daily basis became difficult. This also meant limiting the visits of surveyors, engineers and architects who were restricted in the number of sites that they could visit," said Liz Beattie, project officer for the Trades Hall and Literary Institute.

CFMEU Shop Steward Stephen "Blackie" Black points to other

hurdles. "There was contamination by asbestos and lead in underfloor and ceiling spaces which had to be removed before any further works could commence, the ceiling height throughout the building also created problems in that scaffolding had to be set up and then dismantled and set up again in the individual rooms and hallways, as we couldn't use scissor lifts because of weight restrictions on the timber floors."

Under the front portico, the Bronze relief of John Dias has some new company. A new relief of Helen Lothian Robertson, one of the early activists of the 1882 Tailoress' strike, has been cast for the left side of the doorway, providing both visual and gender balance.

In the John Halfpenny Executive Room, the original Greek key has been restored to the walls. Water damaged walls have been repaired, and aging carpets have been replaced throughout with a new custom-made carpet designed in-house.



The Workers' Museum displays ceremonial armour crafted by the Tinsmith's Union.





The Old Council Chamber was once described as the "Grandest room in the Colony". Pains-taking work by heritage experts has restored the original elaborate paintwork, including friezes above the two doorways to the North.

The Old Ballroom (right) - once the home of 3KNZ radio - has been transformed into "Common Rooms" bar, a permanent home for Melbourne Fringe



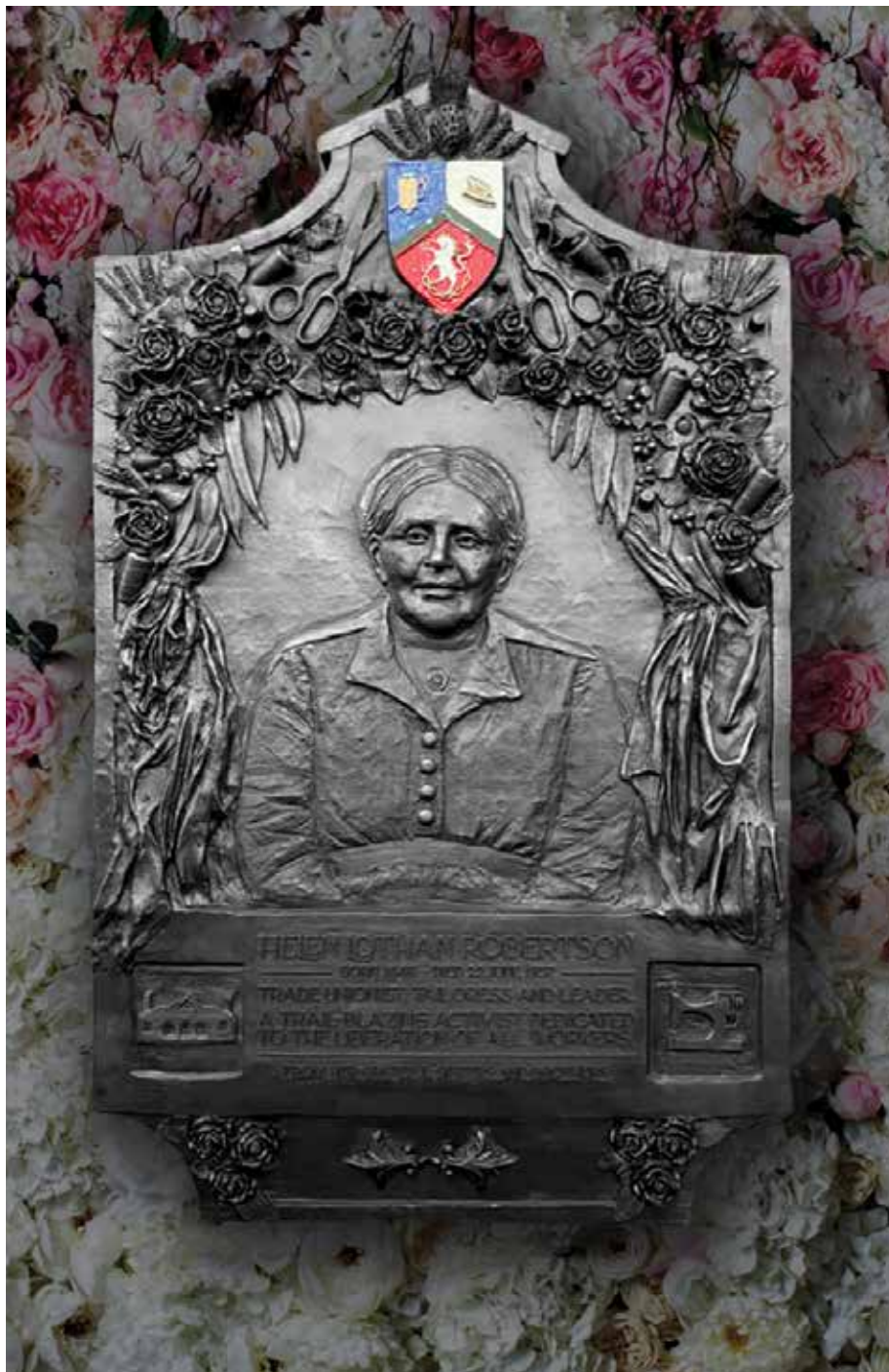
The union organisers who work in Trades Hall, however, are more excited by the practical amenities the restoration will bring. More light, temperature control, and "a kettle and a toaster that can be on at the same time" were top of the staff wishlist.

"Trades Hall has always been a working building, not a museum, and its real life comes from the people, and the passion to build a better society", Liz reflects.

Workers on site have also been inspired by the project, and the opportunity to contribute to a building that generations of tradesmen have poured their skill into.

Blackie reflects with pride on the work. "I'd also like to say a big thanks to all the workers that contributed to stage 2, in the pride and workmanship that the Workers Palace deserves."

Stage 2 has been completed ahead of schedule, and just in time for a re-opening that people can actually



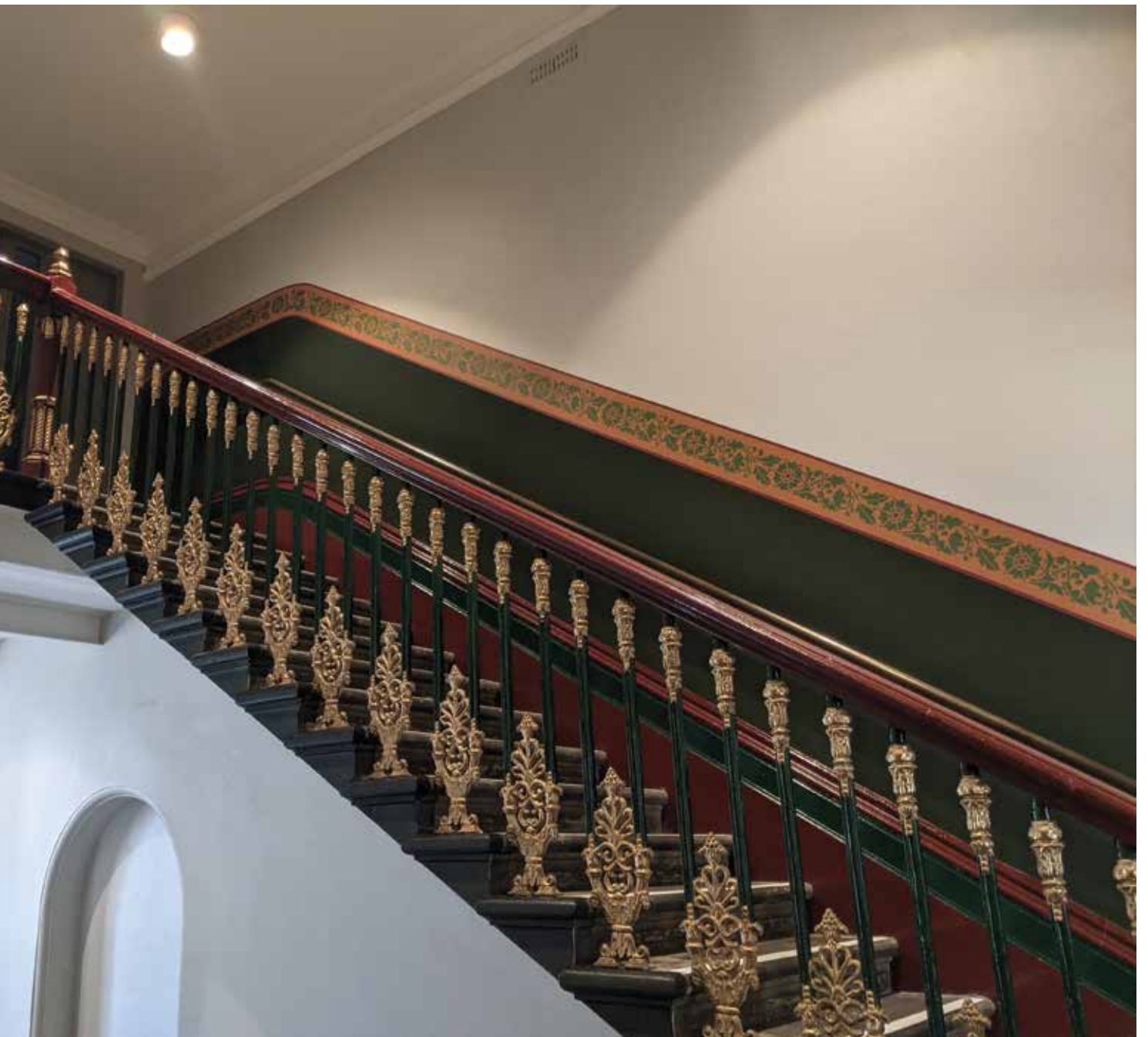
The bronze relief of Helen Lothian Robertson, sculpted by local artist Jennifer Mann, will hang to the left of the main Lygon Street entrance. The sculpture was unveiled by members of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia at a special event during WRAWfest.



The John Halfpenny Executive room (below) has been through five different colour schemes over the years, but the original has now been restored.



attend.





ORGANISING FOR EQUALITY



“We’ll win in the same way we’ve won everything from paid parental leave to anti-discrimination laws: by getting organised and fighting together with other women.”

Those words were part of VTHC Assistant Secretary Wil Stracke’s call to action at the launch of Organise for Equality: a grassroots, Victoria-wide women’s campaign to be safe, respected and equal at work.

“We’re bringing together women to make change on issues that matter to us - everything from fully-funded early childhood care and education to pay equity, superannuation equality and so much more,” says Wil.

Right now, there’s more than ever to fight for. For one, like just about everything else last year, the gender pay gap got worse.

And of course, there’s the pandemic. The infectious elephant in the room.

COVID-19 has highlighted the reality that women continue to shoulder the burden of unpaid care work in our society, particularly of young children, even with two parents at home.

Women are dropping out of the labour market, and the rates of under-employment and under-utilisation for women is highly concerning. In a time when casual workers were left to fall through the cracks built into wage subsidies and support payments, women suffered the most due to their higher rates of casual and insecure work.

SAFE, RESPECTED, EQUAL





“

**We're the caregivers
predominantly.
We're the ones
who facilitate the
world revolving
on so many levels,
and we have been
disproportionately
affected by COVID.**

Kim Travers, CPSU member

Female-dominated areas of work have also been on the frontline during the pandemic, but were rewarded with little more than tokenistic, empty gestures. COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerabilities of these frontline workers. Many women report needing to engage in multiple forms of work to piece together a 'living wage' while many more find it impossible to find and hold onto secure employment. Frontline workers were regularly exposed to hazardous working conditions, including gender-based violence. The concentration of refugee and migrant women employed in low-paid front-line roles came into clear focus as the virus tore through those communities.

I'm Fired Up, How Are We Going to Win?

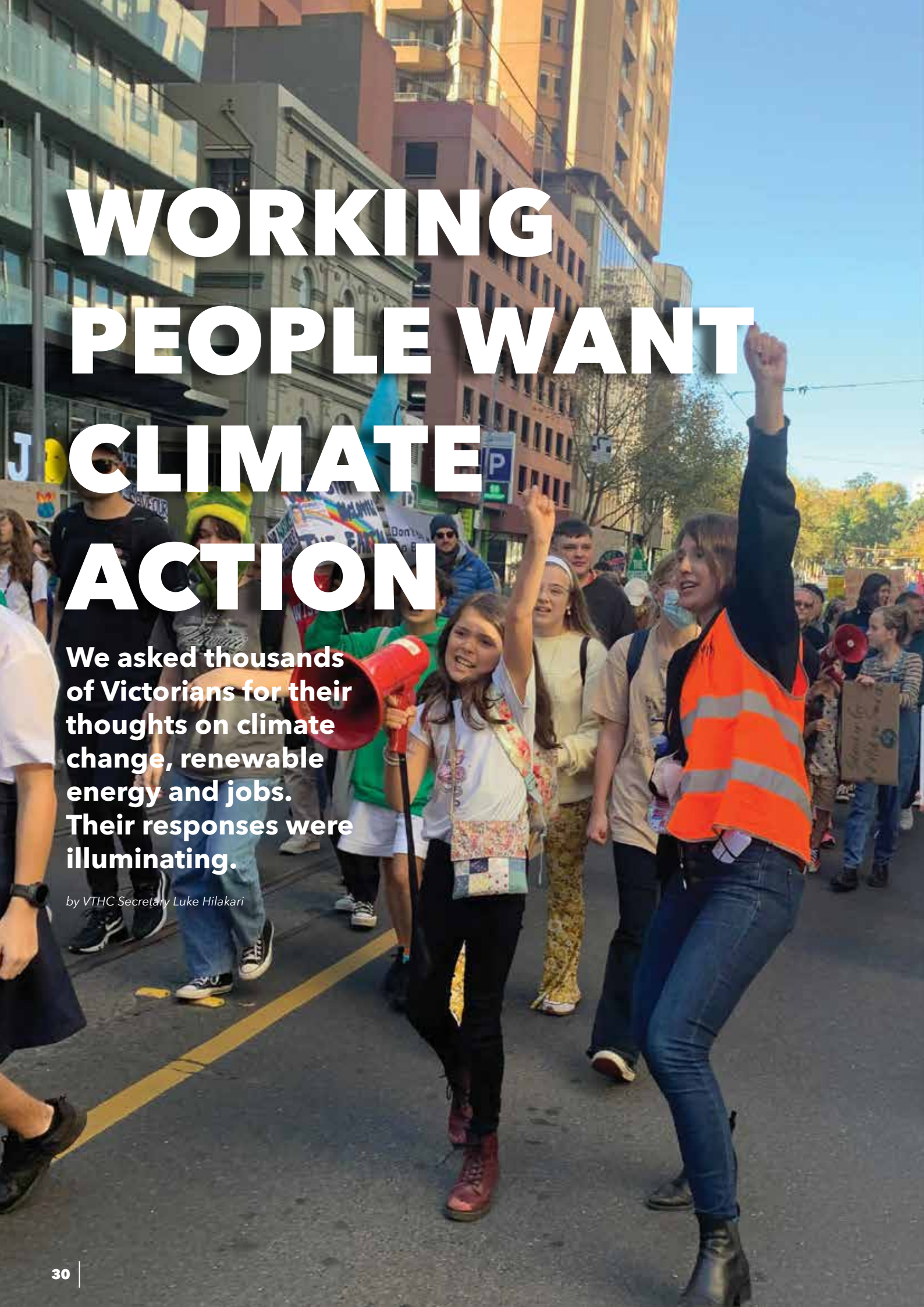
The task of winning equality is massive, and it can't just be legislated. Equality must be won in every community and workplace. That's the logic that drives Organise for Equality.

The activists who sign up for the campaign will take on the work of organising local campaign chapters, meeting with folks in their own community to plan local campaign actions and actualise the central strategy.

You can also join one of our Join the Call sessions, which are welcoming, inclusive organising meetings aimed at getting active in the community and our workplaces.

By signing up, you'll be able to connect with like-minded women in local activist groups, create and participate in exciting stunts and actions, gain skills in organising, digital media, political lobbying, amplify your voice and build power to make real and lasting change.

**Join the campaign:
organiseforequality.com**



WORKING PEOPLE WANT CLIMATE ACTION

We asked thousands of Victorians for their thoughts on climate change, renewable energy and jobs. Their responses were illuminating.

by VTHC Secretary Luke Hilakari

You've heard this story before, right? The one where working-class Australians aren't really thinking about environmental issues at all, but at the same time feel constantly threatened by Australia's inevitable transition to renewable energy? I call it the Joel Fitzgibbon Paradox.

It's a comforting story for politicians that have no interest in tackling climate change to tell themselves. The idea is that caring about clean air and drinkable water is just a niche obsession for inner-city dilettantes who are detached from the everyday pressures faced by working people.

The problem is, it's just not true.

In late 2020 we asked thousands of Victorians for their thoughts on climate change, renewable energy and jobs. We also asked them to identify whether they considered themselves 'working class', 'middle class', 'upper middle class' or 'wealthy'. Their responses were illuminating.

We learned that about three quarters of Victorians, from all walks of life, are genuinely concerned about climate change. Contrary to what some folks would have you believe, less than one third of working class Victorians claim to be unconcerned.

This shouldn't be surprising, because working people feel the impact of climate change every day. If you work outdoors, weather is getting hotter, to the point where on building sites workers are more regularly forced to down tools on hot days because it simply becomes too dangerous to keep working. If you fight fires, the fires are bigger and the seasons are longer and more devastating. The smoke from these fires is now a dangerous hazard impacting entire



capital cities. If you are a nurse, paramedic or healthcare worker, you'll know all too well the disastrous impact a heatwave can have on our communities, especially the elderly.

We also learned that the group least likely to support real action on climate change is actually the wealthiest among us. They're twice as likely to demand more support for fossil fuels. They're much more likely to tell you investing in renewable energy will cost jobs, and they're less likely to want the government to take action.



It's the top end of town that have the biggest interest in maintaining the status quo, perhaps because they're more shielded from the catastrophic impacts of climate change on their jobs and way of life than the rest of us.

It's the top end of town that have the biggest interest in maintaining the status quo, perhaps because they're more shielded from the catastrophic impacts of climate change on their jobs and way of life than the rest of us. Unlike many pensioners, they can afford an air conditioner in each room and the power it costs to run them.

Our two biggest trading partners with coal, Japan and Korea, both now have targets of zero emissions by 2050. In Australia and around the world, energy companies have already made choices to close coal-fired power plants. When Engie closed Hazelwood in the Latrobe Valley it was an investment decision to not repair aging infrastructure and to sack the existing workforce. With banks and superannuation funds making decisions to rapidly divest from fossil fuels, the risk is that those communities that have powered our nation for last 100 years, face energy plant closures sooner and are left behind when they should be the centre of these discussions, so their workforce and their families can have a secure future.

Action on climate change is already happening, whether we like it or not. The choice we all have to make is whether we want to be active participants in that change, securing quality, well-paid jobs for a transitioning workforce, or do we bury our heads in the sand and see investment in these new opportunities siphoned off overseas and good jobs replaced by low-paid, insecure work?

Take the Star of the South project for example. This is poised to be the first large-scale offshore wind project in the Southern Hemisphere, situated close to important energy infrastructure that already exists in





the Latrobe Valley. If this project gets off the ground it could create thousands of good jobs and, if connected with Hydrogen plants, can supply our trading partners with the clean energy they're increasingly demanding.

Most of us, in most jobs and in most communities, want our governments to show genuine leadership and facilitate a smoother transition to a low-carbon economy, with innovative, job-creating projects just like this. If the Morrison Government, and people like Joel Fitzgibbon, remain uninterested in facing this reality, then state governments will have to keep stepping up to the plate.

When workers are told by people in power that we can't afford change or uncertainty, they know that change and uncertainty are already here. We can either plan now for an orderly transition, build new industries, and create the well-paid jobs of the future, or we can have a very different future thrust upon us. It's time that we got beyond political games because such distractions don't just damage our climate, but also damage our chances of creating a future built on good, clean, well-paid and secure jobs.

TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH YOUR SUPER

IF YOU'RE AN AUSTRALIANSUPER MEMBER, YOUR SUPER IS PLAYING AN IMPORTANT PART IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE.

As a shareholder in some of the world's largest companies, AustralianSuper has the power to drive positive change.

By working with the companies we invest in to reduce their carbon emissions, we can have a meaningful impact on climate change globally. Companies which manage climate change well also make better long-term investments, so this work supports our aim in providing members' strong long-term returns*.

Andrew Gray leads the environmental, social and governance (ESG), and stewardship program at AustralianSuper. In 2020 he completed a 6-month rotation as chair of an organisation called Climate Action 100+ (CA100+), which AustralianSuper co-founded. CA100+ is an initiative created to tackle climate change. It brings together some of the world's most powerful investors and is the largest of its kind.

In the first 4 years, CA100+ has guided companies to prioritise

climate change in their business strategies. Key to this success has been engaging business leaders, creating a framework, and providing a clear set of asks.

Companies recognise that managing climate change is an essential part of future-proofing their businesses. As such, they're generally open to hear the expectations of long-term shareholders, such as AustralianSuper.

'The science tells us that the world economy needs to reach net zero emissions by 2050 to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement,' says Andrew. 'For investors, this is an important goal. We believe meeting net zero over time will result in the lowest economic cost transition to a low carbon economy and produce the best investment outcomes for members.'

'Companies that are not managing climate change well, and don't have a viable business strategy in place to meet this goal, will become less

appealing to investors over time, and attract less capital,' he says.

Learn more about CA100+ and how AustralianSuper is driving positive change at weareunion.org.au/aussuper-climate

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Safe Apprentices, Good Jobs

“You start so young, often straight out of high school. You think... surely they’ll look after me.”

A group of young workers are gathered at Trades Hall on a Wednesday night. There’s an anxious energy in the room. For some, it’s the first activist meeting they’ve been to since before the pandemic, and for others, it’s their first ever.

“As an apprentice, you don’t really know your worth,” says Josh. “You don’t know what your rights are.” The room nods in agreement: everyone here knows this feeling well. “It’s really hard to stand up when you feel like your job’s constantly on the line. I just kind of bit my tongue and rolled with it.”

The stories start to come out, one by one around the room.

“I had \$46,000 in wages stolen from me,” says Daniel. Everyone gasps at the dollar figure, but then they nod again because it’s by no means beyond imagining. Wage theft among apprentices is rampant. The Young Workers Centre’s records show that 75% of apprentices who contact them have experienced wage theft.

Deeper than the widespread wage theft is the psychological damage which can linger for years and years.

“The boss would take his anger out on the apprentices, even if you were

doing the right thing,” says Josh. “He’d set you up to fail. He’d tell you to do something, you’d do it, and then he would turn around and ask you why you’d done it.”

“You’d get constantly put down, and constantly feel like shit. At the end of it, you’d think - well, why am I even waking up in the morning to be abused like this?”

Unsurprisingly, this doesn’t make for a great learning environment, which is supposedly the point of an apprenticeship.

Joseph, who completed a baker’s apprenticeship, says that the standards of education are often

incredibly low. "We didn't go to the school. We had the guy come out to us and you'd get like one hour of theory a month. He'd come out, give us some books and leave, pretty much."

Joseph no longer works as a baker, but he's keen to see the system improved.

"With bakers especially, it's so hard because you start so young, often straight out of high school. So you feel like you should be going to TAFE at some point, but then you think it's fine, it'll come. Surely they'll look after me." Many apprentices miss out on fundamental training, and that's a risk to their future health and safety.

The current rate of completion for apprenticeships in Victoria is 46% - which puts Victoria as the poorest-performing state in the country. In the construction trades, apprenticeship cancellations rose 20% between 2016 and 2020. Cancellations in electrotechnology and telecommunications rose almost 25% for the same period. Across all industries, 70,000 workers dropped out of apprenticeships in those four years.

With stories like the ones above, it isn't too difficult to see why.

It all points to the need for massive reform in the apprenticeship system.

Currently, virtually anyone who wants an apprentice can get one - even if they've abused apprentices in the past. Too often, dodgy employers exploit the apprenticeship system as a source of cheap labour. Many apprentices find themselves spending more time doing menial tasks like digging trenches or cleaning than being exposed to the technical elements of the work they are supposed to be learning. Without a system to ensure employers are above board, this behaviour can continue unchecked.

This is why young apprentices - organising through the Young Workers' Centre - are launching the campaign, Safe Apprentices, Good Bosses, to fix apprenticeships and win real change in trades. And that's not nothing. The Young Workers Centre has campaign chops. "Wage theft" wasn't even a phrase used in Australia before young workers took it on, and now Victoria's wage theft laws are the envy of the country.

Scott Collom, a former electrical apprentice and now an organiser for the Young Workers Centre, says the campaign is an organising opportunity for the whole union movement.

"We need you to talk to your kids, your cousins, your neighbour who is doing an apprenticeship, and get them involved. We can smash this bad model and make apprenticeships good jobs, but we need apprentices and trainees in every industry to speak up together."





WOMEN ONSITE

Australia has one of the most gender-segregated workforces in the world, and it's one of the reasons for our persistent gender pay gap. But addressing this problem isn't as simple as just telling girls, "You can be anything!" We know that we need are strategies to attract, recruit and retain women and Women Onsite has pilots with both job seekers and employers to make this happen.

It's not that women lack the motivation to consider a trade. There are lots of reasons, and some literally just lack the tools. "Having a set of tools can be the difference between someone getting an apprenticeship, or feeling like it's beyond them," says Jobs Team lead Barbara Huggins. "If you're the first one in your family to ever try a trade, you don't have an old set of tools around, and buying all new tools is expensive. The Women Onsite project is piloting strategies that remove barriers for women. In some cases, the best thing to do for someone is just give them \$200 worth of kit so they can start a whole new career."

The Jobs team at Trades Hall is funded by the Victorian Government to pilot strategies that support women into historically male dominated industries. The Women Onsite project supports soft skills like job-readiness for participants, as well as partnering with TAFEs and unions to offer "Try a Trade" days. It was never envisioned that the team would have to work almost entirely remotely during two years of lockdown, but the project has nevertheless succeeded in supporting 90 women with 30 starting apprenticeships to date. "This will change lives, but it will also change industries. Trades will benefit from a diversified workforce, bringing in new talent and new perspectives."



MULTICULTURAL SAFETY AMBASSADORS

Supported by the Migrant Workers Centre at Trades Hall, "Multicultural Safety Ambassadors" reach out to their communities to deliver community education on issues like workers compensation. The program is in its second year, and over 22 workers from over 20 different language communities have graduated as safety ambassadors.

Recently, Winta Eyod presented a session in Amharic at an Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo church, and Shemsia Waritu led training in a park for an Oromo women's community group.

"It's crucial to get workplace rights and safety information out there in language, but also have it be delivered by trusted community leaders," says Migrant Workers Centre CEO Matt Kunkel. "It's nothing new to us as unionists. It's the organising model; organising workers to fight for their own rights, their own safety. Trusting workers to be the experts."

Besides delivering critical information to workers in communities, the program is also identifying a new pool of talent for the movement. "There are so many campaign jets coming through the program," says Matt. "We're just putting them in touch with their natural home in the union movement".



CANDIDATE SCHOOL

Working people are so often locked out of the halls of power, which leads to decisions being made without their interests being taken into account. Recognising this, the Victorian union movement is looking to upskill people who are already leaders in the workplaces - delegates, HSRs and activists - to get them elected to positions of power in their communities.

Penny Flynn was an ASU delegate who participated in the inaugural class of Candidate School in 2020, and was subsequently successful in getting elected to her local council of Horsham.

Since then, she's already been able to demonstrate the benefits of having working people in these positions.

"I think my influence at the table has been a good thing, because I bring a different perspective. A working person's perspective."

Things happen slowly, so she readily



admits she hasn't been able to totally overhaul her local council. But just by being involved she has been able to affect changes.

"We were talking about the budget, and I was reading the document, and where it was talking about staff salaries it said 'a new agreement will be negotiated after July 2022.' And I thought to myself, that doesn't sound right. So I pulled out the Agreement and it says that the parties will start negotiating 12 months before the

expiry of this Agreement. No other person would have thought of that. They would have just let it go through, but now everyone knows they need to start negotiating with the workers under the Agreement."

Especially when it comes to industrial issues, no one thinks about them in the same way that union members do!

"I'm all about people. I'm certainly not there for myself. We need more unionists at the table because they don't normally do what they do for themselves."

The 2021 intake of Candidate School has welcomed a diverse cohort of union activists ready to throw their hat in the political ring.



PERMANENT VISAS FOR ALL WORKERS WHO CALL AUSTRALIA HOME

Hande Denli, 35, is a Turkish migrant living in Australia on a Bridging Visa.

IN April, migrant workers kicked off a new campaign for permanent visas. Australia's visa system is stacked against workers. Many find ourselves going from temporary visa to temporary visa with no hope of a stable future despite having lived and worked in the country for years. Meanwhile, exploitative employers are enabled to churn through a vulnerable temporary migrant workforce.

Migrant workers are calling on the Morrison Government to:

- Create a pathway to residency for migrant workers: Make the newly proposed visa subclass 191 a pathway to permanent residency for migrant workers of all visa subclasses who have worked and made a home in Australia
- Break the exploitative system of workers depending on their employer for visas: Replace the employer-sponsorship system with a state-sponsored migration program that prioritises the needs of workers rather than employers.
- Provide protections for workplace whistle-blowers: Establish a firewall between the Fair Work Ombudsman and the department of Home Affairs to ensure migrant workers who report wage theft don't face visa cancellations or future visa penalties for breaches of visa-specific work conditions

The campaign is well-timed. This year there are two Senate enquiries underway into our migration program, and the Morrison



“Uncertainty is one of the things that really prevents you from focusing on your life. And you don't feel safe and stable enough to really contribute to the community.

- Hande

Government announced a new permanent residency visa (subclass 191) that will commence in 2022.

This campaign was unanimously endorsed with enthusiasm by workers at a Migrant Worker Solidarity Network meeting in March. Thousands of workers signed the petition calling for visa reform. Activists wrote letters to decision-makers, and followed up by meeting with MPs and Senators across political parties to talk about why visa reform is urgently needed.

So far, the network has met with Mark Dreyfus MP, Senator Jess Walsh, Maria Vamvakinou MP, Senator Claire Chandler, Senator

Damien Drum and Julian Hill MP. These meetings were not only a chance to restate the importance of our recommendations. They also provided a space for workers with first hand experience of Australia's migration system, many of whom do not have an electoral voice, to share their stories and be heard by our elected representatives.

In November, the campaign had a win. The Committee on Temporary Migration published their final report which incorporated nearly a dozen of the Migrant Workers Centre's recommendations, including:

- To reform the visa system to create more pathways to permanent residency
- To penalise employers who breach workplace obligations to migrant workers
- To establish workplaces rights inductions and information programs for migrant workers
- To establish a firewall between the Department of Home Affairs and the Fair Work Ombudsman
- To abolish the prohibitive work conditions attached to the International Student and Working Holiday Maker visas
- To establish a National Labour Hire Licensing Scheme

The inclusion of our recommendations in this report is a milestone moment for this campaign, and gives us a strong foundation to take our fight for a fairer visa system to Canberra.

MIGRANT WORKERS RECLAIM \$200,000 IN ATO CLAWBACKS

Last year, the Morrison Government cruelly locked temporary visa holders out of JobKeeper and JobSeeker. Not only did this move leave over a million workers without support during the peak of the pandemic, but we're now hearing from workers on temporary visas who had their JobKeeper applications erroneously approved and are now being asked by the ATO to pay back their JobKeeper income.

We know from the hideous experience of Robodebt what a serious psychological toll this can take on people already in a precarious work and living situation.

Hassan Jaber, who joined the Migrant Workers Centre as an organiser this year, is one such worker who was affected. Hassan explains:

"When the Government introduced the JobKeeper program in 2020, I was an Uber driver. I had no income because of the COVID restrictions. I asked my tax agent if I was eligible for the JobKeeper payment as a sole trader. He said yes, and he also contacted the ATO to double check. The person at the ATO who answered the phone said, 'Just submit an application. We will review your application. If you are eligible, you will receive the payment. If you are not eligible, we will not pay you.'"

Hassan had friends who were international students and had their applications rejected, but Hassan's was approved. He says, "I received the JobKeeper payment, but a few months later, the ATO sent me a letter saying that I was not eligible and now I had to repay \$27,900."

Hassan contested this repayment - as a single parent without income during COVID-19, he

“

**I did not make
any mistake**

couldn't afford the repayment, and he felt he should not be penalised for a mistake he didn't make. After requesting a review, the ATO decreased the amount to \$8,400. Hassan still refused to accept this, contested it once again and the ATO finally retracted the repayment completely.

Outrageously, Hassan's case was not an isolated incident. The following month, he started working at the Migrant Workers Centre and a worker came to us for assistance with the same issue.

The worker was an independent contractor who was told he could apply for JobKeeper, was approved, and then asked to pay back \$13,500 to the ATO. Hassan says, "He was crying because he does not speak English, he's not reading, he's not writing – he said, 'I did not make any mistake,'" Luckily, Hassan knew from experience that the worker could contest the case. "We were able to help the worker submit an objection to the ATO.

A few weeks later, the worker called the Migrant Workers Centre and thanked us for helping him. The ATO had cancelled his repayment order."

As of November 2021, the Migrant Workers Centre has helped migrant workers reclaim over \$200,000 in JobKeeper repayments claimed by the ATO.



SPRING HAS SPRUNG

WITH **MERAKI MINDS**

WEDNESDAY
MAY 24 AT 7PM

\$5
TICKETS

CHECK IN WITH QR CODES

Checking in with a QR code helps keep life and businesses open. It means faster contact tracing, which limits the spread of COVID-19 and helps save lives. Check in with a QR code.

Using QR codes protects our community

www.covidsafecheckin.org

COVID-SAFE WORKPLACES



A new team of organisers are hitting the streets to help keep workers COVID-safe.

It's October in Melbourne, and the city is slowly coming back to life. Although the city's offices are still quiet, construction sites are once again reverberating with the sounds of diesel engines, and cafes and retail stores have opened to lines of slightly shell-shocked customers.

Workers and shoppers are happy to be back, but teething problems are evident. Workers in a wide range of roles have been burdened with a variety of new duties including checking vaccination certificates, maintaining density limits, and informing patrons of potential exposure. Customers, returning from months of isolation and out of practice exercising courtesy, are expressing frustration at the new processes and the delays they cause. Some are becoming aggressive towards staff.

A team of COVID-Safe organisers has stepped up to assist. The COVID-Safe Workplaces team runs a wide range of outreach on COVID safety to workers in the community, and in their workplace. The team visits over 100 workplaces every week to emphasise the importance of COVID-Safe plans, checking in with a QR Code and getting vaccinated. The team also runs training and information sessions on COVID safety, the latest restrictions, and why it's so important we all check in and get vaccinated.

The team deploys to commercial centres across the city; this week it's Brunswick, Footscray, Maribyrnong and Knox. Organisers speak to dozens of workers who have experienced threatening and aggressive behaviour from customers, simply for asking them to do the right thing and check-in. The organisers listen, and advise workers on workplace safety

principles and how their employer can make their workplace, and the check-in process, safer for workers.

The outreach organisers are part of a wider COVID-Safe project funded by a Victorian Government grant. In addition to training and outreach, Trades Hall has undertaken research about attitudes to vaccination, and has run targeted advertising campaigns encouraging vaccination and courtesy to frontline workers.

With workplace tensions high, the visibility of union support is more important than ever.



Street posters and stickers designed by Victorian Trades Hall Council in English, Arabic and Somali. Each poster references an idiom native to the language and culture and implores "Mask up, Check in, Get vaccinated. Do the right thing and treat all workers with respect."



VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL

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Carlton 3053
weareunion.org.au**

WE ARE UNION