

Budget Backlash

SYDNEY: "Everybody here is up in arms", said Sue Chilly from the Aboriginal Medical Service after announcement of the mini-budget. All Black organisations will meet in Sydney on May 25 to consider action in Canberra. This followed a demonstration just before the budget speech

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A gathering storm against mini-budget

In MELBOURNE community groups responded quickly to Treasurer Lynch's announcement of the Medibank levy and staged a community protest next day.

They staged their protest at the Footscray Medibank office in the main shopping centre and distributed leaflets headed "Hands off Medibank, Fraser".

"All the confusion about Medibank will concern the great majority of migrant workers," Stefano de Pieri a member of the Italian migrant worker organisation FILEF, told Tribune.

organisation FILEF, told Tribune. "When Medibank came in, many migrants who had no health insurance before were very pleased. Now it looks like Medibank is under threat."

Reported actions are forerunners to a gathering storm of protest at savage cuts to community and welfare projects and a budget which "giveth with one hand and taketh with the other". This is how John

"giveth with one hand and taketh with the other". This is how **John Healy**, Sydney branch president of the Waterside Workers Federation described the budget when asked by **Tribune**. "But I think he taketh more than he giveth," he added.

"Hawke's stand was not heartening for the working class," Healy commented.

Maurie Mulheron, Australian and NSW state councillor of the Australian Railways Union was also concerned about ACTU president Bob Hawke's reactions. "It was noticeably different to the one he adopted to Whitlam when he was PM. Where does the ACTU president stand? There seemed to be some kind of collaboration, seeing that the union ballot legislation was partly held up."

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mulheron was strongly critical of cuts to commonwealth railways in West Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory. "Public transport must be updated, especially in view of the oil crisis and the projected rise in the price of oil to \$1-\$2 a gallon and the fact that there is not enough oil in Australia," he added.

In a press statement on behalf of the Save Public Transport Committee **Alan Sorrensen**

condemned the public transport cuts. They result from a powerful roads lobby which has led to increases in government spending on roads, but none for all other transport, he said.

The Federal Government has its head in the sand and ignores views for better public transport shown in the NSW and Victorian state elections. "If the government will not listen to reasoned public debate then it may well be necessary to seek stronger pressure, perhaps by industrial action", said Sorrensen.

Jim Fraser, Victorian state secretary of the Australian Railways Union described the tax indexation/family allowance/Medibank levy as a three-card trick. "It puts virtually nothing in the pockets of railworkers", he said.

"The ACTU executive declared the budget completely unacceptable to the trade union movement," said **Pat Clancy** ACTU executive member and National Secretary of the BWIU.

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HAWKE DAZZLED

"I disagree with Bob Hawke's initial statements about the budget - he was dazzled by tax indexation and couldn't see beyond that. The ACTU executive decision was unanimous." Bob Hawke was absent from the meeting.

"The budget is thoroughly unprincipled and a political double cross," said Clancy. "Tax indexation has been introduced as an excuse to destroy Medibank. The \$2.6 million cut from government spending will worsen unemployment.

"The BWIU has initiated a save the Building Industry campaign and has called for a national stoppage in May."

Harry Karlake, an organiser in the Victorian BLF said: "The mini-budget is a disaster for the building trade. The Federal government had already shelved approximately 150 projects earlier this year. About half of the building work over the past few years has

been government-financed. These decisions will put the nail in the coffin of that work, and could culminate in 50 percent of building workers across Australia being unemployed."

Jim Baird, commonwealth organiser for the AMWU said that the general reaction in the metal industry had been that the budget is a way to dodge away from the social legislation introduced by the Labor government.

"But it is also a whole new ideological concept of how government should run," he said, "and how the government should spend tax money. It is similar to depression years when political leaders said that 'the individual can get the nation out of trouble.'"

CHILD ENDOWMENT

The increases in child endowment could give the impression that some redistribution in favor of women has taken place. "For families where income is shared what is given for child endowment is taken off the tax rebate. We are concerned that the allocation for child endowment might come out of promised child care funds," was the response of **Sylvie Shaw** from the Melbourne Working Women's Centre.

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Pensioners had already demonstrated their concern about government policies before the budget, with a protest demonstration in Canberra and the launching of a national petition.

"The removal of some pharmaceutical benefits from the free list was very serious for pensioners," said **Bill McDougall**, secretary of the South Coast Pensioners Association.

A member of the Federal Council of the ABC Staff Association sees the cut of \$15m in the ABC's budget as a continuation of efforts to destroy the ABC as we know it.

"Commercial interests are concerned with the competition the ABC poses for them," he said. "The free market is a myth, particularly between the private and public sectors. The ABC has proved to be effective competition for the private sector and they therefore want to destroy it."

The Federal Conference of the Staff Association is meeting now to debate responses to budget cuts.