

# Australian construction workers speak out against Labor government attack on CFMEU

Our reporters  
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The federal Labor government's action in August, placing the construction division of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) under the quasi-dictatorial control of an administrator, has provoked strong opposition among building workers.

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) members have campaigned at numerous construction sites, distributing articles from the *World Socialist Web Site* and speaking with workers about the administration and the broader political issues posed by Labor's attack, which is aimed at slashing wages and conditions throughout the working class.

SEP campaigners have pointed to the dead-end perspective advanced by former CFMEU leaders, sacked by the administrator, and their allies in the other building union bureaucracies. The sole concern of these figures is the restoration of their own positions and privileges, garnered through decades of service, enforcing the demands of governments and corporations.

In opposition to this, the SEP has called for the formation of democratic rank-and-file committees at all major worksites as the means through which workers can organise to fight for their wages, conditions and rights.

This will be the subject of an important public meeting, "Labor's takeover of the CFMEU: An attack on the working class," to be held this Sunday at 2 p.m. (AEDT), in Sydney, Melbourne and online. [Click here](#) for more details and to register for the meeting.

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**Arthur**, a building worker and CFMEU delegate in Melbourne, said he would attend the SEP's meeting on Sunday because, "I'm interested in any political organisation that is actually talking about this issue and starting meetings. I don't know of anyone else, apart from the union, that is actively advocating against administration. There's no news media organisation that is on our side, it's all a one-sided bash fest.

"We need more people to become politically active. We have people that are unhappy, but apathy seems to come in and people just want to go back to their normal lives. We need people to come and actually listen and get involved.

"The more people talk, the more people you can get to that meeting, then they go out and talk to ten people on their work site, their place of employment, their friend group. The only way to grow is people listening, getting information, disseminating that information, people critically thinking about what they're hearing, making their own choices."

Arthur agreed that the Labor government's imposition of an administrator to run the construction union is an attack on the working class as a whole:

"100 percent it is. This is a way of stopping dissenting voices. This is a threat: 'If you act out and we don't like where you're going...' It can apply to any union who steps out of line. It means any government can choose which union can stand up for themselves and fight back—they can automatically just be stopped.

"I think workers do need to break from the Labor Party. I don't know what avenue that leaves, voting-wise—this will be worse under a Liberal government. But how can we put our votes or faith behind a party that is actively attacking the union movement?"

Arthur also spoke about the insecure conditions confronting many workers in the construction industry:

“There are multiple companies that will fold, not pay workers’ entitlements, get bailed out under the [government-funded] system and start up again next week making money. Phoenix companies.

“We are daily-hire workers. We can be removed from site and sacked with a day’s notice.

“Then there’s the idea of an ABN worker [self-employed sole trader]. You’re supposed to be on wages if you work for a company for more than a set period of time. But we’re now in a situation where you have people working for multiple employers, or the same employer, on an ABN rate, not getting paid superannuation.

“I don’t see the Master Builders turning around and going, ‘Hey guys, guess what, we actually ended up with record profits this year. We’re going to give you a little bit back, because we just made so much money off the back of you guys.’

“Unless we fight, they never give back. No boss hands you a pay rise. No condition has been handed to us by a boss. It’s all been fought for.”

WSWS reporters spoke with two building workers at a Melbourne construction site, who asked to remain anonymous.

The first worker said: “This attack on the CFMEU is not about corruption, it’s about the developers making more money by cutting wages. That’s the issue.

“The Labor government have instigated an investigation based on rumours. Why isn’t there an investigation into ambulance drivers doing 18-hour shifts?”

Asked why the Labor government was spearheading the attack on building workers, he said, “They don’t represent the working class. But who do you vote for now? If the Liberals are in, they’re just as bad.”

The second worker said: “Bikie gangs, this and that—it’s all allegations, there’s no facts. The big agenda is to crush our good pay rates and conditions. With other unions out there, they will work in the rain, they will work when it’s 100 degrees.”

He referred to the destruction of full-time jobs: “We had 179 guys on our books, now there’s 75 of us. Then, two weeks ago, we got redundancy letters—they’re going to get rid of another 50. So there will only be 25 full-time workers and the others will be labour hire. They will bring them in, they’ll use them as long as they need to, one or two days, and then say ‘we don’t

need you.’

“With us as full-timers, they can’t do that. Even if there’s no work, we’re going to come in and they have to pay us.”

The first worker added: “Sally McManus [secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)] is part of the government. She’s not backing the workers. The ACTU has brought in holiday pay and sick pay for casuals, now they want to get rid of the full-time people and just put everyone on casual.”

He pointed to the difficult conditions confronting building workers: “Our guys are working long hours. They are brushing the water off the slab. Even if you have a couple of millimetres it can be dangerous. If you go upstairs now, they’re spotless. If it wasn’t for the union [safety officers] you could have had half a dozen deaths here. Our safety officer comes here at 6 a.m. He starts up the top. He walks all the way down. He’s got his list. Nobody goes to work until it’s all cleaned up.”

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### **Sydney**

2 p.m. (AEDT) Sunday, October 27

Belmore Senior Citizens Centre, 38 Redman Parade, Belmore, NSW

Reserve your seat in Sydney here.

### **Melbourne**

2 p.m. (AEDT) Sunday, October 27

Activity Room 2, Kathleen Syme Library, 251 Faraday St, Carlton, VIC

Reserve your seat in Melbourne here.

If you can’t attend in person, the meeting will be livestreamed. Register for the Zoom livestream using this link.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**