

The following information provides an overview of the history of the CFMEU Forest and Furnishing Products Division.

BACKGROUND

The CFMEU Forest and Furnishing Products Division was first registered as a Federal Organisation under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1904) on the 21st August 1907, as the Federated Sawmill, Timber-yard and Woodworkers Employees Association of Australasia.

The name of the Union was changed on the 27th October 1913 to the Amalgamated Timber Workers Union of Australia, and again on the 10th July 1918 to the Australian Timber Workers Union.

In late 1990 a ballot was conducted by members of the Australian Timber Workers Union and the Pulp and Paper Workers Federation of Australia endorsing the Amalgamation of both Unions to form the Australian Timber and Allied Industries Union. A further ballot was conducted in mid 1991 on the amalgamation between the Australian Timber and Allied Industries Union and the Building Workers Industrial Union. This endorsement supported the first stage in the development of a major Union, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union which represents approximately 120,000 members. The Forest and Furnishing Products Division represents 20,000 members nationally.

The history of the CFMEU Forest and Furnishing Products Division goes back to the 1870's campaign for the 8 hour working day, where it was at the forefront of the campaign. 1920 was the start of an on going struggle in the forest and forest products industry to reduce the 48 hour working week to 44 hours. The successful campaign resulted in Justice Higgins making an order to reduce the working hours of sawmillers in the metropolitan areas. Country sawmillers remained on 48 hours per week.

Almost 7 years later, employers tried to reintroduce the 48 hour week across the industry, claiming sawmills were closing & jobs being lost because of the impact of the 44 hour week.

In 1928 Judge Lukin gave his own interpretation of the award clause and reintroduced the 48 hour week.

There was controversy over the legitimacy of Judge Lukin's authority to alter or amend the award. In 1929 the case went to the full arbitration court, where the court hired an officer to investigate the claims made by employers about the effects of the 44 hour week and took into consideration Judge Lukin's interpretation of the award. The full arbitration court upheld Judge Lukin's decision of 1928 and the 48 hour week was consequently reintroduced across the country.

This was a time of great upheaval, when workers were subjected to violence, and imprisoned for standing up for their rights. In many instances, workers were locked out of their workplace by their employers.

As the reversion back to a 48 hour week affected only metropolitan workers, only 3000 of the 8000 workers in the industry supported the Union's campaign, resisting the employers' attacks and refusing to work the extra 4 hours unless paid overtime.

This dispute continued for two years in some States, before it returned to court and subsequently the industry reverted back to a 44 hour week.

The CFMEU Forest and Furnishing Products Division was one of the first Unions to achieve the 44 hour week and among the last to win it back. This had a devastating effect on the Union, which was financially crippled and brought to its knees. Despite the Union's exhausted financial situation, it maintained its struggle, never losing sight of the objective, which enabled the Union to continue and ultimately win back the 44 hour week. The very same passion and drive was responsible for restoring the financial viability of the Union.

Since 1996 the Coalition Government has introduced a hostile industrial environment intended to reduce wages and conditions and abolish many entitlements through so-called industrial workplace reforms.

One demonstration of the ruthlessness and determination of this government to attack workers and their Unions was the atrocious and illegal acts perpetrated on the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in 1999.

With the re-election of the coalition, and their further watering down of the Industrial Relations Act, the Union Movement knows it will bring about continuing unjust attacks to workers' rights and entitlements across all industry sectors.

FUTURE

The future direction of the CFMEU Forest and Forest Products Division is to continue to build, strengthen and maintain a Union that protects and improves the quality of life for workers. For this to occur the Union must take a proactive approach and:

- Develop the Union;
- Reform and Improve the Industry;
- Empower Workers and Improve Their Environment;
- Protect and Improve Workers' Wages, Conditions & Rights
- Reform Society.

To achieve this direction the CFMEU Forest & Forest Products Division will continue to promote unity and collective action, involve, encourage and empower members and work for positive reform locally and internationally in enterprises, industry and society.

This positive direction should ensure that the CFMEU Forest & Furnishing Products Division maintains Award conditions and entitlements and achieve further improvements for workers within the Forest and Furnishing Products Industry.