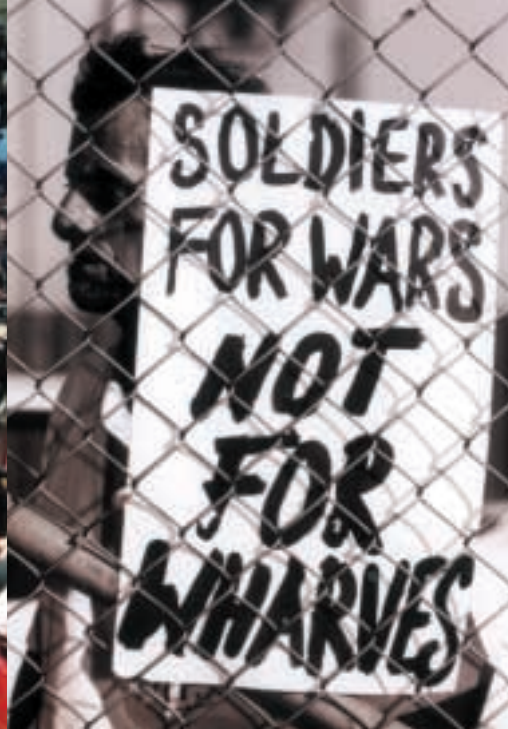


▶ WATERSHED DISPUTES



Large strikes don't tell the whole story of our movement. Every day millions of trade unionists take small stands that incrementally better the lives of working people. But big disputes showcase the passion, courage and breadth of solidarity that holds our movement together.



▶ Early Battles 1920s – In the Beginning

The fledgling ACTU had a baptism of fire with several major industrial conflicts in its first years. An early victory in a dispute over piece work in the metal trades industry was followed by a spate of protracted disputes, with few positive outcomes. In a political climate that was militantly anti-union, timber workers struck for five months as employers tried to increase their hours to 48 a week, while the miners were locked out for more than a year over a wage cut.

▶ Pig Iron and a Principled Stand

In 1938 waterside workers at Port Kembla refused to load pig



iron bound for Japan in a stand against fascism and the Menzies Government which was prepared to put BHP's profits before the national interest. The wharfies received widespread support from the union movement. The willingness of the WWF to accept the assistance of the ACTU during the dispute marked the peak body's growing authority.

▶ War Heroes Demand a 40 Hour Week

Hours of work were the defining issue for returned servicemen and their unions at the end of World War Two. The campaign for a 40 hour week began with a successful strike in the newspaper industry in 1944. The ACTU took up the issue for other unions in the Arbitration Court, kicking off what Albert Monk described as a lawyers' picnic, lasting 2 years. In 1948, it culminated in the historic decision to codify the 40 hour week.

▶ Cold War Splits

Cold war politics cast a shadow over the union movement from the late 1940s, notably in the 1949

coal strike where the Communist leaders of the Miners Federation clashed bitterly with the ACTU and Labor Government.

▶ Defending the Social Gains of the Long Boom

In 1976, the ACTU led a national stoppage in defence of Medibank, the national health scheme.

The Fraser government was threatening to dismantle the scheme — a principal social gain of the Whitlam era.

Australia. Howard secretly trained soldiers as wharfies in the ports of Dubai and colluded with Patrick to sack its 2000 workers and replace them with the strikebreakers.

The lock-out took place in the dead of night. Security guards in balaclavas roaming the docks with attack dogs on chains became the defining motif of the dispute.

The fight produced a robust display of modern union solidarity, as well as



▶ MUA Here To Stay — Waterfront Showdown

In 1998 the Howard Government marked its first term by backing Patrick Stevedores in a vicious attack on the Maritime Union of

widespread community support, over many months at picket lines across Australia. After a stunning moral and High Court victory, the MUA workers were re-instated.