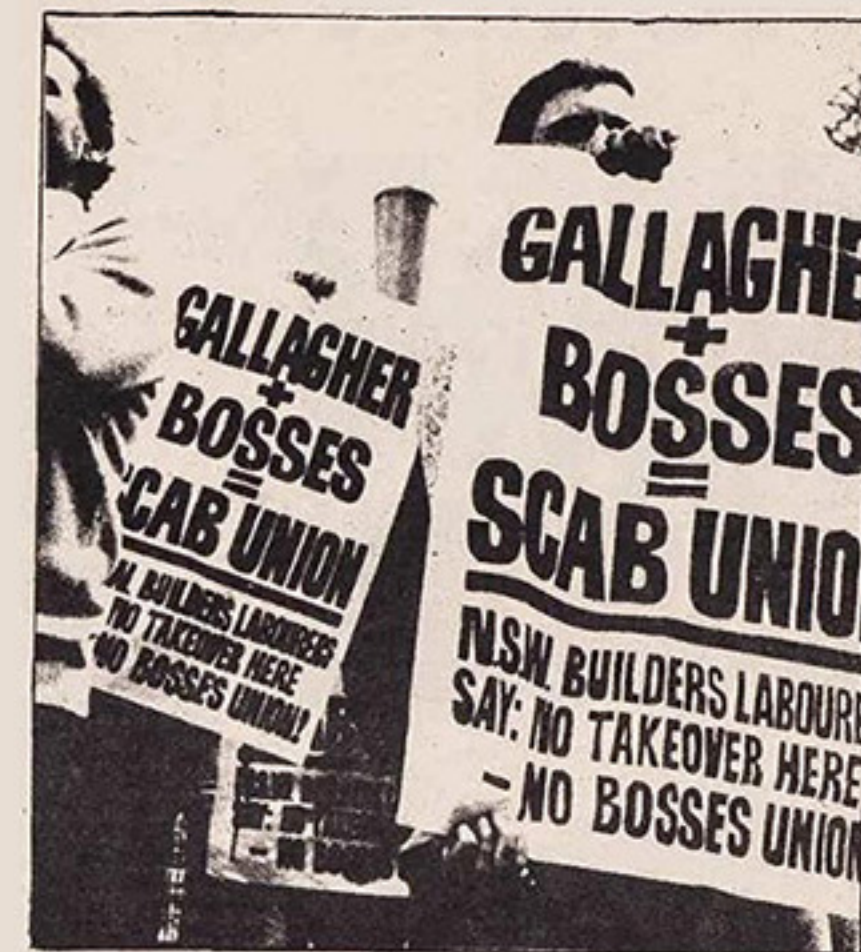


"Our fight is the fight of everyone, for the democratic control of our lives. And our ideas ARE getting through - that is one of the reasons that they want to destroy us."

United we stand, divided we fall.



Q: The New South Wales B.L.F. has just recently publically endorsed a rally and demonstration called by B.L.F. supporters for March 13th. Why does the N.S.W. B.L.F. see such a rally and demonstration as necessary at this time?

JO: Well, I think that at the present time we are seeing one of the biggest political attacks that has ever been made on the N.S.W. B.L.F. by the employers the N.S.W. master builders, and by the Federal secretary of the Union, Gallagher, who in my opinion is being used by the Master Builders. It seems to me that because the policies we are defending involve a far bigger section of the population than just Builders' Labourers, that it is in the interest of all those affected, as well as the Builders' Labourers, to insure that B.L.F. policies survive in N.S.W.

Q: You raised the question of Norm Gallagher, Secretary of the Federal B.L.F., who is attempting to set up his own union in N.S.W. There seems to be great confusion within the general public as to what is actually involved in Gallagher's actions. Gallagher himself attempts to justify his intervention on the grounds of union democracy" and, with the claim that he will clean up the corrupt N.S.W. B.L.F. leadership". How much truth is there behind his claims?

JO: There is none whatsoever. The allegation of corruption is one that Mr Gallagher has used over four years against his union, in fact the current charges are almost three years old. The N.S.W. B.L.'s have never believed this claim. Talk of us ickling union funds, and selling our cars outside, is quite frankly ridiculous. IF WE WANTED TO BE RICH MEN, MUNDEY, RINGLE AND OWENS, COULD HAVE BEEN RICH MEN LONG AGO, MONEY, NO RETURN FOR LIFTING GREEN BANS. The union has a mere few thousand dollars, nothing compared to what we could get, and which would not be shown publically at all. It is claimed we have refused to produce financial records. What we HAVE refused to produce are any records relating to union membership: for obvious reasons. However, our financial records have always been open to our membership; have been open to the press; and in fact, to Gallagher's people, when he conducted his investigation in 1974.

Q: And on the question of union democracy? Gallagher, for instance claims that N.S.W. B.L.F. meetings are stacked with "residents", crims and poofsters".

JO: These claims are also ridiculous. Certainly some residents do come along, but they are always urged to sit separately and not to vote. Anyway, yesterday's

and not to vote. Anyway, yesterday's meeting was clearly builders' labourers, 2,000 of them.

But in general terms Gallagher's claims to represent union democracy can be shot down in flames by the fact that ever since October 14, 1974, the date of his original intervention, he has consistently refused to address a mass meeting: he has consistently refused to debate with union officials, including myself, on job sites, he has consistently refused to debate us through the media. But, I think the final straw which will sink Gallagher on the question of union democracy is that WE HAVE OFFERED AND STILL OFFER TO GO TO AN IMMEDIATE ELECTION IN N.S.W., and if Gallagher feels we are corrupt and that we are not wanted by the workers why doesn't he field the team against us, and we can fight the issues out. He has consistently refused to do it. He WILL NOT do it. The only chance Gallagher has, and its not going to work, is, for the employers to pressure N.S.W. Builders' Labourers into joining the so-called Federal Branch, the scab union, and coercing them into scabbing on this present strike.

So, on the question of union democracy Mr Gallagher doesn't have a clue.

On our position on union democracy: all serious decisions we make have always been made at a mass meeting. In fact last Thursday there was a mass meeting held to initiate this strike; yesterday there was a mass meeting to continue their struggle; and next Monday there will be a further mass meeting to decide whether to

continue.

I challenge Mr Gallagher to hold a mass meeting in N.S.W. of his supporters - don't believe he can.

Q: I understand that even Gallagher's legitimacy in terms of intervening in N.S.W. as a representative of the Federal body of the Builders' Labourers has been questioned?

JO: That's right, the meeting of the Federal Council on the 16th October which originally decided upon the intervention was completely unconstitutional and even Justice Holland of the Equity Court was forced to recognise this and make a ruling to that effect.

Q: You referred to the union Norm Gallagher has attempted to set up as a "scab" union. How much proof do you have of complicity between Gallagher and the Master Builders?

JO: I have the proof that Builders' Labourers come in here every day and tell us that they have been pressured by their employers into joining Gallagher's union. Also Gallagher's officials are allowed freely onto job sites, yet N.S.W. B.L.F. officials are hindered. And, the fact that, Gallagher's organisation is officially deregistered and the N.S.W. Branch is the only legally recognised state branch in N.S.W. state yet, the MBA, which is so keen on law and order, refuses to deal with us and assists the deregistered organisation.

Q: I understand that the current strike concerning Concrete Constructions was triggered by that firm refusing to employ workers with N.S.W. B.L.F. tickets?

JO: Well in fact they were sacking N.S.W. Builders' Labourers people with years of service in the industry, and replacing them on new jobs with people who hadn't been in the industry for long and were carrying scab tickets. Builders' Labourers have personally told me that they went to Concrete Constructions and were told to go to the Federal office, to Gallagher's union and get a ticket, if they wanted a job.

This is what triggered the current dispute and brought the question of permanency to the surface.

Q: We have heard a great deal recently about violence on the job sites: which the MBA and Gallagher blame on the N.S.W. B.L.'s.

JO: On the question of violence in the building industry we have the position that the real violence comes from the employers and Gallagher. Where democratic mass meetings of Builders' Labourers have made the decision to remain out on strike, and the employers deliberately hold their jobs open and with the help of Gallagher introduce scabs, then the employers and Gallagher are deliberately creating a confrontation situation and this is where real violence comes in. The Builders' Labourers vigilantly groups which were yesterday, and today touring around job sites are doing no more than attempting to enforce in as reasonable a manner as possible decisions made at yesterday's democratic mass meeting of Builders' Labourers.

If anyone wanted to go against the policies they had the opportunity yesterday morning to do so and in fact a small handful did but today are abiding by that strike and I DON'T THINK THAT ANYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO GO AGAINST IT.

On job-sites we attempt to talk to the workers who are working and explain the issues that are involved. If that proves unsuccessful, we have then been occupying jobs, occupying the offices of the employers. We see anything that will hold

up production as the thing - while trying to avoid physical confrontations.

The fact that cops are being used in Sydney today and yesterday and Monday, arresting people attempting to stop scab labour, then the question of violence is at their feet.

There are no cops provided for us. There are no cops recognising the decision of the Builders' Labourers meeting yesterday. But, there are cops recognising the decisions of the Master Builders and Gallagher to scab on that decision.

If I could make just one more point here: this struggle with Gallagher's scab union has definitely politicised our members. After all the internal fighting, after all the incredible pressure brought to bear on individual Builders' Labourers by the employers and by Gallagher's officials after all the lies, and the confusion, we have just managed to have the largest mass-meeting of builders labourers in ten years. A mass-meeting which could make this tremendous decision to remain out on strike and which could make that decision with ONLY SEVENTY VOTES against out of a total of two thousand. And all this period of grave economic uncertainty.

Q: You have referred to this period as one of grave economic uncertainty, but what approach have you taken towards the Federal Labor government at this time?

JO: Well, clearly at this time the questions around permanency of employment are central. But we have also called upon the Federal Government to institute massive increased building programmes in socially necessary areas such as cheap inner-city housing, hospitals and schools. We have something like six million square feet of unused office space in Sydney and the boom was sure to bust. But instead of applying credit restrictions which simply caused a recession in the building industry... we feel the Federal Government should increase public spending providing both socially useful buildings as well as jobs.

Q: The N.S.W. Builders' Labourers have gained quite a bit of public attention and support through their stands on a large number of social issues including green bans student rights, women's liberation, homosexual rights, black rights and prisoners action. Could you briefly explain what has been done in these areas?

JO: I think some of these struggles have been amongst the hardest on which to convince our membership. Working class people on a building site understand that there is a need for people to have low-income housing; and while we have difficulty in arguing that we have the right to say where labour should be used, there

has been a broad acceptance of issues such as that. On the other issues I think we have been successful in that we have penetrated our membership with the idea that as well as comfort in where we live, we also need a certain amount of democracy in how we live.

A black in a country as racist as Australia is, where aboriginals have traditionally been treated like dirt, and still are, faces tremendous problems. We have always tried to support black rights at various times taking various stands and in fact we do have a black organiser who is deeply involved in the black movement. Similarly with university students, traditionally builders labourers have held the view that students are a bunch of long haired poofsters who, when they get out of university become bosses and rob us all I think we have got away from that now. The education system is a disaster. Your struggles over how you should be taught and what you should be taught are similar to our struggles over working conditions and over control of what sort of work we do.

Sexism is another big problem. The fact that women now work in the building industry has had a tremendous impact.(3) Among the current vigilantes we have women going out on the jobs with men.

I think homosexuality has proved one of the biggest problems. I can remember having a very torrid debate on a big building site in Sydney with a group of militant workers over the Penny Short issue: their argument was, "well they're just a load of poofs". I think we have to fight this question out.(1) The question of sexual liberation is a question of liberation of all people

These struggles(2) are very important to us for their success means liberation within our own union itself. That is, the acceptance within our union of people for what they are, black, christian or homosexual.

The developers, Norm Gallagher, and the Lewis Government, all tell us that, WE HAVEN'T THE RIGHT to get involved in these issues, that they are outside the bounds of traditional unionism. They are trying to contain us, all of us.

Our fight is the fight of everyone, for the democratic control of our lives. And, our ideas ARE getting through - that is one of the reasons that they want to destroy us.

Q: How important is it for supporters of the N.S.W. B.L.F. to march on March 13th?

JO: The present struggle has brought everything to a head. The N.S.W. Builders' Labourers needs the support of as many sections of the general population as possible to show Gallagher, the Master Builders, and the Lewis Government that

DESPITE all the lies, DESPITE all the distortion, DESPITE all the collusion, this union, and its social policies, has broad public support. If people want our policies to survive, they have to be ready to get involved and defend them.

Q: Should Gallagher succeed do you feel that Builders' Labourers support for these issues would disappear?

JO: I don't think that these social issues could ever disappear. I don't think you could turn the clock back 10 years. Gallagher thick as he is, reactionary as he is, can never turn the clock back. A certain number of things have been set in motion which cannot be finally stopped.

But, Gallagher, certainly can turn the clock back just a little way, and cause a massive regression of all the things we have done. He is a simple trade union bureaucrat trying to build a personal empire.

Notes

In 1972, following the expulsion of Jeremy Fisher from the Robert Menzies College at Macquarie University because he is a homosexual, the N.S.W. B.L.F. leadership, WITH THE FULL SUPPORT OF THE BL'S ON THE SITE, imposed a ban on all further construction at the University until Jeremy Fisher was reinstated.

Similarly, in 1974 the N.S.W. B.L.F. gave active support in the defence campaign for Penny Short - Penny Short was a Macquarie University student who lost her teacher's college scholarship because she is a lesbian.

The N.S.W. B.L.F. have also been active supporters of the prisoners action groups struggling for improved conditions and democratic rights for prisoners in N.S.W. gaols. In 1974 the N.S.W. B.L.F. placed a ban on further construction at Long Bay Gaol, because of the nature of the buildings under construction - a row of cells buried deep in the earth, without windows or any natural lighting.

N.S.W. B.L.'s had a mass meeting in the Sydney Lower Town Hall on Tuesday morning 4th March 1975.

Gallagher has refused to even address mass meetings in Victoria, his home state and the base of his support.

Green bans applied by the N.S.W. B.L.F. in 1973 in Redfern were largely responsible for an aboriginal housing project being established in that Sydney suburb.

N.S.W. B.L.F. members helped to put up the latest aboriginal embassy in Canberra.

In 1972 the N.S.W. B.L.F. supported the Draft Resisters Union set up at Sydney University.