



Anniversary of the Green Ban Movement

Green bans by the building unions are one of the few uniquely Australian contributions to the international workers' movements. The building unions in the early 1970s in Sydney imposed 'green bans' i.e. a ban on demolition or building work in support of an issue of heritage and/or environment.

The Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU), the Federated Engine Driver's and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) and the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF), under the leadership of Jack Munday, Joe Owens and the late Bob Pringle, imposed bans on many sites to protect heritage buildings, parks, bushland and even historical suburbs in Sydney.



The first green ban imposed was at Hunters Hill where the BLF prevented the building of home units on one of the last remaining sections of bushland on the Parramatta River. These bans in the 1970s stopped inappropriate building in Centennial Park, saved numerous historical buildings and even stopped the bulldozing of heritage suburbs including Glebe, The Rocks, Woolloomooloo, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Newcastle East End.

In the early 1990s the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union (CFMEU) imposed a ban on the demolition of the historical Finger Wharf at Woolloomooloo. This ban was maintained for over 2 ½ years and eventually the wharf was saved.

Green bans are about much more than saving patches of green space and important heritage buildings, they also serve as a reminder that working people have a social conscience and can exercise it through how they use their labour. Enforcing these bans have not been without cost to the workers involved, and most recently has required the union and its members to risk large fines under federal government laws that restrict industrial action.

In placing green bans on certain developments, the CFMEU and its members have often worked contrary to their own best interests in securing work. However, the trade union movement and its members are about more than jobs, but also about having our members' voices heard on issues that affect them and their children.

Other bans have included a ban that forced the state government to significantly modify the refurbishment and extension of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. This ban reduced the visible bulk of the extended building and its impact on the Botanic Gardens. A ban in Centennial Park prevented McDonalds building a fast food outlet. A ban at Circular Quay prevented the City of Sydney from inappropriately modifying the historical Museum of Contemporary Art.

One of the most recent green bans in 2004 prevented the state government selling foreshore land at Pyrmont Point to develop high rise units and the Seaforth TAFE site that has been returned to community ownership.

June 16, 2011, will mark the 40th anniversary of the first green ban at Hunters Hill, placed by the then BLF secretary Jack Munday. The struggle of collective action to make the rich, the greedy and the powerful accountable for a better society, has been a great victory for building workers and something they should be proud of. On the 40th anniversary we acknowledge and celebrate this great achievement.

***As union members said then, as now,
"Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!"***

