



There's Solidarity With The CFMEU

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Many Victorians would not condone some of the methods angry unionists are utilising to make their point. But they would sympathise with the protesters' message.

An out-of-control pandemic, riots, earthquakes and a Premier with a 65 per cent approval rating as Melbourne yesterday became officially the longest locked-down city in the world. Such is Victoria in 2021. Melbourne was once voted the world's most liveable – a title the city is not likely to regain in anyone's lifetime.

As much as non-Victorians might be confused by the condition of the state, it's even more baffling to many Victorians.

One example will suffice exactly how warped have become the priorities of Victorians.

A few hundred protesters gathering at the [Shrine of Remembrance](#) this week provoked howls of



outrage from the public and condemnation across the front pages of Melbourne's newspapers.

Yet the suspension of the Victorian Parliament by decree of a public servant generated barely one-20th of the media coverage devoted to what occurred at the Shrine.

A few weeks ago when the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, declared Parliament was irrelevant, and said "I think if you ask Victorians whether people giving speeches on the floor of Parliament is as important as getting jabs into the arms of people ... I am not going to apologise for the priorities I have got" his comment passed largely without comment.

The CFMEU might not be Solidarity, and no home-grown version of Lech Walesa is in sight (yet). For 18 months the Andrews government has faced no opposition to its policies – not from the Coalition (at either the federal or state level), nor from human rights lawyers, nor from the media or from anyone else, no matter how arbitrary or draconian those policies might be.

So it should be no surprise that those members of the CFMEU now protesting at being treated like the hundreds of thousands of other Victorians who were made unemployed at a few hours' notice by government diktat are gathering the support of some who in less extraordinary circumstances would have nothing to do with muscle-bound builders with neck tattoos wearing beanies emblazoned with "Touch One, Touch All".

The difference between how the Victoria Police treat a CFMEU members' rally against the Andrews government and a weekend protest of people who don't sport neck tattoos is revealing.

For the former the police, at least initially, maintained a respectful, and almost a fearful, distance. Which is basically how the authorities have handled the CFMEU for the last 10 years.

That's very different from what was meted out to an elderly female protester standing in the middle of a Melbourne road during an anti-lockdown protest last week. Video footage seen around the world "appeared to show" (in the language of the few media outlets that reported it) the woman pushed backwards to the ground by two policemen and as she lay on the road those policemen leaned over the woman and sprayed her in the face with pepper spray.

A few moments earlier a photographer for The Age newspaper had been sprayed in the face with capsicum foam by police. Apparently, both incidents have been referred to the professional standards unit of the Victoria Police.

Many Victorians would not condone some of the methods angry CFMEU members are utilising to make their point, but they would sympathise with the protesters' message.

Certainly, it might be that not every single person at the CFMEU protests is a union member, but these words from a news report in The Age a few days ago are a stark warning to the leadership of the ACTU and the Labor Party.

"Despite the union movement's determination to distance itself from the protesters, the majority



marching on Tuesday appeared to be the people industrial unions used to represent: young, working-class men who, in at least some cases, have suddenly found themselves tossed out of work.”

While the Victorian construction industry is shut down for a fortnight because 0.1 per cent of its workforce have COVID-19, in Sydney construction sites will return to full capacity from Monday.

The news from Victoria yesterday that the state recorded 766 new COVID-19 cases, its highest number since the beginning of the pandemic, should put to rest forever any notion “lockdowns work”. But on the evidence so far, for some time yet, most Victorians will continue to believe they do.

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