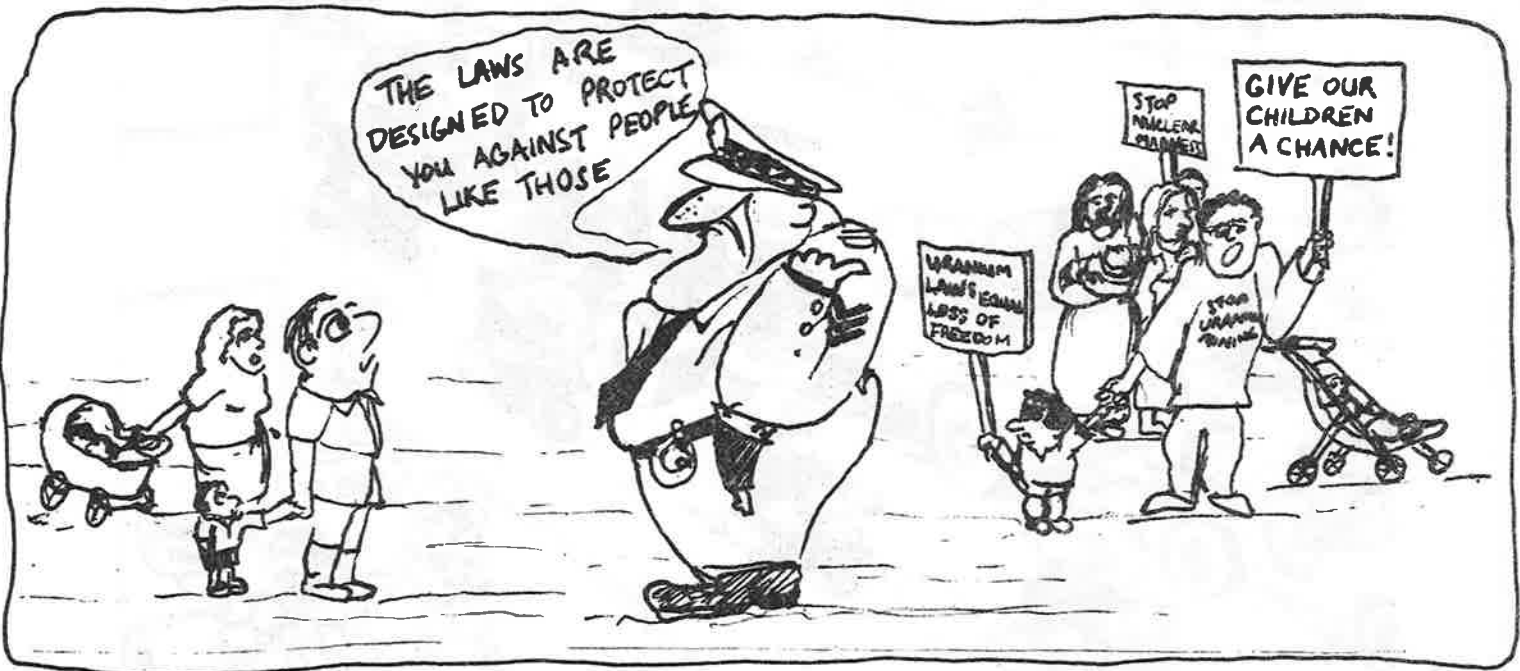


THE URANIUM LAWS



REPRESSIVE LAWS

Under the legislation used to give the go-ahead for uranium mining in Australia, the government can easily invoke legislation to silence citizens who exercise their right of free speech by opposing projects associated with the nuclear industry or uranium mining. Penalties as high as a \$10,000 fine or 12 months imprisonment can be imposed.

Ignoring the recommendations of the Ranger Report, the Government decided in August 1977 to grant authority to the Ranger partners to operate under the Atomic Energy Act, 1953. This Act, originally a Defence Act has since been expanded to cover trade and commerce, enabling it to be used in relation to commercial uranium mining.

These laws not only apply to the mining, milling and transportation of uranium, but are broad enough to cover fuel fabrication, reprocessing and the disposal of wastes, in other words the entire nuclear industry and its operations, and also the operation of associated industries.

The Acts are worded in very vague terms, and are therefore open to extremely wide interpretation.

AGAINST UNIONS

These laws mean that much industrial action by workers or their unions can be prohibited, even if they are only indirectly associated with the nuclear industry.

Strikes can be broken by the use of the army.

Union officials and members can be gaoled, workers can be forced to work, unions can face enormous fines. Mining companies can determine the make up of their workforce to ensure its ready compliance.

What amounts to a state of emergency can be declared by the Government, if it considers

it "necessary to control and eliminate hazards associated" with a "situation resulting from a nuclear activity". Use of the army, removal of all normally applicable rights of unions and citizens alike, is then made possible under the Environment Protection (Nuclear Codes) Act, 1978 (Section 14).

Anyone who uses, or threatens to use boycotts or secondary boycotts, obstructs or hinders, or through publication or speech incites others to in any way oppose a project carried out by,

or on behalf of the A.E.C. can be fined a maximum of \$10,000 or gaoled for 12 months, or both under the Approved Defence Projects Protection Act, 1947 (see Section 60 of Atomic Energy Act, 1953).

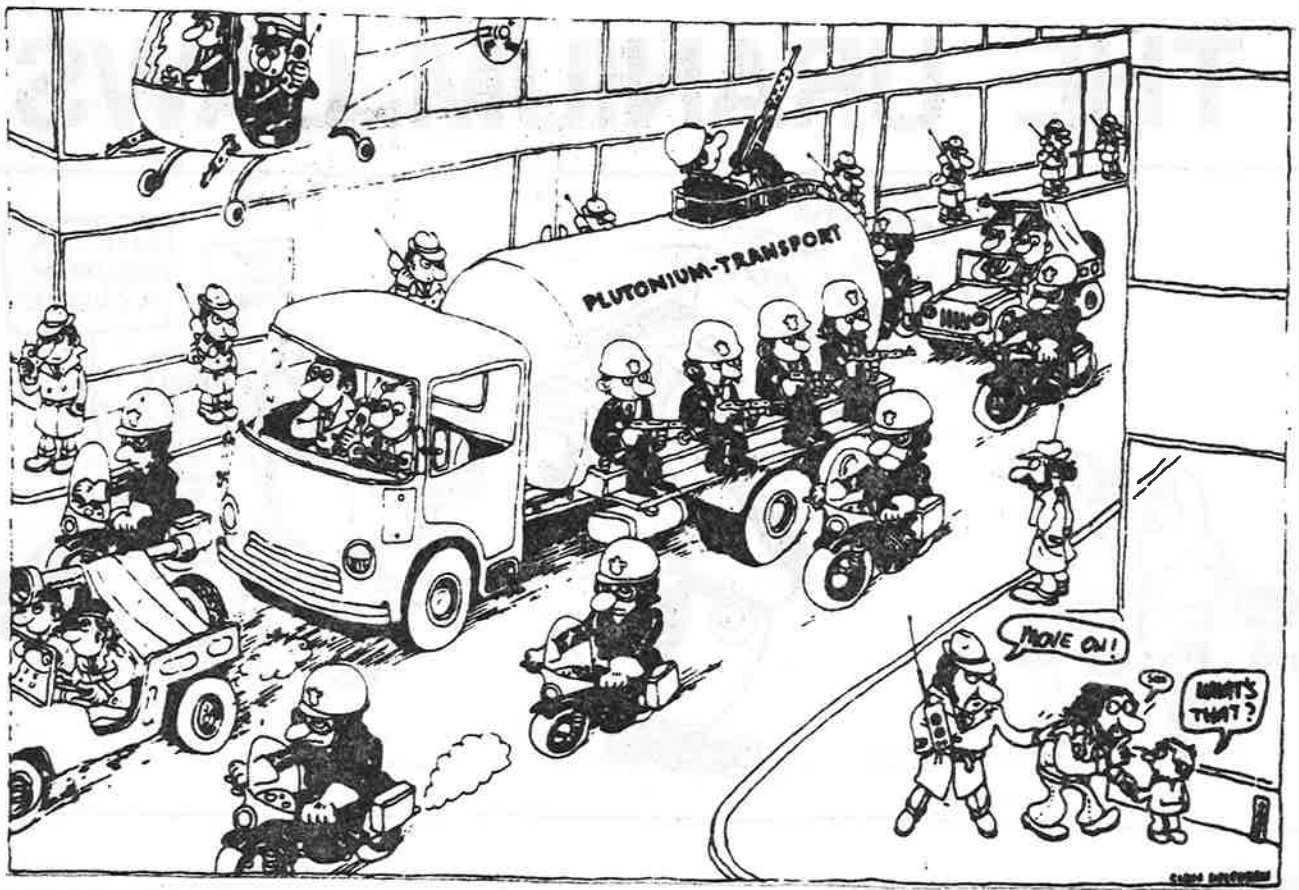
These laws add to the battery of anti-trade union legislation passed in recent years and aimed directly at severely reducing their ability to represent their members.

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Aboriginal people are denied any real power in determining how uranium mining will affect them.

They can face difficulty in publicising the repercussions uranium mining will have for them. Any plans they propose for limiting these effects can be overruled by the Government.

Members and people employed by the Northern Lands Council, the body set up to represent Aborigines in negotiations between mining interests and the Aboriginal people, are forbidden to divulge information they receive "concerning the affairs of any person" — which could include information relating primarily to the mining industry. The penalty for contravention of this provision is \$1000 fine, or six months in gaol under the now amended Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act, 1976 (Section 23E).



PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Many aspects of the nuclear industry and its consequences will be kept secret and the public's right to information will be denied.

Workers can be denied full information on the materials they are handling, the risks they face in doing so, even the results of their health checks. Unions can be denied information needed to make safety and compensation claims. Information about the effectiveness of safeguards can be restricted, the inevitable accidents and spillages of radio-active wastes can be hushed up, information about the risks faced by workers can be denied and evidence of environmental damage can be hidden from the public.

Any person, whether or not employed by the Commission, faces 20 years gaol for conveying or publishing "restricted information", if the person either intends "to prejudice the defence of the Commonwealth", or has reason to believe that another will use the information for that purpose. Proof of the person's intention or belief is not needed; they have the onus of disproving this and can be convicted on circumstantial or character evidence (Sections 44, 47).

Under the Environment Protection (Nuclear Codes) Act, 1978, the Governor-General can make regulations that would ensure confidentiality for information concerning the standards observed, and practices and procedures followed, in relation to nuclear activities. The regulations may set fines as high as \$50,000, imprisonment for a maximum of five years, and a daily fine of \$50,000 for a continuing offence (Section 15).

A present or former employee or consultant of the Commission faces seven years imprisonment for publishing or improperly retaining in their possession any document containing "restricted information". Any person who voluntarily receives that document, knowing it to have been communicated in breach of the Act, faces the same penalty (Atomic Energy Act, 1953, Section 48).

YOU MAY BE IMPLICATED

Use of the laws is not restricted to people directly involved with the industry, but they can also be used against workers and unions working in associated industries and other citizens alike.

Any person who does anything to "impair the efficiency of any real or personal property" belonging to the Atomic Energy Commission, or used in conjunction with a Commission contract, can be detained, searched and arrested without warrant. They can be imprisoned for up to seven years under the Atomic Energy Act, 1953 (Sections 49, 50).

Coupled with extremely heavy fines and gaol sentences, these laws appear intended to intimidate and gag all opposition to the development of the Australian nuclear industry.

Copies of the relevant Acts are available from your member of Parliament or from the Australian Government Publishing Service.