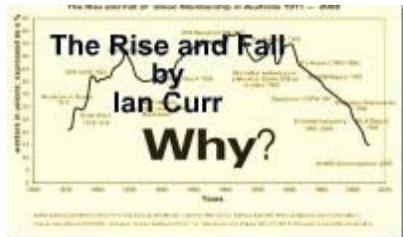


Over the past week everyone has been talking about the fall of the stock markets around the world.



The Decline in Union Membership 1911 - 2008

Is American Capitalism over, ask the newspapers.

Over the past 25 years there has been another decline that rarely makes the headlines.

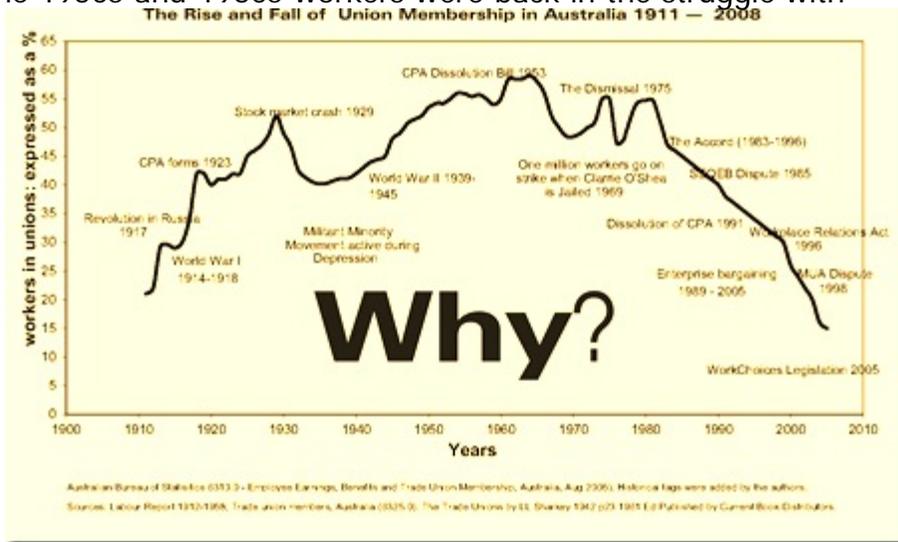
After auspicious beginnings in the 1890s and up till the stock market crash of 1929 workers organisations made steady progress. Then there were the hard years of the depression.

The unemployed workers union and the militant minority. Workers carrying their swags from town to town. Both capitalism and worker hit skid row. Roosevelt introduced *The New Deal* in the USA but it failed when unemployment rose again. Only war could save the capitalists, and workers paid with their lives.

Still in the 30s a few got organised and by the 1950s and 1960s workers were back in the struggle with some modest gains on the waterfront, the building site and in the factory.

Capitalism reached its peak.

Big mining and construction booms and jobs to go with it. For a while even wages kept pace with profits for a few short moments. Then Vietnam and the OPEC Oil crisis. Only wars could save the beast. People lost faith. They shot Martin Luther King after a garbage workers strike in the South, a *Bolivian* army sergeant *shot* dead *Che Guevara*, a death squad shot black leader Patrice Lumumber in the Congo, US army Lt Calley's men shot villagers at Mai Lai, and Pinochet killed Salvador Allende with the help of the CIA; the racists killed Steve Biko and Chris Harney in South Africa — targeted killings were all the rage in the CIA — only Fidel Castro seemed able to elude the bullet.



Workers lost hope. The pundits told us that Whitlam would wreck the economy. Yet it was capitalism not Gough that bought stagflation, with high inflation and high unemployment. Our union leaders accepted the current wisdom and found refuge in economic rationalism. They took the U out of Labour. Bureaucrats even took over the Builders Labourers Federation from Jack Munday. Still not enough. So Hawke outlawed the Builders Labourers.

Meanwhile developers built freeways and high-rise in the cities. Men-in-suits stole even more land from Murriss and Kooris and Nungas so the Big Australian could mine under the smokescreen of Native Title. Meanwhile the Accord and Enterprise Bargaining kept the workers in line. The bosses were back on top. The Wharfies fought back briefly and the toffs jailed Craig Johnston. The jihadis killed thousands of workers

in the twin towers and it was back to war. The CIA have resumed their old standby — targeted killings were back in Baghdad, Beirut, Pakistan, Gaza and Kabul.



And they give the workers bigger bills for fuel, food and housing.

So last week the ALP government put the unions out in the cold with 'Forward with Fairness'.

So how to fightback? Answers are hard to come by.

Read [After the Waterfront - the workers are quiet](#) and let us know what you think.

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