

Increased contract employment in the Australian coal industry: Threat or opportunity?

Kathryn Heiler

School of Business, The University of Sydney and CFMEU

ABSTRACT

The Australian coal industry has seen a dramatic increase in contract employment since the late 1990s. Over a third of employment is now contract employment, in an industry renowned for being hazardous and with industrially adversarial. A still heavily unionised sector, with strong Lodge level organisation, the expansion of contract employment is being used by many of the large mining companies as an often overt de-unionisation initiative. How can the mining union respond to this threat in the light of an increasingly hostile federal government anti-union agenda? This paper examines critically the causes of this increased increased labour market fragmentation in coal and looks at the implications for the union, for employees and contractors.

