

## **Dead Men Talking.**

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### **Abstract**

The Mining and Energy Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU and formerly the United Mineworkers' of Australia and the Miners' Federation), unlike many sections of organised labour in Australia, has embraced what might be construed as an "intellectual" approach to the collection and preservation of its history and the role of coal miners in Australian society and the national economy.

One consequence of this approach has been the Miners' Oral History Project. The project began during the early 1990s when the Mining and Energy Division made a small grant to two retired miners to undertake recordings of the reflections of former miners in New South Wales. The Mining and Energy Division subsequently commissioned professional historians to edit the recorded material.

As a result, a sell-out volume, *At the Coalface*, was published in the 1990s. A second volume, *Back at the Coalface*, now in its second printing, was published in 2007.

More than 100 interviews have been recorded and transcribed and the project continues today as The Miners' Oral History Project. The interviews will be lodged with the National Library of Australia.

As a result of the interviews, the book *Lockout* (by the late Jim Comerford) was published and subsequently adapted as the highly successful *Lockout* television documentary. A copy of this documentary can be made available to you and can be screened at the U.K. conference as part of any paper presentation. The documentary runs for 57 minutes.

Funding for the projects was available through The Mineworkers' Trust which itself is funded through United Collieries, a New South Wales mining operation partly owned by the current miners' union.

The paper discusses the attitudes of coalface miners to their history and the foresight of the Mineworkers' Trust in supporting the oral history project and its various end products. It examines, too, the use of non-print technologies in what might be called multi-media mining history.

The title of the proposed paper, *Dead Men Talking*, reflects the fact that many of those interviewed over the past decade have since died. Their stories would have remained untold but for the project - a project which is also a rich source of primary material for future studies. In its approach to its history, the Mining and Energy Division of the CFMEU occupies a unique niche in the telling of the national story and, more generally, the history of organised labour.