

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES is

A provocative film about one of the most vicious and protracted labour disputes in Australian history — one which saw the emergence of the New Right as a powerful force on the country's political landscape.

In February 1985, over one thousand electrical workers went on strike against the introduction of contractors into the South East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB). Queensland's Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen, reacted by calling a State of Emergency and sacking 1,002 workers. Soon after, he rushed through Parliament some of the harshest anti-union legislation ever seen in Australia. The film's director, Tom Zubrycki, spent many months following the major protagonists in these events. The resulting film is a chilling portrait of political intrigue with strong, colourful characters locked in a struggle where the stakes are the future of unionism itself.

The film is about strategy, tactics and backroom deals. Vince Lester, the National Party minister in charge of the dispute, takes us on a crusade of country fairs, schools, and debutante bails as he spreads the gospel of anti-unionism and free enterprise. Meanwhile, the union office is a radically different world. There, Bernie Neville, a determined rank and filer, fearlessly confronts his own union officials and the Queensland Trades and Labour Council. Nothing stands in his way, especially where he fears a sell-out round the corner.

The film is history as it happened. Its remarkable portrait of a watershed episode in Australian labour relations is seen from the perspective of ordinary workers and their families, whose story might otherwise have been unrecorded. Through their struggle against betrayals and oppression, the film achieves an importance that extends far beyond the details of the moment. Reverberations from the conflict continue to be felt in national politics, and will do so for years to come.