

VIGILANCE

maritime
workers
bulletin

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For rank & file control of the MUA - Nationalise the maritime industry under workers' control

Issue 39. November 3, 2008

DP World Botany EA 2008: Now it is crunch time

MUA members at DP World Port Botany are going to vote on their new Enterprise Agreement (EA). Members have to ask themselves not just what the new EA contains - but assess if it's the best deal we can get and if it meets our short and long-term needs.

The proposed EA

Some of the main points in the EA include pay rises of 5% a year (official inflation is currently 5%); back pay that will be backdated to July 1 (around \$1560 if you earn \$75,000 a year) as well as new Safety Facilitator and Operations Clerk positions.

Nasties include the loss of First Aid positions to contractors; the general maintenance roster going from 33.6 hours a week to 35.48 (with a maximum of five voluntary redundancies); the loss of Rail Co-ordinator jobs; the Consolidated Allowance for casuals frozen for two years and upgrades for workthroughs halved.

End the trade-odd mentality

Vigilance believes that we should not trade-off long-held jobs and conditions - whether it is for back pay and pay rises in line with inflation - or anything else.

Given that we are all but at the end of the EA process, the best we can do is to fight to defend every job and condition that is now on the chopping block.

We should be demanding no loss of first aid positions, no changes to maintenance rosters, no loss of rail co-ordinator jobs, full 5% a year rise for consolidated allowance, no change to current system for upgrades etc. while keeping the full pay rise and full back pay.

For a free, open and democratic meeting

Democracy is a union's lifeblood, but some seem to forget this fact. The situation where some members who ask questions and make comments are talked over the top of and ridiculed should not be tolerated.

Similarly with the EA vote, nothing short of an open and transparent vote should be tolerated (the voting procedure last time - with no count and not even a chance to vote no - was dubious to say the least).

This bulletin calls for a voting procedure that must include the nomination of four returning officers from the floor (two to count the yes vote, two for the no) and the call for a division within the room between yes and no voters to make an accurate count easier.

Vote NO and prepare to fight

Vigilance calls for a no vote on this EA. Trading away our conditions has to end. But a no vote without industrial action will get us nowhere. We will never get a better deal from the company without forcing their hand. Besides, our officials will wear us out with repeated votes for a similar EA until we give up.

A no vote has to be backed up with action. This meeting has to move and vote for resolutions

that empower the Branch and site committee to:

- 1) apply for a bargaining notice so that legal, protected industrial action can be taken;
- 2) devise a strategy of on the job action
- 3) call a special yard or membership meeting as soon as possible in order to put these plans into effect.

The question of leadership

It is becoming increasingly clear that our officials - despite their fine words - are not serious about fighting for a program that protects jobs and job security for all.

The only way to really turn things around is with a leadership that is based on a militant program (like the one on the last page). If the current crop of officials are not prepared to fight to defend our jobs and conditions, the rank and file will have to fight to replace them with leaders that are up to the task.



Don't give up our First Aid Post without a fight

Management at DP World Port Botany want to replace MUA labour in the First Aid Post with contractors. This is unacceptable. First Aid Posts operated by wharfies are a waterfront institution won through struggle and sacrifice - something we can never forget.

First Aid Posts were first won in Brisbane with a militant campaign led by Ted Englart. "Red Ted" was the Brisbane Branch Secretary of the Watersider Workers' Federation (WWF) for much of the 1940s and 50s and a well known Communist. First Aid Posts were soon won in other Australian ports.

So what was "Not in the union's name" again?

On Wednesday September 24 the MUA Sydney Branch issued a leaflet entitled "Not in the union's name". The leaflet dissociated the Branch and the DP World Port Botany site committee from an attempt by union members to get all casuals to make themselves unavailable ("scratch") for Friday September 26.

Once you strip away the rhetoric ("anarchist activity", "destructive", "gutless" etc.), the leaflet boils down to four points.

It's the EA, stupid

Some members are unhappy with the contents of new DP World EA and the lack of rank and file input into it. A fact that the author of the leaflet appears unable to understand.

The leaflet does not *once* mention *one single part* of the proposed EA. It doesn't take Einstein to figure that out this "vague idiocy about being unhappy" is actually about 1) the continued trade-off of conditions (two year freeze on the consolidated allowance, contracting out first aid etc); and 2) members being talked over the top of and ridiculed at meetings - instead of being listened to. Just because this was not spelled out on the "unsigned sheet" does not make this fact any less real.

When we take action . . .

The leaflet describes campaigns that don't involve the Branch or committee as "madness" and says "when we decide to take action . . . it will be done collectively and inclusively and the dangers will be analysed".

Sydney had a dispute over first aid in 1950. On January 3, wharfies walked off the job because no WWF first aid attendant had been picked up. By January 6 all of Sydney's wharf labour were involved in the dispute. Work resumed on January 10 when an agreement was made that ensured this work went to WWF labour.

Trading away our First Aid Posts not only makes a mockery of the struggles and sacrifices of the past.

It also sets the precedent for companies to eliminate other First Aid Posts at other ports in the future.

Isn't this the point? At no stage has *any* action been proposed by any of our elected officials. Given the huge volume of shipping lately, we have missed a golden opportunity to take action and win real gains.

It should be clear to all that our elected officials never planned to take action and would only do so if put under massive pressure from the rank and file.

"Insanity" or valid tactic?

The leaflet refers to the "insanity" of asking some and not others to "withdraw their labour". But tactics that minimise workforce losses and maximize the bosses' pain are entirely valid. Permanents cannot scratch - casuals can. Why not use this to our advantage?

"Gutless" unsigned sheet

Much is made of the fact that the sheet that argued for casuals to scratch was unsigned. But why would anyone put their name to such a sheet? Might as well hand yourself over to the boss bound and gagged.

Besides, what is "gutless" - not putting your name to a sheet that argues for taking action - or not taking action and trading-off our conditions?

Despite what some may think, the *en masse* scratching by casuals had a positive effect. It might not have changed much in the EA, but it has forced the MUA Branch and site committee to listen to the casual workforce and take their concerns more seriously. A small victory in itself.

Patrick Botany kept MUA first aid positions. Can't DP World do the same?



Maritime Workers' Journal July / August 2008, p. 14.

"The company wanted to contract first aid out".

"We're now trained in trauma".

"Some companies try bringing in private doctors and ambulances . . . we only agree to St John Ambulance".

"We've been under pressure since the 1998 dispute . . . Now they know we'll fight for it".

Barack Obama – change we can believe in?

Democratic nominee Barack Obama looks set to win the November 4 U.S. elections and become the country's first African American president - a truly historic milestone in a country built on slavery. Voters want an end to George W. Bush and his war in Iraq. But Obama is politically much closer to the Republicans than to the millions that will vote Democrat.

The majority of the US population have turned against Bush, his disastrous policies (Iraq), incompetence (Hurricane Katrina) and cronyism (Halliburton).

Big business backs Barack

It is not just voters that have turned against Bush. The corporate interests and wealthy elite that fund U.S. elections decided long ago to back the Democrats.

In 2007, Obama and Hilary Clinton raised just under \$200 million between them, compared to a total of \$126 million for the Republicans. In the month of January 2008, Obama pulled in \$32 million - or just under the amount McCain raised in all of 2007.

Big business knows it has little to fear from an Obama win.



Tell me who your friends are . . .

Corporate America will also be reassured by Obama's advisers. These include the U.S.'s richest man Warren Buffet and academic Jason Furman, known for his defense of Wal-Mart's anti-union policies.

Others include Bill Clinton's former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (responsible for U.S.-imposed sanctions against Iraq that killed half a million children) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (who armed and financed the Afghanistani mujahideen that gave rise to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda). Colin Powell, who promoted the first Iraq war, is also backing Obama.

Iraq – same as it ever was

Obama's strong point was his opposition to the Iraq war (he once spoke at an anti-war rally). But once in Congress, he has voted for almost every single bill to fund the Iraq occupation. Obama has refused point-blank to promise to have U.S. troops out of Iraq by 2013. He wants to keep at least 50,000 troops in Iraq to "fight terrorism" and send those who are withdrawn from Iraq to fight in Afghanistan.

He also stridently supports Israel's suppression of the Palestinian people as well as U.S. sabre-rattling against Iran, Cuba and Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez.

Change – maybe just a little bit

Behind Obama's calls for "change" lie policies not far removed from those of the Bush administration.

Obama has promised to rollback Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy, raise the minimum wage and invest in education - all positive, but not very far-reaching.

More telling though is his support for Bush's latest corporate handouts - \$700 billion for the buying up of Wall Street's bad debts and another \$250 billion to buy stakes in the biggest banks.

His job creation policies amount to a \$3,000 company tax break for each job created in 2009 and no increase in unemployment benefits.

Obama accepts the continued role of private insurance in the health system and rejects real moves towards publicly funded health care. The son of immigrants has even voted with the anti-immigrant right-

wing to build a 1100km U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Break with the Republicans AND Democrats

Barack Obama is the representative of a party that has always put corporate interests first. His record shows no sign that he would defy this history.

An Obama win will however raise the hopes of millions of Black workers. Those who have suffered the brunt of American capitalism and racism will have a sense of pride in his victory. But his administration will still see schools and hospitals remain underfunded and the gap between the rich and the working class poor remain essentially unchanged.

U.S. workers – black and white – need to turn their backs on the Democrats. US trade union donations to the Democrats (currently 93 percent of all union political donations) have to end.

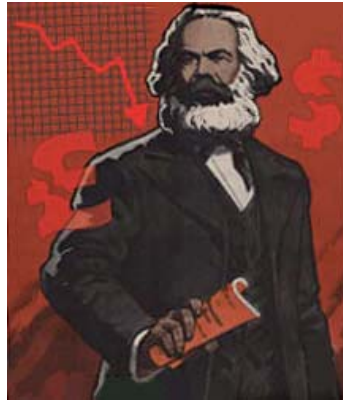
The only way forward is for U.S. workers to break all ties with the Democrats and work to build a fighting, independent labor party based on the trade unions.

Karl Marx warned us that this would happen

The current economic downturn is not just a terrible mistake caused by a few greedy bankers. Recessions are part and parcel of the capitalist system - something that Karl Marx understood long ago.

Under the capitalist system, the whip of competition forces companies to continually work to maximise profits. The only way they do this is by forcing workers to work longer and / or harder.

This constant drive to maximise profits leads to a "crisis of overproduction" - *too many* goods being produced for the market. Because these goods cannot be sold profitably, investment then falls, production is cut back and unemployment rises.



It is this tendency of capitalism to hit crises of overproduction that explains its boom and bust cycles. The best known downturn is the Great Depression of 1929-32 but there have also been more recent ones - 1974-5, 1980-2 and 1990.

These economic crises not only demonstrate capitalism's inherent instability and inability to provide all people with decent living standards. They also demonstrate that capitalism is ready to be replaced by a more efficient and humane system that does not waste human and material resources.

Karl Marx was right: if the working class wants to live, capitalism will have to die.

Vigilance Bulletin maritime action program

DEFEND OUR LIVING STANDARDS: No more trading-off of our conditions. Large wage rises to recover lost real wages. More annual and sick leave. Full wage indexation / cost of living allowance so that wages always keep pace with inflation.

DEFEND OUR JOBS: End casualisation - permanent jobs for all. Enshrine seniority. Improved rosters and shift penalty rates. Seven hour shift for eight hours pay - three hour no-work night curfew. A shorter work week with no loss in pay - and slide the hours down and the wages up to create jobs.

DEFEND OUR RIGHTS: Full right to stop work and strike over safety, conditions and in support of other workers. Militant defense of all picket lines. Common expiry dates for all maritime agreements. Nation-wide industry strikes to achieve our goals.

DEFEND OUR UNION: Strike action to defeat all anti-union laws. No court room, government or police involvement in union affairs.

BUILD SOLIDARITY: Oppose all strikebreaking. Honour all picket lines. No handling of scab cargo. Organise the unorganised and the unemployed.

FIGHT RACIAL & SEXUAL OPPRESSION: Discrimination and exploitation of migrants, women etc. allows bosses to pit worker against worker.

UNION CONTROL OF OUR JOBS: For industry employment and union hiring halls. Full job equalisation and rotation. Skilled job training for all.

RANK & FILE CONTROL OF THE UNION:

Annual election of all officials and delegates, with the right to recall and replace them. Officials to return to their old job for two months every year. Annual decision-making conferences. Re-establish job delegates' associations. Regular mass meetings and elected strike committees to control all disputes.

PEACE IS UNION BUSINESS: Black bans and strikes to demand US / Australian troops out of the Middle East and East Timor. Oppose military action against "rogue states" eg. Cuba, Venezuela, Iran.

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS SOLIDARITY: Support international strikes. Australian standards for all seafarers while in Australia. Full citizenship rights for refugees. Fight FOC shipping and multinational exploitation with a massive union aid program to build militant unions in the Asia-Pacific.

WORKERS' CONTROL OF INDUSTRY: End business secrecy - open up the company books to union inspection when bosses cry poor. Nationalise the maritime industry without compensation and place it under workers' control.

NO RELIANCE ON THE LABOR PARTY: No support to Labor's privatisation, real wage cuts and union busting. Oust the trade union bureaucracy. For a workers party based on the unions that fights for a workers government to seize major industry. For a planned economy to end poverty, racism & war.

The right of all members to express opinions in union matters is essential if our union is to be democratic. All contributions to Vigilance are welcome so long as they are in the interests of the working class.