

VIGILANCE

maritime
workers
bulletin

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

Issue 40, March 31, 2009

Why should WE pay for THEIR economic woes?

DP World Sydney plans to cash in on the current economic downturn with redundancies, roster tampering and four hour shifts for casuals. But why do we have to suffer in order to bolster *their* profits?

Crisis – or downturn?

The world is in the midst of a recession. In fact the International Monetary Fund (IMF) believes that the advanced economies (US, Europe, Japan etc.) are suffering their deepest recession since World War II.

But that is only half of the story. The latest IMF figures* have world economic output *increasing* by 0.5% in 2009 and rising by a further 3% in 2010. The advanced economies are expected to *contract* by an average 2% in 2009 and then grow by 1.1% in 2010. China - Australia's major trading partner - will grow by 6.7% in 2009 and 8% in 2010.

It is the US credit crunch and the collapse of Western financial markets that has dragged the rest of the world down. So yes - we are in a recession – but talk of an economic meltdown is greatly exaggerated.

DP World profits are still healthy

DP World's full year results for 2008** shows that the company is in good shape. Worldwide volumes rose by 8%; revenue increased by 20%; adjusted earnings rose by 22% to US \$1,340 million and company profits increased by 48% to US \$621 million.

Ports within DPW's Australia and Americas group saw similar results – throughput up 8%, revenue up 14% (which was “driven by solid volume growth in Australian terminals”) and earnings rose by 15%.

DPW's own outlook for 2009 suggests an average decline of 8% in volume across the group i.e. a return to 2007 volume levels. While this will vary between countries, it is hardly a crash in trade volumes.

Economic blackmail

The fall in shipping and the mostly empty yard are a real turnaround from the situation six months ago. But the figures above demonstrate that the economic downturn will most likely end by next year – and volumes will pick up sooner rather than later. Any fall in DP World profits will not last forever.

There is no doubt that DP World is using the current downturn to further undermine our conditions. The company is seeking to exploit our genuine concerns about job security in today's economic climate to ram through further cost savings.

The company made plenty of profit when there were crane chasers, when there were two breaks per shift and when MUA members were in the first aid post. DPW will make plenty of profit today. But for DP World – like any other company – too much is never enough.

Time to put our interests first!

It's about time we stopped trying to solve the company's profitability problems at our expense. We have to stop worrying about the problems of the management and start defending our own interests instead. Forget the company's cash flow problems – maritime workers have a cash flow problem as well!

It is unacceptable that maritime workers are made to pay for the economic downturn. All workers have the *right* to a full-time job, the *right* to a living wage and the *right* to a decent home. The only way to exercise our rights is to directly challenge the company's “right” to make a profit.

Open the company books to union inspection

DP World says that it cannot afford to keep operating without putting in place redundancies and other changes. Their “business secrecy” means that they are the only people that know the whole story.

How much profit does DP World Sydney really make?

What sort of salary and benefits does senior management “earn”?

How much are the shipping & trucking companies charged per container?

Opening the company's books to union inspection is the only way to answer these questions.

The company can say anything it likes to justify its actions. But, as these changes affect us, then surely we also have the right to know the whole story.

The MUA should oppose these redundancies, rosters changes, four hour shifts and refusal to upgrade supplementaries to GWE's.

The union should instead demand the opening of the company's books - all the books, all the files and all the information about the operation of the company as well as its suppliers, contractors and bankers.

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Armed with this knowledge, we can then push for solutions that benefit the whole workforce. A shorter work week with no loss in pay (eg. a 32 hour week) would create more permanent jobs and share the available work around.

For too long the bosses have been getting away with murder. Why? Because the strength of the Maritime Union has not been used to stop them. But as long as the company gets away with it, the blackmail will continue.

Oppose all DP World's attacks – no redundancies, no "temporary" roster changes, 4 hour shifts etc.

Demand that the company open its books to inspection by elected union committees.

* <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/update/01/index.htm>

** available at <http://www.dpworld.com>

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.

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