

# VIGILANCE

maritime  
workers  
bulletin

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

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## Fremantle wharfies fight retrenchments - and WIN!

Wharfies at DP World Fremantle have fought off the company's push to make the workforce pay for the current economic downturn. A 24-hour stoppage on May 18 and a two and a half week campaign to make the terminal the safest site in Australia have stopped planned compulsory redundancies.

DP World management played hardball for months. They wanted four retrenchments from among the 30-odd maintenance workers. The company also wanted to postpone upgrades that came out of last November's EBA (twelve wharfies to permanent and twelve to VSE). Delegates had agreed to the delay, but wanted a firm trigger mechanism to ensure the upgrades occurred when conditions improved.

On the issue of retrenchments a compromise position had been reached by MUA national official Jim Tannock and a majority of the local site committee: accept two voluntary redundancies and rearrange the maintenance roster to share a reduction in earnings to keep the other jobs. Management arrogantly rejected this compromise and pushed ahead with the compulsory retrenchments.

### Wharfies strike back

MUA members were fed up. A stopwork meeting was held on the evening shift of May 18. With solid support from the WA MUA officials, a resolution to take indefinite strike action and immediately walk off the job was voted unanimously. Wharfies on the night and following day shift had the situation explained to them and were urged to attend a mass meeting at 4pm the next day.

DP World scurried to the Industrial Commission and won a return to work order (a "section 496") in order to force the strikers back to work the next day.

At the mass meeting the next afternoon, a recommendation to go back to work and begin a campaign to make the Fremantle DP World terminal the safest site in Australia was accepted unanimously.

DP World accused the workforce of a "go-slow" and assigned a supervisor to document any evidence. But this amounted to nothing, as safety was improved.

All they found was a workforce diligently following every single safety rule to the letter (along with a regrettable reduction in container movements).

DP World management had another trick up its sleeve. MUA members later discovered a "secret file" that the company compiled – complete with photographs that management claim show delegates turning workmates back at the front gate!

After two and a half weeks of campaigning to make the terminal the safest site in Australia, management decided to come back to the negotiating table.

### Management back down

DP World finally agreed to accept terms that were little different from those previously put forward in negotiations.

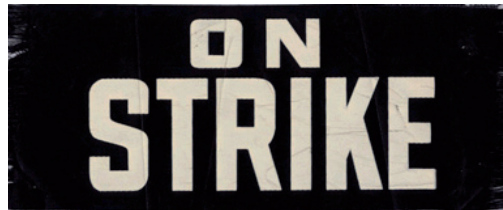
These include: no forced redundancies (with a reduction in maintenance roster hours and pay to keep the two jobs that would have been lost); four new permanent and four VSE jobs to

replace those who had previously retired; an agreed trigger mechanism based on container volumes for backfilling the postponed EBA upgrades; all supplementaries who have qualified to go to GWE to do so; and all disciplinary letters arising from the 24-hour stoppage to be set aside.

The action taken in Fremantle shows that maritime workers do not have to succumb to economic blackmail. We did not create this economic downturn – and we should not be made to pay for it.

The fight in Fremantle was a defensive struggle which was forced to compromise. But it shows that we CAN take on the bosses and win. It once again proves the truth in the slogan of the militant Builders Labourers' Federation: "If you don't fight – you lose!"

*STOP PRESS: DP World looked set to target two Fremantle delegates. Disciplinary letters alleging breaches of the DP World Code of Conduct were sent to the "ringleaders". However management decided that taking on delegates who were acting on behalf of members could provoke a showdown with the WA MUA. DP World decided to take no further action against the two delegates.*



# The State: neutral umpire or defender of the rich?

Justice is blind, police fight crime and the army defends the nation. Or so we are told. But in reality the legal system, the police and the armed forces are not “neutral umpires” – they are institutions of the state that serve and defend the interests and property of the capitalist ruling class.

Just look at the role of police and the army during strikes. Police arrest picketing unionists and break picket lines. Troops work as scabs in order to break strikes. But when has a boss ever been arrested for sacking workers and closing factories?

Some would argue that these workers “broke the law” and endangered “public order”. But this only confirms that the law is not neutral – it protects capitalist property and profits.



If further proof was needed, just look at who is appointed to head these institutions. High court judges, the generals and admirals of the armed forces, police commissioners and top civil servants are primarily drawn from the ruling class.

The state does not rule through force alone. It carries out other functions (eg. welfare and healthcare) that maintain social harmony and help conceal the state’s repressive nature.

Frederick Engels was right when he said that the state was essentially a “body of armed men”. While society is divided into classes, the ruling class will need a repressive state in order to maintain its domination.

*[This is part of an ongoing series of articles that explain the ideas of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Vladimir Lenin & Leon Trotsky].*

## 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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