

VIGILANCE

maritime
workers
bulletin

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

Issue 43, September 30, 2009

MUA officials reshuffled - and not an election in sight

The retirement of national officials Jim Tannock and Rick Newlyn has led to a reshuffle within the MUA hierarchy. These moves occurred two years into the officials' four-year term, yet no elections took place.

These changes see Assistant National Secretary Mick Doleman moving to Deputy National Secretary and Sydney Branch Secretary Warren Smith and WA Assistant Branch Secretary Ian Bray filling the two Assistant National Secretary positions. WA Branch Organiser Will Tracey moves into the WA Assistant Branch Secretary position, Sydney Assistant Branch Secretary Paul McAleer becomes the Sydney Branch Secretary and seafarer Joe Deakin is now a Sydney Assistant Branch Secretary.

So why were there no union elections? The answer is MUA Rule 42 that covers casual vacancies. Appointing officials almost two years out from the June 2011 elections is fully in line with current MUA rules. Whether it helps the MUA and its democratic pretensions is another matter.



Rick Newlyn and Jim Tannock

Rule 42 lets the MUA hierarchy promote like-minded officials and gives appointees the benefit of being a serving official when election time comes around.

Ian Bray from the militant WA Branch is something of an exception to this process. Given his intention to run for a national position in two years time, and the size of the WA Branch (around a third of all MUA members), his appointment is a concession to a likely 2011 victory.

The continued alliance of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) with the "left-wing" MUA bureaucracy sees the party rewarded with an Assistant National Secretary position (Warren Smith) while retaining both the Sydney Branch Secretary spot (Paul McAleer) and one Sydney Assistant Branch Secretary position (Joe Deakin).

The CPA's *Maritime Industry Program* (2001) states that "the lack of involvement of rank and file workers in the affairs of unions is becoming more widespread". This will continue while officials are reshuffled and appointed - instead of facing rank and file election.

Urine tests for drugs & alcohol: time to piss 'em off

In what the CFMEU Mining & Energy Division calls a "breakthrough", the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) has ruled against the plans of Shell Refining to use urine tests for its random drug testing, and ruled in favour of oral fluid (saliva swab) tests. The MUA should use this precedent to remove invasive urine drug testing from the maritime industry.

The AIRC ruled that urine drug tests are "not only a violation of privacy but [are] also not as accurate in detecting possible employee impairment in the workplace". This is because oral fluid tests only detect recent use (making them less likely to detect drug use in an employee's own time), while urine tests can detect drug use from days before. The AIRC concluded that a positive oral test is far more likely to indicate actual impairment than a positive urine test. It also regarded drug use during non-work hours as "something which was not the employer's business".

Not only are urine drug tests unnecessary. Any form of random drug testing is unnecessary. A British study in 2004 has found no strong link between drug use and accidents in safety-critical areas. Lack of sleep and excessive workloads were found to be far more likely to lead to accidents than drug use.

The Maritime Union should prioritise a campaign to replace urine testing with oral swab testing and bring an end to all random drug testing in the maritime industry. Fremantle DP World have since 2006 used swab and breath tests as part of their incident-based testing policy, and only use a urine test once a positive result is returned from either of the first tests. While not perfect, the policy at Fremantle DP World is a foundation for the MUA to build on.

[Information from Common Cause (CFMEU Mining & Energy), June / July 2009 and "Drug test ruling gives workers greater privacy", Sydney Morning Herald, May 25, 2009.]

Ideology: the 'velvet glove' of the ruling class

Capitalism cannot rely solely on the iron fist of army and police repression. It also requires the velvet glove of ideology – the system of ideas used to convince us that capitalist rule is natural, inevitable and just.

The exploitation of workers by a wealthy capitalist class is hidden behind phrases like “freedom”, “democracy” and “the national interest”. It is all a sham. We have the “freedom” to own a corporation or TV station, but most of us could never hope to exercise this right. “Democracy” allows us to vote for unaccountable politicians who have no control over the rich or the economy. The term “national interest” is used to con us into tightening our belts with wage and budget cuts that boost corporate profits.

IN THE RED CORNER



In Defence of Marxism

This ideology is produced by institutions with a vested interest in upholding the status quo. The school system teaches us to obey authority. Religion tells the lower classes to accept their fate. The mass

media constantly promote capitalist ideology and attack unions (no surprise given that billionaires Packer and Murdoch own most of it). Part of the media's distortion during the 1998 Patrick dispute was its attack on wharfies' “inflated earnings” - while ignoring Corrigan's \$480,000 a year salary.

The dominant ideology is the ideology of the dominant class - an idea as true today as it was when Marx first stated it 160 years ago.

[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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