

# Appeal to Reason

Number 2. October 2011. <http://bob2011mua.wordpress.com>

## Patrick blames the workers

As an employee at Patrick Port Botany and a union delegate, I would like it known that this company has treated its employees with absolute contempt for too long.

It's now high noon and the days of Patrick masquerading as "the good Corporate Citizen" are well and truly over.

In regard to safety, Patrick has systematically and deliberately ignored the maintenance of heavy machinery and equipment — cranes, straddle carriers, and most importantly the surface area of the terminal.

We are operating machinery that is obsolete and of yesteryear. We are expected to deliver "world's best productivity" while the Company refuses to invest in modernising for technological advantage the existing infrastructure and further skilling of its workforce. Such investment translates into achieving greater productivity outcomes — unfortunately the management at Patrick are in a mode of thought reminiscent of a 1930s industrial relations regime. It's no wonder productivity has slumped.

The machines we are required to operate burn as much oil they leak, with some machines having done in excess of 40,000 operational hours without having seen a spanner, let alone a tube of grease.

In regard to training, Patrick have concurrently failed to ensure a revision of "container top safety" and other essential safety training programs and have failed to provide rostering systems that incorporate the effective management of fatigue for the shiftworkers employed within the enterprise. It's no wonder we have one of the highest fatality rates of all blue collar industries and that the injury and incident rate at Patrick is now being scrutinised by a Federal Government agency.

Then of course one would only need assess the derelict and decrepit "temporary" buildings that workers have been forced to congregate in, like penal prisoners of Guantanamo Bay, for the last seven years. Buildings so run down that not only do they affect the morale of the workforce, but with a bit of rain they become an electrical hazard to such an extent that lighting and electrical systems short out.

But of course according to Patrick Management none of this has anything to do with productivity, and it is far too convenient to just blame the workers.

Sean Ambrose

## Second Registry

The Australian Second Registry for ships will deliver very few, if any jobs to MUA members.

Under proposed legislation the shipowner will be obliged only to employ an Australian master and chief engineer. The ratings will no doubt be sourced from the Philippines. They will be covered under an ITF/MUA agreement which will provide the ratings



employed with between 1200-1500 US dollars per month, with leave of two or maybe three months per year.

So, comrades, our hierarchy should be honest with the rank and file and tell the truth instead of using the smokes and mirrors bullshit they have been up to for months.

If shipping "reform" legislation creates an environment where Australian-flagged coastal shipping is given priority under law and there is guaranteed investment in the industry, then it is a step forward from the armageddon we have at the moment.

Stay strong, comrades, keep up the good fight, and keep questioning the hierarchy of our union. For a genuine democratic fighting union!

## No room for Craig Thomson

Over the last few months, we have watched the disgraceful actions of the MHR for Dobell, Craig Thomson, unfold before us.

Before Thomson was an MHR, he was the national secretary of the Health Services Union. This union represents health care workers in some states, most of them earning on average about \$20 per hour. Thomson, as the national secretary, was paid an annual salary of \$157,000, around four times what his average member earned.

The \$157,000 wasn't enough for Mr Thomson. Like a poor imitation of Gordon Gecko, he threw union funds around with gay abandon. There was no such thing as the global financial crisis for Mr Thomson, and there were certainly no worries about getting up in the middle of the night to work as many of his members did.

Thomson was in his element as a big-noting union official. Lavish lunches and dinners. Only the best of wines.

As far as we are concerned at "Appeal to Reason", it's a pity he didn't choke on them! The organised working class would not have mourned his departure.

The Russian revolutionary leader Lenin summed up the likes of Thomson when he described a section of social-democratic trade-union leaders as being inveterate traitors to the working class, and in fact the social mainstay of the capitalist system.

Prime minister Gillard's defence of Thomson has been based on legal technicalities — and the fact that, should Gillard cast Thomson adrift, in all likelihood an election will need to be called.

What Gillard may not realise is that the likes of Thomson will make Labor utterly unelectable. For many on the sidelines of the union movement, Thomson's antics confirm every doubt they have about joining a union or voting Labor.

The "Appeal to Reason" calls on the ACTU leadership to condemn the actions of Thomson from a

fundamental position of moral leadership. Unionism and its leadership has nothing if it does not have moral authority.

Being a union leader is not about stumbling half-pissed out of the Hilton. It is about fearlessly defending the rights of those in society who have less.

In recent decades there has been a collapse of union density in Australia. Only about five of every hundred new jobs in the economy is being unionised.

We can argue about the new economy. We can argue about anti-union laws. We can argue about the effects of the age of consumerism on why union density has collapsed and unions in many areas have become non-existent or marginalised.

What there should be no argument about is that rank and file workers deserve much better from the leadership of many unions than what they are receiving.

Until the ACTU Executive and its affiliates heed this call, unionism will continue to decline.

Bob Carnegie

## **Egyptian waterside workers defeat DP World**

From a Cairo newspaper, 26 September: "Four thousand workers at Ain Sokhna port (Egypt's only privately-owned seaport) struck on 21 September against Dubai-based owner DP, and after four days won a near complete victory." That was one of a wave of workers' struggles in Egypt in late September.

## **Don't let offshore be converted to non-union labour**

I thank our officials and comrades on the Highland Navigator that have brought to the attention to all Australia the union-busting practices which unfortunately in this day and age are becoming more and more common.

We must continually raise our voices not only on the job, but to organise and rally publicly, to let the everyday Australian know that the companies and their cohorts, the governments of the day, Liberal, Labour, or whatever persuasion they may be — whatever they conspire to do, our standard of living and the conditions that our forefathers fought for, and we continue to fight for, will never be given up without a fight

Having just watched the documentary Inside Job, about the Global Financial Crisis, I strongly recommend the viewing by all. It shows in the most simple way how the big banks, the multinationals, and the governments they corrupt, continually bend the worker over while they make even bigger profits.

Vin Francis

## **Workers block scab trains**

Waterside workers in the USA have taken militant unofficial action in a battle with port operator EGT Development over union busting.

The company recently opened a \$200 million grain terminal in Longview, Washington, which it sought to run with non-union labour despite a contractual requirement to do so. Following initial protests by the

International Longshore Workers' Union (ILWU), EGT signed a recognition agreement with a different union. Every other West Coast grain terminal is staffed by ILWU members, making EGT's actions a direct attack on the union which ILWU activists say is merely a precursor to EGT going non-union altogether.

On Thursday 8 September, workers stormed the Longview terminal and sabotaged the transport of scab grain supplies, leading to a violent confrontation with police who used clubs and pepper spray on the workers and made 19 arrests.

The battle has been ongoing since July and has seen workers at several ports take wildcat action, including sit-downs on railroad tracks to block scab trains. No scab grain has moved since July and ILWU members have continued to protest despite a court restraining order intended to keep them away from Longview.

They were bolstered by flying pickets from Seattle, who walked off their jobs to travel to Longview in order to support the action.

## **Automation**

DP World has decided to automate its Brisbane container terminal as a test run for automating other terminals across the country.

Ports worldwide are on the brink of a new technological revolution, replacing old equipment which often has been in place since the previous technological revolution with containerisation in the 1960s and 70s.

Automated terminals are already in operation in some other ports. In Rotterdam, the Euromax Terminal opened in June 2010, with a capacity of five million TEU [twenty-foot-equivalent units] handled by a workforce of 900 spread over 84 hectares. The busiest port in Australia at present is Melbourne, handling about two million TEU. The Port of Brisbane does about one million TEU per year.

In Brisbane, DP World plans for automation to bring a 65% cut in the workforce within 18 months. In negotiations currently under way for a three-year Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, the union's response is to ask for better redundancy deal (four weeks' pay for every year of service).

A confident and militant union would respond differently. It would demand that the benefits of automation not be monopolised by the bosses, at the expense of the workers. It would demand a shorter working week, longer leave, better work conditions, and a comprehensive deal on automation across Australia.

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