

In Support of Ships Rolling Funds And What They Stand For

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Rolling funds, over four decades, have provided the most successful industrial, political and economical involvement of the rank-and-file in the many campaigns and issues confronting the union.

Every person in the industry today, no matter what area, owes their very job to the struggle of the union and the financial and active role played through the rolling funds with the involvement of rank-and-file members of the union.

Today, that struggle continues with the Industrial Assistance Commission reports, pickets, legal proceedings and writs.

Questioned

Recently, we have had some comrades who have questioned paying into ships' rolling funds. Ever since the inception of rolling funds we have had members, from time to time, reluctant to pay and, I suppose, in recent times it is easier to understand because of the amalgamation of the maritime unions.

Some of the members who have amalgamated with us may not be familiar with rolling funds and for what purposes they are used. In the past, once the purpose of the funds were explained to the members concerned they have been quick to support them.

History

To explain rolling funds fully, it is necessary to go back to when they were formed. During 1948 the union and its members formulated a "policy of peace" which was passed unanimously at the annual general meeting in Sydney March 1949 (page 4 *Seamen's Journal* February 1950) and approved by seamen in the April Stop Work Meetings at Brisbane, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Port Adelaide and Fremantle.

Later, we formed a policy not to carry arms and ammunition to future wars and decided that we would support the peace movements that were beginning to emerge and organise in Australia.

There was also, at that time, a campaign to improve our living and working conditions in the industry. Towards this end a Peace and Progress fund was set up in the union and members were asked to contribute.

To finance these movements and defeat the then Menzies Liberal and Country Party Government at the coming election, a 10/- was struck. While 10/- (\$1 in today's money) doesn't sound much now, the wages at that time were only about 7 pounds (\$14) a week.

The majority of members supported the policies and direction the union was taking and immediately set up rolling funds on all ships which were voluntarily donated to each pay day by the crew.

Industrial Struggle

At that time the Australian working class, including ourselves, were under heavy attack by the then Menzies Government and there was quite a lot of industrial unrest. Consequently, many trade union strikers sought finance to help continue their struggle.

Whereas there used to be tarpaulin musters onboard ships with no check on how much money was given in support of causes, we now had our rolling funds with all donations going to different campaigns and struggles ashore – being paid through the branches of the union and we had a proper check on all amounts that were paid out.

Our members are always generous and

quick to help our brothers in struggles ashore, and if we were to add up how much was given I am sure it would be quite substantial. Let us hope that all the people we have given to do not forget, if and when we call for assistance.

I do not remember why they were called rolling funds but I think it was because, at that time, we had a number of rolling campaigns going.

The campaigns that were mostly funded were highly successful and the results show in the standards of accommodation, working conditions and the maintaining of jobs today.

I must digress here to explain union dues, before I proceed to develop the question of rolling funds. Union dues are paid at regular intervals, to support the union structure. Our dues are linked to wage rises and are set at 1.2% of our wages with an average being struck.

Union Funds – Administration

As I said before, the dues support the union structure, employ officials and staff, buy or rent buildings to operate from and set up the necessary infrastructure.

The officials are elected every 3 years by the members and are paid to advance the interests of our union members and to give them any protection or support that they may require during their term in office.

The costs then and now of running the union uses almost all the dues paid. In larger unions with scores of thousands of members there is generally enough money to promote campaigns. In our union of over 5,000 members there is very little money for campaigns or political donations from the general funds.

Rolling Fund

The members of our union, to their credit, recognised and understood that if the union and its members were to progress we would have to find extra finance. Campaigns do not run on thin air and must be funded to reach fruition.

Let's go back through some of our campaigns financed partly by rolling funds. Firstly, let me say that following up our policies of peace, first raised in 1948, Seamen's Union of Australia members have been vigorous supporters of peace and the peace committees in Australia both physically and financially and have seen tremendous achievements in this area.

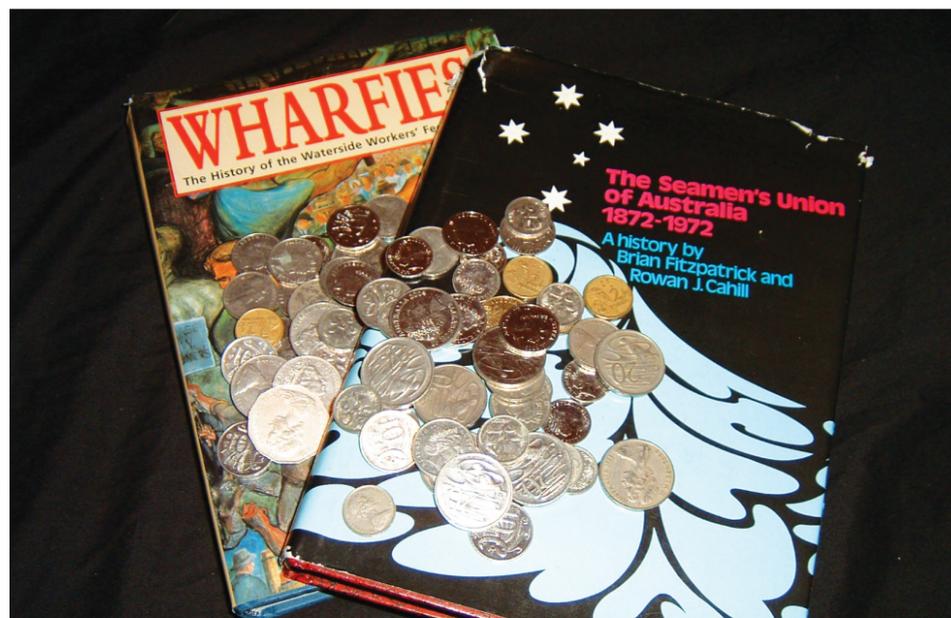
Campaigns

I think it would be fair to say that the Australian Peace Committee could not have achieved what they have had it not been for donations from SUA rolling funds. It would also be fair to say that if there is no peace in the world we can forget about any campaign we may wish to promote.

The coastal tanker campaign, while highly successful, took ten years. All leaflets, advertising etc., came from ships rolling funds. The benefits arising out of the SUA members manning coastal tankers were enormous.

Other financed campaigns include the Ampol and the overseas tanker campaign, support for the Australian National Line, the aggregate wage and both the overseas and expand Australian shipping campaign, still going after six years.

The original COM/Representatives and Conventions held about every three years have in the past – excluding the last two – had delegates financed by rolling funds. The



enlarged COM is where the way forward in our union is discussed.

Rolling funds have been set up in all ships and also in the Maritime Services Board departments, where our members operate, at Goat Island, Botany Bay, Watsons Bay, Newcastle and Port Kembla and the finances from these areas have assisted our members campaigns in the MSB.

The rolling funds have not only been used for campaigns but have financed many causes and emergencies. They have been used in numerous family crisis for transport, sickness, injury etc. and assistance to members unable to rejoin his ship through injury and sickness.

Deputations

Deputations to Canberra and other places, involving rank and file members in support of union programs, have been financed by rolling funds.

Right now, rolling funds are financing teams of seamen to go out into the country areas around Australia to explain to people, and the country media, why Australia must have a greater shipping fleet and a larger share than the current 4 per cent of our international trade carried by Australian ships.

Members' Awareness

The comrades involved in visiting the country areas do so in their own time. They receive expenses that pay for a bed, fuel and sometimes, maybe a meal a day.

in elections running back to the fifties. While there is some criticism of the Labor Party, they have at least supported the SUA in expanding Australian shipping, retention of ANL and cabotage on the coast. That in itself is value for the money we have put in to re-elect them. Had there been a Liberal / National Party in power, we would, in my opinion, be fighting flag of convenience vessels in the coastal trade.

Any member who refuses to donate to the rolling fund which is democratically set up and properly run by the members is obviously only thinking of himself and not of the union or its members as a whole.

Donations

Most donations to rolling funds are relatively small. Some funds of latter years are funded by ships' bars and members only put in a token amount. The last rolling fund I paid into was \$3 per week. This is no great burden to members in our industry. What will \$3 buy – a middle and schooner of beer, 3 units on a "nag" on Saturday or a cheap carafe of wine at a dinner. Many of our members would blow 6 months of \$3 per week in an evening.

So, is it not a small price to pay, if the money is being used to promote the betterment of the membership or to help one of our members who is sick or in trouble?

In conclusion, if it was not for those conscientious members, who have paid into rolling funds since their foundation to assist

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Members conscious of the need to lift or expand Australian shipping campaign have come from the Blue Mountains, Port Kembla and the south coast, the central coast, the Sydney metropolitan area and on odd occasions from Newcastle – at their own expense – to stand with their comrades on the picket line outside Columbus line offices in George St, Sydney.

Members have used the rolling funds to help support, elect or re-elect the Labor Party

or help promote campaigns, the present SUA members would probably not have the conditions and living standard that they enjoy today.

Rolling funds gave our officials and members the necessary finance to carry our campaigns to successful conclusions and in doing so lifted the SUA to the position of No.1 seagoing union in the world today; and recognised as such. I shall leave the reluctant donors to think it over. ↘