



# QUEENSLAND BRANCH NEWS

NEWSLETTER of the QLD Branch of the MARITIME UNION of AUSTRALIA

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## International solidarity for the Hutchison workers

JORDI ARAGUNDE of the International Dockworkers' Council has written from Barcelona: "In a few hours we will prepare a letter to all the IDC affiliates warning the situation and prepare for the future actions of solidarity. We are on the same ocean and we must fight together. Hasta la victoria!"

We also have a letter of solidarity from Bob McEllrath, president of the US West Coast port workers' union ILWU.

The five leading officials from the ILWU Canada have written to the MUA expressing their "strong support for the members of the Maritime Union of Australia and their families after this brutal attack by Hutchison Ports Australia".

### "Shoulder to shoulder"

PETER SIMPSON, state secretary of the ETU, came to support and speak at the community assembly at the Hutchison terminal on 8 August.

He recalled the 1998 Patricks dispute, when, he said, he had learned a lot of what he knows about trade unionism. Today, he said, "we're here with you, comrades, shoulder to shoulder. Our members have seen workforce downsizing first hand, and they will support this dispute".

He wants to see more support from the Federal Labor Party for our dispute. "Federal Labor has got to get back to its roots. The state government also can assist by ensuring that the police aren't made Hutchisons industrial police, as the then Conservative government did in 1998.

"It's up to all in the movement, Unions, the ALP etc to now ensure that the message gets out to the community about what Hutchison have done. The community won't think it's right for people to be sacked by email at 11:30pm the evening before".

There should be laws stopping such behaviour by employers. But, Peter Simpson said, "a hundred years of industrial precedents were abolished with Work Choices, and, as has

### Join the community assemblies! Show solidarity!

Brisbane: Curlew Street, Berth 11 Fisherman Island.

Sydney: Gate B150 Sirius Rd, Port Botany (access via Foreshore Rd)

The assemblies will run 24/7, so come any time. Support will be especially vital at night and in the early mornings.

happened so often when conservative governments roll back workers' rights, they're never returned, a situation we need to hold Labor to account for should they win the next Federal election. It's also up to us as union leaders to ensure that does occur".

AMWU state secretary Rohan Webb spoke, and said he would be "hitting the phones that afternoon" to get AMWU members along to support the community assembly. Finance Sector Union official Simone Gilmore also joined us.

### From Auckland to Australia

A NUMBER OF wharfies came to work for Hutchison in Australia from the Port of Auckland. Most of them have now been sacked.

The first difference one of them noticed between the dispute here and the battles they had in Auckland was that in Auckland the union told the members that they couldn't stop the trucks coming into the terminal when they were in dispute, because that would cause trouble with the law. They tried handing out pamphlets, but often got the response "we're owner-drivers, and we don't care". One wharfie describes himself as "amazed" at how the community assembly peacefully turned back the trucks on 7 August. It is a good sign for the success of this dispute.

The Port of Auckland is owned by the city council through a council-controlled investment company. The mayor of Auckland is an ex-Labour "independent". The port

authority has been helped by NZ's National Party government and by the media, and not impeded by the city council, in its union-busting activities.

"It got bad about 2011", said one wharfie, "when they started to try to get rid of our conditions. The port authority had not renewed our CEA [like EBA] for two or three years. They wanted 12 hour shifts, on-call working, payment for as low as four hours if work is slow, within a frame of 160 hours over each four weeks, and three workers for two cranes instead of two drivers and a foreman for each crane. The new CEO, who came in 2012 from Maersk, had previously worked as an accountant for Hutchison boss Li Ka-Shing. Their basic aim was to get rid of the union.

"We struck for six weeks in 2012. Without support from the MUA and the ILWU, and other unions in NZ, we could not have held out so long. The port authority recruited non-union labour during the dispute, set up a company union, and turned individual members by offering higher pay.

"Through a court ruling the port authority had to reinstate us on our previous CEA. But then the port had two workforces side-by-side, the union workers and the scabs, on different conditions. The bosses waged a war of attrition to get rid of delegates and unionists. They had installed cameras round the wharf and in the crane cabins. A lot of people were victimised, one by one.

"There are still union members there, and the union negotiated a new CEA last year, but on the basis of accepting the 160 hours/ 4 weeks framework.

"Eventually we were fed up of being undermined, and some of us came to Australia to get jobs with Hutchison. We will fight for our conditions here: we know the costs of losing".

## **From the northern ports**

DEPUTY BRANCH SECRETARY Jason Miners reports on the recent tour of northern ports by himself and branch secretary Bob Carnegie.

We started in Gladstone on Monday 3 August. We visited Patricks and the tugs, and a well-attended Gladstone monthly members' meeting. The meeting strongly welcome the energy of the new branch leadership and its commitment to regional ports.

Members raised concerns about the Gladstone-Weipa bauxite run. We said the union would campaign to get more tonnage for union labour on that run, with branch secretary Bob Carnegie supported by the branch executive to take on Rio Tinto.

From Gladstone we went to Mackay Hay Point, where we met with towage members from TK, Dal Tug, and Smit. Bob thanked some of the long-standing delegates there, especially Laurie Horgan and Skinny Paskins, for their work. The members' main concern was what the branch will do to secure jobs for union labour in the new towage contracts. Tenders are to be submitted in October to BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance, which runs the coal terminal.

In Bowen we met with towage members working for Svitzer, who were pleased about the new commitment from the branch leadership and the change which will give them representation on the branch committee.

In Townsville we met with towage members working for Smit, and with wharfies working for NSS. Warren Smith, MUA assistant national secretary and the official nationally responsible for NSS, came along too. Bob Carnegie and Jason Miners committed to union effort to negotiate the stevedoring agreements in Townsville and to a significant increase in on-the-ground visits to help build up union organisation and restore confidence.

In Cairns Jason met with seafarers, tug workers, and inshore workers at a general meeting (Bob had to return to Brisbane urgently when the Hutchison dispute erupted). A robust debate about the proposed new state-wide union structure for tug workers with it being endorsed. Cairns members are also concerned about the unemployment rate of over 8% in their region (it is 4-5% in Brisbane).

## **"A total lack of respect"**

ROS MCLENNAN, the new general secretary of the Queensland Council of Unions, was at our community assembly at the Hutchison terminal, Fisherman Island, on 8 August to support us. She said that Hutchison had "shown a total lack of respect" and she was "proud to be with us".

Also there to support us were state Labor MPs Shane King (also an ETU activist) and Nikki Boyd, and Mark Bailey, state minister for Main Roads, Road Safety, Ports, Energy, and Water Supply.

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