



MEDIA RELEASE: Monday 8 July, 2019

National waterfront stoppages as DP World attacks wharfies conditions

Wharfies will strike for 48 hours at DP World's Fremantle, Brisbane, and Sydney container terminals, and for 96 hours in Melbourne, to fight against automation, outsourcing, cuts to income protection insurance, and dishonest bargaining by the company which is trying to use change provisions in existing agreements to secure outcomes it cannot bargain into new agreements.

The two day strike is part of a series of 48 to 96 hour work stoppages planned for container terminals in Fremantle, Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne run by Australia's largest stevedore. Fremantle workers will strike this Thursday and Friday.

Workers have also imposed a range of indefinite work bans, including bans on upgrades, overtime, and shift extensions. DPW challenged the rights of the Maritime Union of Australia to use bans in the Fair Work Commission, with a decision pending on Monday.

This restriction on utilising the legally protected bans has forced workers into strike action as their legal rights to use the bans was effectively removed by the company and FWC.

The industrial action follows the expiry of a three month cease-fire agreement between DPW and the MUA, which saw the company press ahead with a savage agenda of job cuts and attacks on rights and conditions. Income protection for workers remains as a target of the company.

The strikes will proceed after their protected status was confirmed by the FWC on Friday, when the company sought 418 orders to stop workers using strike action. Fair Work Commissioner Paula Spencer dismissed DPW's application and reaffirmed the legal and protected nature of the strikes, stating that they could continue.

MUA West Coast Deputy Secretary Adrian Evans said DPW management were also insisting on including provisions in a new workplace agreement that could see waterfront jobs lost to outsourcing and automation.

"Our members have shown incredible patience in an attempt to reach resolution with DP World, including by agreeing to hold off on any form of industrial action for three months, but despite that good will management are refusing to budge on these key issues," Mr Evans said.

"This major escalation of industrial action is about sending a clear message to management that the safety, dignity, and job security of wharfies are absolutely non-negotiable.

"We are fully committed to reaching an agreement as quickly as possible, however we will not sell our conditions, compromise our core claims, or undermine industry standards to do it.

"Our members have delivered huge increases in productivity to DP World in recent years, which resulted in substantial profits, and all workers want is to receive a fair reward for those efforts."

MUA Assistant National Secretary Warren Smith said the company had unnecessarily escalated the conflict earlier this year when it unilaterally stripped workers of income protection insurance.

"Management initially used the wellbeing of workers and their families as a bargaining tool, and wharfies don't take kindly to that kind of corporate bullying and intimidation," Mr Smith said.

“The attacks on wharfies have been escalated by DPW beyond income protection, with outsourcing, automation and downright dishonest bargaining processes by DPW being targeted by workers.

“We will not roll over and accept an unfair agreement, we won’t accept unilateral attacks on workplace rights and conditions, and we won’t stand by while outsourcing and automation are used to axe quality jobs from the Australian waterfront.

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