

Australian picket line supporter calls for all-out action

“Why do the unions keep talking about more productivity?”

Terry Cook
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Despite the fact that the trade unions have blocked all calls for strike action to back the sacked Australian waterside workers, thousands of workers, housewives and youth have joined picket lines in the major ports.

In many cases, they have come with a bitter distrust of the union leadership. Among those at Sydney's Port Botany terminal was a retired bakery worker Jean Louis Stuurop, whose father was a Dutch waterfront worker.

Stuurop spoke to us after reading the Socialist Equality Party leaflet, “The Waterfront War: Why is Only One Side Fighting?”

“I agree with what you raise in the leaflet. I have been thinking exactly the same things. Patrick's and the government are getting away with murder and I blame this solely on the unions.

“I did not come here for the leadership of the MUA or the ACTU. I have come down to show solidarity with the workers who have been sacked. These are ordinary working class people who are being attacked and everyone should be out supporting them.

“The unions could put a stop to this nonsense in no time if they chose to. They could bring the whole country to a standstill if they wanted to. Instead, they are doing absolutely nothing. The oil workers union was supposed to come out. Why were they stopped from doing this? Why is it being left up to individuals to act?

“When I see [ACTU President] Jennie George speaking on TV, saying the ACTU is right behind the workers, it makes my blood boil. I ask: ‘How is that possible, when the ACTU puts a stop to other workers taking strike action?’ I can honestly say there is not a single union leader in this country that I look up to or admire.

“Why do the unions keep talking about more productivity? My father was a wharfie on the waterfront in Holland. After the war the waterfront was closed down and workers were thrown out of work for six months. The government there went on with the same rubbish that Howard and Reith are going on with now—wharfies don't work, they are bludgers. How do the ships get loaded and unloaded and things get done, if it is not for the workers? It's not done by employers and bludging politicians!”

Asked why he thought the unions were acting to undermine the struggle, Stuurop said: “I believe the trade union leaders have made themselves a comfortable place in this system and are doing very well for themselves. They have made all kinds of arrangements with the employers and they do not want anything to happen that might disturb this.”

Stuurop, like many workers, has been thinking over the experiences of recent years. “This whole thing did not begin yesterday or even when the Liberals came in. It's been going on for the past 15 years. The unions were giving up workers' conditions and jobs under the Labor government to satisfy the employers.

“I worked as a baker and I think about the bakers' union and what it did. We fought to get conditions, decent working hours and pay. But the union did deals with the employers to screw all this up. Now bakers work all hours, right around the clock, without proper penalty rates, seven days a week. It's the same in every industry.

“The unions have told us that we have to go along with modern ideas; that we should work to be more productive. But all this means is that workers must give up everything to increase profits for the shareholders.”

Referring to the recently published book, *Civilising Global Capitalism*, written by Labor frontbencher Mark Latham, Stuurop said: “They talk about new global capital and civilising it. But the employers still want the same old things they demanded 50 and 100 years ago. They want to take away from workers their rights to defend themselves or to fight for decent conditions.

“Now there are another 2,000 more men out of a job. How are they going to find work and feed their families when we have mass unemployment and the unions have helped to create it?”

Stuurop said he had been critical of the role of the unions before coming to Australia. “When I was a young man in Holland I refused to go into the army to be sent to fight for the colonialists in Indonesia. I was sentenced for four years jail for that, although I only served two.

“The government was going all-out to make war on the Indonesian people. But again, where were the trade unions in Holland? They went along with this.”

Stuurop closed by warning that the struggle at Patrick’s was in danger, because the unions were preparing a betrayal. “This cannot be won with the leadership that the workers have got today. If they do not begin to ignore the directions of the ACTU and do something, then this dispute is going to go down the drain and we will have another rotten defeat.”



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