

# Australian waterfront workers denounce job cuts

Our reporters  
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*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with wharfies and waterfront maintenance workers at a protest outside Hutchison's Port Botany container terminal in Sydney yesterday. It followed the late-night sacking of almost 100 HPH employees nationally.

**Chris** was one of the more than 50 workers sacked at Port Botany.

"I've got three kids—two boys, 9- and 7-years-old, and a baby. I have a mortgage of about \$500,000, so it's not looking real good," he said. "My wife is very supportive but it's very hard at the moment, we're going through a lot of issues. It's had a big impact on everything and really taken the wind out of us."

A former tower-crane operator in the construction industry, Chris began working at the Port Botany terminal in March last year. He said he knew five or six Hutchison workers who had just bought houses thinking that they had job security.

"I worked for 15 years on construction sites on very good money—better than what I get here—but I came over because I thought the wharves would mean more security. This is big thing for a family. I enjoyed what I did and I gave that away to come here. I was told that everyone would be trained but it wasn't forthcoming.

"I'm not copping what they did to us. It's unfair. You've got to fight it. You can't let them do what they do. These laws just work against us and they have to be changed. It's all about greed. How much more money do they have to make and how much lower does the workingman have to stoop before things start getting equaled out?"

**Brendan**, another sacked HPH worker, is a member of the health and safety committee at the terminal. He said that the company had targeted all the union delegates. "There's only a small percentage of our workforce now that has not been made redundant," he

said. "The company has withdrawn from any future tenders at present—they've turned a couple of shipping lines away—and they've reduced their numbers to a point where they'll have a skeleton workforce.

"Automation is one aspect of it [the job losses] but when they get around to cranking business back up again and trying to make a profit with their new technology, they're going to be looking at a casual workforce. You'll get a permanent job, that's not permanent. You could get an email at midnight."

Another young sacked worker said he had only been working at the terminal for a year. "They haven't given us any reasons why they're getting put off. We all came here in good faith, having left our previous jobs because they said this will be a job for life and that they would look after us. We looked after them and this is how they've repaid us."

DP World maintenance worker **Harry** has worked on the waterfront for over 20 years and was involved in the six-week strike against the mass sacking of Patrick's workers in 1998.

"There's a lot of comparison here with what happened at Patrick's. The media took a picture of me on the picket line with my young daughter on my shoulders. They wrote up the story saying I was placing my child in harm's way in front of trucks. It was a total lie. It taught me you can't trust the media on anything," he said.

"I'm here to show my solidarity with Hutchison workers. It's wrong and we have to stand up and fight it. A lot of our basic conditions have been hit since the Patrick's dispute. There are more and more casuals every year, increased productivity and longer shifts.

"Everything you do in the place is watched on cameras and since 9/11 it has gotten worse. It's like you're being spied on all the time. Supervisors can

follow you on cameras all day, every day, if they want.”

Hutchison worker **Johnny**, 31, told the WSWs he was shocked by the midnight dismissals. He began working at the terminal a year ago.

“I’ve never seen anything like this in my working life. How can they do something like this to anyone? I wasn’t sacked but I’ve got a wife, a young child and another one on the way. The guys that were sacked are going to have real problems. I’m not sure what we should do but we have to stand by them,” he said.

**Con**, a former Qantas aircraft engineer, has been working at DP World for nine and a half years as a casual and decided to attend the protest on his day off. He denounced the sackings and spoke about the increasing casualisation of waterfront work. “Just about our whole workforce is casual—it’s a 70/30 split,” he said.

“We ring up every afternoon at 2 p.m. and they tell us if they’ve got a shift for us the following day, except for the weekend when we ring up on a Friday afternoon and they tell us what they want us to do for the whole weekend. Then on Sunday afternoon we have to ring up after 2 p.m. So we run our whole lives around a phone.

“There are 500–600 workers [at DP World] and although we don’t have full automation at the moment it’s only a matter of when. [After automation is introduced] they’ll probably cut the workforce in half so there’s going to be at least 300 people looking for work again.”



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