

BlueScope Steel workers speak with the WSWS

Our reporters
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BlueScope Steel workers from the company's Port Kembla plant, south of Sydney spoke with the World Socialist Web Site reporters at an early morning mass meeting in Wollongong yesterday. The Australian Workers Union (AWU) and other unions have responded to the management's threat to shut the plant, Australia's largest steel making plant, by promising to assist the company slash up to 500 jobs as part of \$200 million cost-cutting restructure.

Drew, who has two nine-year-old boys, has worked at the Port Kembla plant for over 20 years. He spoke to the WSWS before yesterday's union mass meeting.

"We face a bad situation, and it's one that I've been through here a few times, but I want a better understanding of what this company and the union is demanding," he said.

"When I began here in the early 1990s and there were about 6,000 people. Since then whole areas have been eliminated—pattern-making, foundry, fabrication and all sorts of other things. They're all gone and so have apprenticeships. This is very disturbing.

"I do volunteer work at a soup kitchen and have done volunteer work in other countries that have had major catastrophes. I've seen poverty get worse here over the years but there's no doubt it will be much worse if the job losses keep going here.

"I've now got two nine-year-old boys. What's going to be their future? If there are more job losses at Port Kembla it will turn our lives upside down. All this is happening because of decisions made by people and totally outside my control.

"If this place shuts down it won't just affect the working class but all layers of the population. We've been told that there will be jobs at the university but how can that happen. There's only so much that the university can absorb. Jobs are shrinking across the

entire community. This is not just a community issue, but a state issue and a national issue and its impact will spread like waves in the ocean."

Drew said he did not want to comment on the union assisting the company to impose \$200 million cuts. But he added, "I was brought up in a family of Labor supporters but I'm jaded with both these major parties. They are looking after big business and themselves. They've got no interest in looking after ordinary people. I don't know what we can do about the government. Maybe it's time we started thinking about some sort of revolution. At the moment we're faced with a race to the bottom.

Paul, who works in the blast furnace, said: "The government doesn't seem to want to support a steel industry and the Labor government wouldn't be any different. Everything that has been built up by workers in this country is being destroyed. Instead of fighting to defend this, the trade unions have become like gentle little lambs. We could lose hundreds of jobs from Port Kembla but the union officials will still have jobs when it's all over.

"We've heard recently that some of the shift allowances will be taken away. Some people are saying that they will lose big time—they could lose about 30 percent of the take-home wages. Many are thinking about leaving and getting jobs somewhere else.

"We've also had to watch and see BlueScope workers lose their jobs and be replaced by contractors, particularly in the raw materials area. The unions haven't said anything much about that. Nobody knows what's going to happen."



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