

Australia: Fight the closure at Molycop! Form a rank-and-file committee to defend steelworker jobs!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

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The Socialist Equality Party urges workers to take up a fight against the shutdown of steelmaking at Molycop in Newcastle. The 250 jobs must be saved, the company's attack defeated! Such a struggle is possible and necessary.

Necessary, because the mass sackings and the end of steel production threaten social devastation. Claims by management and the unions of "voluntary redundancies" and "just transitions" are a sham. Workers with years of experience face being thrown on the scrapheap.

That is what has happened when industries have been shut and mass sackings imposed, from the end of car production, to the decimation of steel itself. Two years after the closure of the General Motors Holden plant in Adelaide, 23 percent of workers had not found another job. Of those that did, two-thirds were in precarious, low-paid employment.

The Molycop sackings would have a flow-on impact. Contractors will be hit hard. The cuts would help ensure young people in Newcastle will never know stable employment. They would face a future in the "gig economy."

Any conception that the jobs not slated for destruction are safe would be a delusion. Such promises have been made before, and sacrifices extracted, including for the positions now being destroyed.

The claims of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) that nothing can be done are a lie.

Molycop is not on the verge of bankruptcy. The purpose of the shutdown is to attract maximum returns for an initial public offering by American Industrial Partners (AIP), which owns the company and is raking

in at least \$25 billion in consolidated portfolio revenue.

It is these finance capital interests that are dictating. AIP functions like all private equity firms, scouring the globe for cheap returns and restructuring, whatever the cost to workers.

The unions, which represent the interests of their bureaucracies, defend these profit interests to the hilt. They are a police force of management, doing everything they can to ensure an "orderly closure."

Their model is the shutdown of BHP's Newcastle steelworks in the late 1990s. That directly destroyed over 2,800 jobs and 8,000 more in related industries.

The union bureaucrats, sitting on six-figure salaries and tied to the corporations, are trying to do another job on behalf of big business. They can afford further mass sackings, which will not impact their livelihoods. Workers cannot.

The union officials have demonstrated their opposition to a fight to defend jobs. That is clear by their declarations that workers must bow down to the current cuts. But it is also demonstrated by the entire role of the unions spanning decades. Working in partnership with the corporations and governments, especially Labor, they have forced through round after round of sackings that have eliminated hundreds of thousands of jobs in steel and other manufacturing since the beginning of the 1980s.

Workers must take matters into their own hands. As a first step, the SEP calls for the formation of a Molycop workers' rank-and-file committee. It must be elected by workers and be independent of the union bureaucracy and management.

Workers can begin to plan a definite fight. An appeal can be made to working people throughout Newcastle,

to take up a struggle in defence of jobs and ensure a future in the region.

Such a committee could link up with other workers, including steel. They will understand that what is underway is an attempt by the corporations and the unions to finish the decades-long destruction of the industry.

Preparations can be made for joint industrial and political action, not only at Molycop but more broadly.

Such a struggle requires a rejection of the nationalist poison peddled by the unions. Their claims that Chinese steel production and Chinese workers are to blame is another lie. There has been restructuring and cuts in the steel industry globally, including China, as part of a broader offensive against workers everywhere.

The line of the unions is aimed at dividing workers, and hiding the responsibility of AIP and capitalism. It is the same position unions take in every country to block a struggle and line workers up behind their “own” corporations. That is an endless race to the bottom, with workers pitted against one another to see who will work for the lowest wages and conditions.

The alternative is a unified fight globally, including in steel.

Internationally the working class is returning to struggle. It is doing so in rebellion against the unions, which have suppressed the class struggle for forty years and enforced round after round of pay and job cuts.

In the US, there is a developing upsurge. Auto workers are straining against attempts of the UAW union to prevent an all-out strike against wage- and condition-cutting demands.

Molycop workers should join this developing movement.

They are in a fight against not only the company, but the union bureaucracy, Fair Work and the government. That was underscored by the visit of Prime Minister Albanese to Newcastle one day before Molycop announced the sackings. He has not said a word about them. Labor is trying to place the burden of the economic crisis on workers. It has pledged to boost “productivity,” i.e., profits.

The SEP calls on workers to adopt as their watchword: not a single job lost! The interests of workers must take precedence over the profits of AIP! If Molycop declares it does not have enough money for jobs, it should be placed under public ownership and

democratic workers’ control to ensure no sackings.

That must form part of a broader struggle by workers against capitalism, which subordinates everything to profit. The onslaught on jobs and conditions underscores the need for a socialist perspective, aimed at reorganising society to meet the needs of workers, not the dictates of the financial elite.

The Socialist Equality Party pledges to provide all possible political assistance to Molycop workers in establishing a rank-and-file committee and taking up a fight to defend their jobs. We urge workers to contact us today to discuss this perspective.



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