

Australia: Newcastle workers and youth oppose Molycop sackings

Our reporters
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On September 21, steel manufacturer Molycop informed workers at its plant in Newcastle, north of Sydney, Australia, that 250 jobs would be slashed and part of the facility permanently closed down at the end of this year.

The Socialist Equality Party is urging workers to take up a fight against the company's attack, which has implications for workers and young people throughout the region, as well as those immediately hit by the sackings.

No such struggle will be led by the unions covering workers at Molycop, which falsely claim that nothing can be done, and which are working with management to ensure the "just transition" of workers on to the scrapheap.

This means Molycop workers must take matters into their own hands and form a rank-and-file committee, elected by workers and independent of the union bureaucracy. Molycop workers cannot fight alone—they will need to turn to the broader working class for support in mounting a unified struggle to defend their jobs, not just against the company, but in opposition to the entire political establishment, including Labor and the unions.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers and young people in Newcastle, who condemned the job cuts, stated their support for Molycop workers and related their own concerns about the lack of secure work and affordable housing, and the rising cost of living.

Justin and Joel, both young people looking for work, commented on the impact of the cuts, both to the workers directly affected and for the younger generation in Newcastle.

Justin said, "We know someone personally who works at Molycop, he was really angry about it. He's telling us he's got friends there that just don't know what they're going to do. He has some money put away to protect himself, but a lot of the younger workers don't even have

that.

"It's not just a job. People are going to lose their houses because of this; there's a psychological impact from that too.

"If they're going to close steelmaking, why don't they at least keep the jobs and train the workers in another area of the factory, or send them to new jobs where they can do the same work? But they don't want to do that; [Molycop] just want to take their money and run.

"If people can just lose their jobs suddenly like this, what are they supposed to do, especially with inflation, rent and travel prices going up, and the cost of food?

"Companies keep making money, but the workers that made them billions are the ones who are losing their jobs. The people who work there are good people and they're getting screwed over. It's been like that for a long time and it shouldn't be like that.

"It's becoming really hard to get jobs, even for younger people like us. I've gotten knocked back from jobs I've applied for because they say they don't have enough positions available. It's hard to figure out what you can do, but I agree that there should be a fightback. What if we had a vote in the Newcastle area or even in other areas about this? People wouldn't vote for these cuts."

Joel said, "These are 250 people who won't have a job and they were given no warning about this. They've got mortgages, they've got children. This could put people on the streets; you shouldn't be able to do that.

"Not only that, it's just so hard to live these days. I applied for ten jobs the other day and got knocked back from seven of them and haven't heard back from the other three. I actually applied for a job at Molycop, just before the cuts were announced. They knocked me back, said the job wasn't available anymore."

Joel was critical of the federal Labor government's escalation of military spending, including \$368 billion on nuclear powered submarines: "Why not spend that money

on jobs or housing? That's a massive issue. We need more housing and less rent."

Scott, a former mining equipment worker, said, "I would like to see the steelworks stay open. 250 jobs, that's a lot of people and a lot of families that will be affected. It's bad for the area and bad for the future. There's nothing left in Newcastle, it's hard enough to find work as it is.

"There needs to be a demonstration or something organised against this. Why haven't the unions organised something? I hadn't heard anything about this. What's the point of paying your union dues if they're going to do nothing? If the workers got together to fight this, I'd be supportive of that."

Kienan, an unemployed worker, asked, "If Molycop leaves, what's going to happen to other industries, like the railway industry, is this going to be the start to a whole round of layoffs there as well? But if the company wants to shut down, there is little keeping them in check, regardless of the impact on hundreds or thousands of lives. It's just based on profit.

"It's already very hard, there aren't a lot of jobs. A lot of industry has already left Newcastle, there's almost nothing left. There are still some jobs going, but increasingly the demand is that you do ridiculous amounts of work. I was offered a job at an abattoir which was basically saying you had to work 60 hours a week for \$21 an hour. I have a daughter, so I can't spend that much time at work because I have to take care of her."

Kienan spoke about the broader decline in working conditions: "Increasingly, workers are being told that they can't take their annual leave. It's supposed to be a non-negotiable thing."

He continued: "My mother works in health and she shouldn't work more than 12 hours at one time according to her award, but this gets ignored a lot. It's not unusual to hear of workers in health working double shifts—15 to 16 hours.

"The unions don't do anything to help. We can see more and more they are constantly siding with business. There are three unions at Molycop; you would think that one of them would stand up for these workers to stop these job cuts. The unions have allowed this to continue. When I got offered that job for \$21 an hour, that was union rates which hadn't changed since 2014.

"The rich get richer and the poor get poorer, the people at the top are getting bigger and bigger and bigger. Increasingly, Australia has one of the worst employment and casualisation rates in the industrialised world. We

need more jobs here to help workers everywhere."

Shantay, an education student at the University of Newcastle, said, "My grandfather used to work at the steelworks in Wollongong. He was a Croatian immigrant, he worked two jobs, at the steelworks and a paper run, when he was a teenager. He would later go on to open his own business and he wouldn't have been able to do that if it wasn't for his work at the steelworks.

"That's very different though compared to today. If you're a teenager or a young adult, it is very difficult for you to find any kind of job. You need experience for even some of the most basic jobs. Even if you spend a lot of time in education, your credentials might be virtually worthless.

"I started applying for work when I was 15. I would hand in resumes all the time, but it took me nearly two years to find a job. It was at McDonalds. They rejected my applications two or three times then finally another one said yes. I worked at McDonalds for two years.

"Then I worked for a retailer. I only worked there for about six months, because the conditions were so bad. They would 'forget' to pay you or they would underpay you.

"I recall girls would cry at work because of how mean some managers were, the amount of pressure they put on the teenage girls. They shouldn't be treating people like that.

"If you work a full-time permanent job these days, you are lucky. My mother works in aged care, and has been working as a casual for something like 15 years. Conditions are getting worse in a lot of areas. I was speaking to a friend who works on the railways and he said they work up to 12 hours a day and might not get lunch breaks."



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