

Monday, 6 July 2015

Abbott Government must act in best interests of Australian workers

The Federal Government must act in the best interests of Australian maritime workers rather than give the green light to the loss of their jobs.

Caltex, a major Australian oil company, has decided to dump another Australian crew, this time off the Alexander Spirit. The Alexander Spirit is managed and crewed by TK Australia.

The Alexander Spirit is currently alongside in Devonport, Tasmania, with the crew having been told they will be sacked when they get to Singapore. Both swings of 18 workers would be replaced by international vessels and crew, some of whom can be paid as little as \$2/hr.

The Alexander Spirit was contracted to TK to perform coastal trading until 2019. Yet Caltex says the vessel will be redeployed into international trade citing reduced coastal trading volumes.

This supposed reduction in volume has not been demonstrated to the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) or the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE). Unions have previously put forward options for ongoing viable trade.

Minister for Employment, Tasmanian Senator Eric Abetz today let the cat out of the bag when it comes to employment for those in the seagoing professions:

On ABC Local radio in Hobart, not only did Senator Abetz refuse to step in to assist these workers, he flagged widespread job losses on coastal shipping routes.

"Some of the local shipping is pricing itself out of the market," – Eric Abetz: 936 ABC Hobart, July 6, 2015

Eric Abetz is endorsing \$2/hr wages for work currently being performed by Australians.

Tasmanian Liberal Premier Will Hodgman also washed his hands of the issue, his office telling WIN News Hobart on July 5 that this isn't a matter for the Government.

Coastal Trading Act - "WorkChoices on water"

- The Abbott Government wants to alter the Coastal Trading Act to open up/deregulate Australian ports and create a "WorkChoices on water";
- The Act protects Australian ports and Australia's environment by granting licences to vessels that allows them to carry passengers or cargo between ports in Australia;
- The Act protects local Australian ships from Flag of Convenience (FOC) ships, with their poor standards and exploited crews, take over our ports and displace Australian vessels.
- If protections are removed it will jeopardise maritime jobs, skills, fuel security, maritime security and the environment.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Ged Kearney:

"Australian Unions are extremely concerned the Abbott Government is giving corporations carte blanche to sell out Australian jobs from under the nose of the Australian public.

"The Abbott Government should be standing up to protect Australian jobs in this era of high unemployment. North-west Tasmania has incredibly high unemployment, particularly for its young people.

"But instead of standing up for Australian workers, the Abbott Government is standing idly by as Caltex sacks the 36 workers on board the Alexander Spirit.

"Employment Minister Eric Abetz has today not only condemned these workers but also flagged that he's happy for thousands more jobs to go through his unwinding of cabotage.

"Tasmanian Liberal Premier Will Hodgman said this isn't a matter for the Government.

"If this ship is removed, Tasmania will be entirely dependent on foreign vessels and international crews to source its fuel, which will come mainly out of Singapore.

“There won’t be a single Australian-crewed oil tanker delivering fuel to Tasmania. If fuel security isn’t a matter for Governments Mr Hodgman, I don’t know what is.

“The Abbott Government, they said they promised to deliver a budget for jobs.

“Yet recent legislation introduced in Parliament will alter the Coastal Trading Act to open up Australian ports to foreign ships.

“This means our ports would be open to cheap foreign crews on ships with less stringent safety standards than Australian ships.

“The MUA wrote to Caltex earlier this year, saying that not only is there enough domestic cargo to keep the Alexander Spirit on the Australian coast, that they should in fact put on more Australian crewed vessels.

“Rather than protect local industries and promote Australian jobs, the Abbott Government’s inaction makes them complicit in sending Caltex workers to the unemployment line when Caltex sends those jobs offshore.

“Instead of protecting local jobs, the Abbott Government continues to oversee the demise of local industries and make it easier for companies to use overseas cheap labour at the expense of local jobs.

“The union movement will not stand idly by while Caltex and the Abbott Government flush away local maritime jobs and skills, our fuel security, maritime security and our environment.”

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