

Sitting On The Dock Of The Bay: Load Of Strife



Standing Tall: Maritime union officials Garry Keane (left) Rick Newlyn Mark Armstrong & Chris Kelly at Port Kembla's No 6 jetty

THE BUILD _ UP

SA wrangle catalyst for problems

WHEN the MV Capo Noli arrived at the port of Thevenard in South Australia on her first visit to Australia last Saturday, she sailed straight into a union dispute.

A protest was taking place at the port over the decommissioning of the CSR-owned Australian ship, Ormiston. The 34-strong Australian crew were refusing to open the ship's hatch covers because they claimed the Ormiston was going to be replaced with the Capo Noli.

Registered in 1981 by Italian company Coeclerici, the Capo Noli has a 25-strong Filipino crew and is considered by the International Transport Workers Federation to have a "flag of convenience" because it is registered in Valletta, Malta, "a soft country that doesn't respect maritime laws".

Maritime Union of Australia members in Thevenard believed the Federal Government was going to issue the Capo Noli with a continuous voyaging permit, allowing it to operate along the Australian coast indefinitely.

They also said that another Australian ship, the Kowulka, would be replaced by a foreign vessel. A spokeswoman for CSR Shipping confirmed the decommissioning of the Ormiston was "imminent" and that the crew's employer promised there would be "no job losses and that all of the crew would be placed on other ships".

Wharf dispute costing us \$100,000

THE charter company at the centre of the wharf dispute at Port Kembla is losing almost \$100,000 every day the ship remains unloaded.

Canada Steamship Lines (CSL) managing director Chris Sorensen said the company was likely to take legal action today to end the union blockade of its chartered ship, the MV Capo Noli, carrying 18,712 tonnes of gypsum.

"We have a customer who needs that product and obviously we want to get it off that vessel," Mr Sorensen said.

"We also have another company waiting for cargo that we have to use that vessel for and if we can't get that vessel out of Port Kembla then we have to hire another ship.

"So there is the cost of that vessel sitting there and the cost of looking after our other customers - that's almost \$100,000 for the day."

The Maritime Union of Australia claims the company is acting illegally by using seafarers to do stevedoring work - the discharging and unloading of ships. But Mr Sorensen denied the company was acting illegally.

The Capo Noli was a self-unloading vessel and its Filipino crew were employed under appropriate international labour agreements, he said.

He disputed union claims that the use of seafarers to operate cranes onboard the ship set an international precedent, because the Capo Noli had been operating this way for the past 11 years.

He said the Italian-owned ship had been trading in European waters since 1981 and was one of many self unloading vessels operating internationally. "It is far from unique and we have a number of these hybrid vessels, bigger than the Capo Noli, that we operate on the east coast of the United States."

Mr Sorensen said CSL chartered the Capo Noli last week because of a lack of Australian ships to meet their commercial requirements. It would operate until a \$50 million vessel CSL was building in China was delivered late next year.

He said that ship would be registered under an Australian licence and employ an Australian crew.

THE POLITICS

Move could create 'international transit'



Mr. Rorris

THE consensus between unions and business which has allowed Port Kembla to undergo a \$140 million expansion is likely to stand up to any threat to it, South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris says. As the dispute over who should unload the Capo Noli entered its second day yesterday, Mr Rorris said the wider community should be incensed at what it would mean for Illawarra jobs. "We'll become an international transit lounge for the maritime industry. That's how serious this threat is," Mr Rorris said.

"We campaigned hard to get this expansion (the Port will become the car import capital of Australia by next year) and one of the reasons was the promise of the jobs it would bring to the region.

"We've struggled hard and now this is threatening it. If this is allowed to continue and the Federal Government supports it then all of this expansion will be for nothing."

The expansion has been touted to bring about 1000 jobs to the Illawarra. Unions, business and industry overcame their differences to support it.