

Union Victory

MUA wins right to unload ship

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Arthur Rorris

Union claims Port victory



PORT Kembla dock workers claimed victory over a multinational shipping company last night when they were given the right to unload a vessel at the centre of a fourday stand-off.

There were jubilant scenes at Port Kembla's No 6 jetty after word came through that Canadian Steamship Lines (CSL) had agreed to let "shore-based labour" unload its ship, the MV Capo Noli. Port Kembla stevedores established a picket line at the wharf after the Capo Noli docked on Tuesday and CSL indicated it would be unloaded by its Filipino crew.

The agreement between CSL, the ACTU and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) represents a triumph of will for the stevedores.

MUA branch secretary Garry Keane last night congratulated the dock workers for their commitment. "We were going to be here for as long as it took," he said. "This agreement resolves all our issues - we demanded the right for stevedores to do the stevedoring work at their own port, and the Capo Noli will now abide by its agreements with the International Transport Workers' Federation."

South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris said the willingness of the Port Kembla community to support the dock workers was the key factor in reaching an agreement with CSL.

"This was a David and Goliath battle, and David has won," Mr Rorris said.

"This is a sensational win for the MUA, and it's a massive win for the community of the Illawarra."

Mr Rorris suggested that CSL had picked the wrong town to try to sideline stevedores.

"Many people questioned why they would try this on in Port Kembla, given our proud and militant history of defending the rights of workers," he said.

As the camp set up alongside the Capo Noli buzzed with excitement and relief, the Capo Noli's Filipino crew emerged to join in the celebrations, and were welcomed by the men who had objected to their employment.

The stumbling block for CSL to unload the cargo of gypsum had been the positioning of a "hopper", a storage container required to move freight to the wharf.

After the agreement was announced, CSL managing director Chris Sorensen maintained his company had done no wrong.

"We were an innocent party and I feel a little bit wronged, but we've got a customer who we needed to deliver for, and we had to resolve this issue," Mr Sorensen said. "We've been painted as the baddies in this, and that's extremely disappointing - people just couldn't accept change."

Action in the Federal Court to resolve the dispute was withdrawn.