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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

P&O Ferries sackings show a shocking disregard by DP World for workers' rights and its own standards

21 March 2022, London

DP World sells itself as a progressive business concerned with social and corporate responsibility that supports labour rights and works 'in a responsible way that prioritises sustainability and impact on the people, communities and environment in which we operate'. The company now has serious questions to answer following the ruthless sacking of 800 seafarers at its subsidiary P&O Ferries.

On March 17, P&O Ferries fired 800 British-based seafarers with 30 minutes notice over a pre-recorded Zoom call. The company made the decision without any consultation with its workforce or their unions.

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) are calling on DP World to engage in meaningful dialogue with affiliates RMT and Nautilus International about P&O Ferries' future.

"These kinds of brutal shock tactics are reminiscent of the infamous Patrick dispute, that represents nothing more than an outmoded and discredited management style," said Paddy Crumlin, President of the ITF and Chair of ITF's Dockers' Section.

"DP World's callous decision to sack and attack 800 hard-working seafarers represents a brutal attack on their dignity," said Crumlin. "In doing so, they're breaching laws and failing to meet their own company's standards."

Further, ETF President Frank Moreels echoed this, pointing out that the use of non-union replacement labour amounts to a fundamental breach of workers' rights to freedom of association.

"Their plan to outsource the jobs is in tatters. Reports are coming in across Europe that their original strategy was to replace the sacked workers with Russian and Ukrainian seafarers," said Moreels. "What we're seeing now is a chaotic scrabble to recruit seafarers on anything from two-week contracts through a shady shell corporation with links to the Paradise papers."

In 2019, DP World signed up to the UN's Global Compact (UNGC). Its own policy on sustainability says: "DP World is a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and its 10 core principles, which encompass human rights, labour, the environment, and anti-corruption. By signing the UNGC, DP World has committed to align its strategies and operations with these principles."

“They can’t have it both ways,” said Crumlin who is also Co-Chair of the Committee on Workers’ Capital. “One minute they’re voicing their support for human rights and ESG principles and the next they’re throwing 800 people out of work with 30 minutes notice.”

On March 28, the ITF will raise the case of the P&O Ferries’ seafarers at the UNGC Board meeting in Dubai, and ITF’s General Secretary Stephen Cotton has reached out to DP World CEO Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem to discuss this as a priority. Cotton will also deliver a [global protest letter](#) — signed by hundreds of unions and thousands of workers addressed to Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem.

“We hope that Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem will take this opportunity to engage and move to rectify this situation that avoids further reputational damage to his company and respects these workers’ fundamental labour rights”, said Crumlin.

In the Zoom sacking, P&O Ferries told workers this was a “tough” decision, but it would “not be a viable business” without the changes.

In fact, P&O Ferries’ owner DP World has made record revenue and profits throughout the pandemic, turning over \$10.8bn in revenue and \$1.2bn in profit last year, a 33% increase in profit compared with the previous year. The company has paid out \$376.1 million in dividends to shareholders over the past two years alone.

The Times and other sources have reported the scale of government support that DP World received during the pandemic, with over £30 million in emergency funding, including through the taxpayer funded furlough scheme, landing in DP World’s coffers.

“If the company was in actual trouble, which it’s not, it should have approached unions. This would have allowed time for fair and reasonable discussions to ensure that these workers’ rights were protected and that P&O Ferries’ passengers are not inconvenienced or put at risk by ill-thought decisions,” said Moreels.

“Both economically and morally this situation doesn’t wash with us - and it certainly doesn’t wash for the 800 seafarers who’ve lost their jobs. How can a company who is declaring record profits, who has received over £30 million in taxpayer funds, justify this? Or get away with this?”

“A leaked memo has exposed that Ministers were informed of P&O Ferries’ intention to sack these workers the night it happened. They did nothing to stop it. For too long the political elites have allowed the rich to get richer, and at the expense of the working class. This dispute will be a line in the sand - the government must act,” said Moreels.

ITF President Paddy Crumlin made it clear that: “In the interest of the 800 workers who have lost their jobs, we are ready and willing to facilitate dialogue between the company and the unions, but we also stand ready to provide meaningful solidarity across DP World’s global operations if need be, to defend these workers’ jobs.”

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