

CFMMEU

CONSTRUCTION FORESTRY
MARITIME MINING & ENERGY UNION

NOV/DEC
2023

A REPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP FROM

CHRISTY CAIN



300 CONSTRUCTION DELEGATES/MEMBERS GATHER IN SYDNEY FOR NATIONAL CONFERENCE!

Left: United at the Construction National Conference.

Brothers and Sisters, over 300 construction delegates and officials gathered in

Sydney for a week of deliberation and debate on how we work better together as one amalgamated UNION. The Maritime Executive were also in attendance, with myself and Paddy Crumlin giving reports on a variety of union issues. It was the biggest gathering of delegates that the CFMEU Construction Division has ever had.

Many speakers urged the union to come together for joint campaigns, and vowing to end workers being killed by the deadly killer stone product, which carries Silicosis. From July next year the CFMMEU has put a total ban on this product coming into Australia. If we can save one life through banning this product, then the campaign is a success.

I have been visiting many job sites and wharfs where I can, and I will be attending as many Rank & File meetings as possible. This is to keep the membership informed of what the union is doing, and asking for their support to implement the resolutions that came out of the last CFMMEU National Conference. My view is if you take the membership with you, then you will WIN every time.

It's extremely satisfying to see my old Branch doing great work, and I'm sure everyone will acknowledge that the wages and conditions our equal, if not better than any other country in the world. Excellent stuff!!

Also, just as important, I salute all the membership nationwide. This great UNION, is leading and kicking goals and just remember...

**ORGANISE! ORGANISE! AND ORGANISE AGAIN!
IF YOU DON'T, THE ROTTEN EMPLOYERS WILL!!**

**DP WORLD – IF IT'S A FIGHT YOU
WANT, IT'S A WAR YOU WILL GET !!**

Below: MUA's Adrian Evans addressing members at DP World.



I can never understand these greedy, grubby multinational employers, such as the likes of DP World! They make record profits on the backs of workers around the world, they pay NO tax in this country, and they gauge all Australians who work for them.

Well, enough is enough, and as our membership go to the Christmas break, taking a variety of strike actions, then for once blame these corporate gangsters! The heading says it all, and if it's a fight they want, it's a WAR they will get. To all the members on the docks, stick tight, stay SOLID, we are all with you until we WIN!!

"THEY DON'T LIKE US, AND WE DON'T CARE!"

ORGANISE!

YESTERDAY'S LESSONS, TOMORROW'S STRENGTH: KNOW YOUR HISTORY!

Australian Merchant Seamen and the Seamen's Union of Australia Victorian Branch Assistant Secretary, Roger Wilson, on "What it Means to Think Internationally, but Act Locally".

Like many other Able Seafarers, Roger Wilson began his career as a 16-year-old deck boy, walking up his first gangway of "The Wombat" in 1946.

Life on land post World War 2 was harsh, but even worse for those working at sea. The economic downturn meant that most vessels had not yet been modernised and living conditions onboard were basic, with no carpet, shared facilities like bathrooms, and cabins that often held 6 men. Times were tough, but these memories are ones looked back on by Roger with much appreciation. No TVs meant that nights off duty were spent in the mess room, but, as Roger recalls, this was where a deck boy got a real education.

Here, anything and everything was discussed and debated - from politics, to sport, to issues of social justice. At this time, rules to become a Seaman were part of the Navigation Act, and Roger spent 12 months working as a deck boy, cleaning both inside the ship, and working out on deck, alongside seafarers from all around the world. Union membership was also different. Only after you had done your probation period would a meeting be called

to discuss whether you were accepted into the union or not. There were many men that did not make the cut, but Roger did.

Over the next decade, Roger sailed all around Australia, with the occasional trip over to Naru where he even considered jumping ship for the simple way of living. It wasn't long after that he was back onboard bound for Australia after breaking his front tooth trying to rip open a coconut. The dream of a local way of life wasn't to be.

Roger's first interaction with his union, the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA), was when he was refused workers compensation from his employer for a work injury. It was at this point that he met the Victorian SUA Secretary, Bill Bird, who went straight to the boss and argued that if Roger wasn't paid his entitlements, the SUA would "stick all the ships up". Not long after, Roger received his workers compensation claim, and above all else, had a strong appreciation for his mighty union.



Rogers first vessel as a deck boy - the "Wombat".



1951. 20 year old Roger Steering a tug at the port of GDansk, Poland whilst attending Conference of the Seamen & Dockers International as an SUA Activist. Look closely and you'll see Jim Healy - leader of the Waterside Workers Federation.



Australian Merchant Seamen and Seamen's Union of Australia Victorian Branch.

Our long history of Maritime International Solidarity



There were many blues that Roger played a role in during his career as an Able Seaman and time in office as the SUA Assistant Secretary. Each of these reminded him of the importance of relying on our brothers and sisters around the globe during strike action.

“Globalisation of workers struggle has a long and proud history of solidarity, but there are some that stick with you forever” Roger says with a big grin on his face.

The Italian Seafarers Strike

In late 1959, 6 months after being elected to the SUA, Roger received a phone call from a delegate who was part of the Italian Seafarers Union to ask for support during their world-wide strike. The delegate worked onboard the “Australia” which was part of the Triestino Trio (Australia, Neptunia and Oceania), a fleet of single class passenger vessels that sailed from Australia to Italy bringing in new migrants.



1960. Roger and young daughter address members Keith, Bill, & Fred during a national shipping dispute.

In an act of solidarity, the SUA organised a picket at Station Pier in the Port of Melbourne, where hundreds of Australian unionists came in support. The crowd picketed the wharf, while the Italian crew called across to the scab labour continuing to work onboard, asking them to join their quest for better pay and conditions of employment.

Roger laughs while retelling the moment that a supply truck attempted to reach the ship by breaking the picket line but was hijacked by picketers, who acted instantly by jumping inside the truck and throwing sides of beef and lamb into the harbour. By the time the truck reached the ship, there were no supplies left to unload.

During this time the SUA continued to back up the Italian seafarers through all different means including raising thousands of pounds to send home to families back in Italy, holding events with other like-minded progressive unions to share stories of struggle, and even taking members out on excursions to keep their spirits up during such tough times.

This act of solidarity worked, and after 45 days, the company caved, and the Italian seafarers received significant improvements to their wages and conditions. Once the strike ended, a union delegation was sent to the captain onboard the Australia where he was given back the key to the wheelhouse and told that he was back in command. The ship sailed soon after.

For Roger and our Australian SUA members, this act of international unity held many valuable lessons that they didn't expect to learn. Watching the Italians educate scab labour was an unusual approach to our traditional Aussie manner of “putting people on the coat”. Rather than ignoring those who chose not to join the union, this dispute taught Roger that knowledge really is power. **Taking on the long-term goal of educating those you work with on unionism was a much more effective way of building the union and winning disputes.**

Bloody Sunday

As well as being a militant union that fought hard for the rights of seafarers, the SUA was a progressive left-wing union that played a crucial role in the struggle for social justice around the globe. Bloody Sunday was no exception.

On the 30th of January 1972, British paratroopers opened fire on a peaceful civil rights protest in Derry, Ireland. 13 people were killed and 14 injured. In an act of camaraderie, Roger coordinated a boycott with the SUA's Victorian tugboat crew on a British passenger ship due to return to Melbourne on its last voyage. Unable to come alongside the berth without tug direction, the British ship stayed at anchor, and passengers were ordered to climb down the ships ladder and onto lifeboats where they were sent to shore.

This was not the welcome to Australia that British passengers expected. Roger received many letters about the SUA's “disgraceful act”, but he viewed this act of solidarity with the Irish contingent of the SUA and their family and friends back home in Ireland as a proud moment of our union's history.

At 93, Roger is still a staunch activist, and attends MUA branch meetings and rallies in Melbourne often. He also works at the local Polytec where he teaches community members how to sew traditional “ditty bags”, a type of bag used to hold essential items while working on deck. Roger is one of the only existing Able Seafarers that was passed on this skill by his mentors as a young deck boy and is now doing the same for future generations.

What Roger wants YOU to know!



Roger celebrating his 90th birthday with the MUA.

“I strongly encourage our younger members seek out your union's history. Read everything that you can get your hands on. Wages and conditions didn't just fall out of the sky... companies were never sympathetic to the working class. **Everything you have now has been fought for and won.** So, get off your phone.

These devices only take you away from solidarity with other workers. The more you move away from interacting with others, the more solidarity will disappear”, says Roger.



Roger being interviewed by Emma Cain.



THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE LIVES

Brothers/Sisters, you might have seen in the news lately, heard at a report back meeting or it came up in general discussion in the crib rooms that our Construction Division is putting measures in place to ban engineered stone. A ban that will save countless lives across the industry from the shocking and awful disease, Silicosis.

The push by not only our Construction Division but also fully backed by our Maritime Division as well, for a ban on engineered stone is not just a matter of doing what's right, it's a battle for the well-being of workers so they can go home safely, each and every night. Engineered stone, promoted as a "Top Notch Product" in construction and design, holds a deadly secret that threatens the very existence of occupational health and safety.

Findings from Safe Work Australia have outlined the grave health risks associated with working with engineered stone and have recommended a ban on the product no later than June 2024. Silica dust, a byproduct of cutting, grinding, or polishing these materials, has been identified as a silent killer in the construction industry. Inhalation of silica dust has been linked to debilitating lung diseases, including silicosis—an irreversible and potentially fatal condition. The evidence is staggering, and the toll on workers' lives is immeasurable.

Our National Union, backed by our leaders Christy Cain, Zach Smith and Paddy Crumlin, call for a full ban on these products, not a feather duster approach, we as a union ask for a measured response to this growing crisis that has been ignored for way too long. This isn't a battle against progress; it's a plea for the prioritisation of human lives over profit margins. Workers have a right to a safe working environment, free from chronic illnesses that could, and should be prevented.

To top it off, we have our friends on a very well-known TV renovation show promoting these products that kill workers. It's disheartening to witness publicly known figures and popular television shows downplaying and outright lying about the health issue that engineered stone create.

The public listens to these personalities and programs, thinking they have their best interests at heart. However, the misinformation televised by such figures not only breaks down the health of workers but also undermines the public's ability to make informed decisions.

This TV personality Carpenter now turned Host who is undoubtedly one of the most prominent figures in the construction and television industry, carries a responsibility to prioritise truth and transparency. If he, or any other public figure, knowingly misrepresents the dangers of engineered stone, they are contributing to the negligence that puts workers at risk and ultimately, have blood on their hands. This is not a matter to be taken lightly, it's a breach of trust with the public, and more importantly, with the hardworking construction workers whose lives hang in the balance.

The broadcast of this popular home renovation show holds great influence over public perceptions of construction practices. If it televises falsehoods about the safety of materials like engineered stone, it becomes a part of the problem that is dangerous and could lead to deadly consequences for workers across the country.

In the end, this is not just about trying to fix a wrong, it is about doing what's right for all construction workers, members of our great union or our comrades in the housing sector. It's about the people who build our homes, shape our communities, and put a roof over our heads. The campaign for a ban on engineered stone is a cry for justice, a demand for accountability, and a stand against the corruption of trust that occurs when those in positions of influence prioritize profit over people. We will never stop fighting for the health and safety of our members and we will always stand up for what is right!

“NO MORE COMPROMISE, NO MORE DECEIT, ENGINEERED STONE, FACE YOUR DEFEAT!”

In Unity, **James Simpson** (Simo)

OUR HISTORY, NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

I hope you enjoyed reading about the history of our great Union. A special thank you to Roger Wilson for taking the time to educate our CFMMEU membership on the SUA's amazing history in this edition, and a very big thank you to Emma Cain for sitting down with Roger to document this wonderful story.

Our next newsletter will feature a timeline of how we became the CFMMEU, featuring all the amalgamated unions from the beginning, along with an article from Ralph Edwards, retired President of the Construction Division, Vic Branch.

I urge you to take the time to sit with our veterans and learn about some of their achievements that shaped the union we are all part of today.

In Unity,

Christy Cain
National Secretary
CFMMEU

