During the last few days of the Autumn Session the Minister for Labour, Mr. McMahon, introduced a Bill to give Long Service Leave to regular wharf labourers. This legislation was strongly attacked by the Labour Party on the ground that certain conditions were attached to this privilege. The Labour Party argued that Long Service Leave was a right, and that there should be no strings attached to it. The Government, on the other hand, argues that the wharf industry represents special problems and special methods are needed to overcome these problems.

It is well known that the history of the waterfront has been a turbulent one, and industrial peace has never endured for more than a short period of time. This might, to some extent, be due to the nature of the industry, but it is in no small measure due to the leadership of the industry.

In 1959 the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission made a new comprehensive award for the waterfront. This gave substantial advantages to the waterside workers Federation and there was then reason to hope that the new charter for the waterfront and the new code of conditions of employment would begin an era of peace. These hopes were not fulfilled. In 1958-59 there was loss of 345 thousand man-hours on the waterfront. In 1959-60 the loss rose to over 800 thousand, while in the first half of 1960-61 nearly as many man-hours were lost as were lost in the whole of the previous year.

Over the last five years nearly 30% of the total days lost for industrial disputes in Australia have been lost by some 20 thousand waterside workers out of well over 3 million wage and salary earners. That is 30% of total days lost have been lost by 1% of the wage and salary earners. This is an appalling record, and it is a record that is vitally important to Australia because delays on the waterfront increase our costs of transport; increase the costs of shipping our primary produce abroad. The delays on the waterfront give the Conference Lines Shipping Companies their principal arguments for increasing the cost of freight from Australia to the markets of the world.

Partly as a result of this process, over the last four years over 4,000 waterside workers have lost their jobs, because if cargoes can be shipped overland they are shipped overland. However, so far as overseas trade is concerned there is no alternative but to ship our goods by sea. What the waterside workers have done in increasing our costs is of vital importance to Australia for the simple reason that as many other things do it bears heavily on primary producers.

47% of all the hours lost in 1959-60 were lost in 107 unauthorised 24-hour port stoppages and this, despite the machinery available for the resolving of industrial disputes, and the Commission's decision in 1959 that each Branch could hold eight half-day stop work meetings a year. In addition to this, if
a Branch can show the Commission that there is good reason to have an additional stoppage this can be applied for from the Commission.

However, the great bulk of the stoppages on the waterfront are completely unauthorised. It is quite clear legitimate industrial disputes can and do arise on the waterfront. There is machinery to overcome these disputes and it doesn't require a stoppage of the whole port to overcome them. When you analyse why the bulk of unauthorised stoppages have been held you find that very often as not the cause of the stoppage has nothing whatever to do with industrial conditions on the waterfront. Stoppages have been called to try and muster support for Castro's Cuba or for the communist led peace fronts - "Ban the Atom Bombs"; and the press attitude to Unity Tickets; Crimes Act; Actions by State Governments and other subjects have been discussed at these stop-work meetings. These are not industrial matters; stoppages should not be tolerated to discuss these matters.

What would a Factory Manager say if his men decided to stop work to discuss the press attitude to current political problems - matters that had nothing whatever to do with their own particular employment. This is what waterside workers have done, not once but many times.

It is worth noting that waterside workers do not pay for stoppages, they do not lose wages. On the contrary, they can often gain increased pay as a result of stoppages. If a factory stops work the production is something that is never caught up, but if the wharf stops work the ships are still there to be unloaded or to be loaded, and if there is a backlog of ships that means working overtime at time and a half or at double time rates. Even if a port stops work for twentyfour hours, for two days, or for a week the work is still there and the work still has to be done- the waterside worker is still going to get paid often at penalty rates. It is Australia that pays for these stoppages because of the increased cost of transport.

It is true that the Union can be fined the maximum of £500, but when you work it out it cojes to 6d. per members, and a fine of 6d. per member for a waterside worker is a pretty remote business and does not deter him from holding the stoppages.

It was for all these reasons that the Government felt it necessary and indeed vital to try and have some strings attached to the long service leave that is going to be made available to waterside workers.

The privileges are firstly these. A man will get three months long service leave after 20 years qualifying service, and 6½ weeks for each subsequent 10 years. This is at continuous ports, and by that it is meant that where men have to attend daily throughout the year.

The strings tied to these privileges are these. If there was a port stoppage involving more than 250 or one-third of the men at the port, the men involved will lose certain benefits unless the Union can satisfy the Conciliation and Arbitration
Commission that the stoppage was justified. For every day of such an unauthorised port stoppage the men involved will lose attendance money on four occasions when they would otherwise receive it, and their qualifying period for long service leave will be deferred by the day or will be deferred by up to a month as the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission determines.

It is worth noting that this first proposal is not new. Under the Arbitration Act the Stevedoring Industry Authority can now suspend attendance money where there is concern at mass action. In addition, the second provision appears in the Coal Mining Act, where men take part in unauthorised stoppages the period lost is deducted from the qualifying period for long service. The purpose of this provision, especially the loss of attendance money, is to try to bring home to every individual waterside that when he is taking part in an unauthorised stoppage he is going to have to bear some cost of that stoppage. In the past he has taken part in the stoppage and has experienced no penalty. There has been no loss of wages because the ships have still had to be unloaded at some future time and, as I have said, at penalty rates.

On the other hand, for waterside workers with a sense of responsibility, not only to their Union but also to the Nation and with some desire to improve conditions on the waterfront in relation to transport costs, then there is a very real benefit in the form of the long service leave that I have mentioned. It is only to be hoped that the thinking watersiders, whom I am confident are in a majority, will now exert their influence to a greater degree than in the past and not follow blindly where the leaders of the industry dictate. The legislation passed in the last Parliament gives such men the opportunity and the incentive to stand out against unauthorised stoppages and to do something to reduce the tremendous loss of man hours on the waterfront.
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