

RIG WORKERS VOICE

Feb 2010

Issue 31



Rig Workers Held Captive in Singapore win their freedom

For the past two weeks Norwegian offshore drilling company Songa Offshore, operators of the Australian manned drilling rig Songa Venus, have been refusing the right to shore leave for rig workers whilst the rig is in Singapore for survey and refit work. The rig is moored alongside the wharf at Keppel Dock with full gangway facilities allowing free and easy access to shore.

Whilst Songa management have been able to come and go each day, no doubt enjoying the finest of hospitality that Singapore has to offer, the workers have been continually denied shore leave for reasons that can only be described as draconian. Songa management have been refusing shore leave on the basis that there is a zero tolerance to alcohol consumption whilst on the rig in Singapore and the workers cannot be trusted to abstain if they were to go ashore.

Alliance members onboard the rig had repeatedly requested shore leave so they could make contact with their families, buy toiletries and enjoy the sights of Singapore in their own time but were refused time and again with Songa virtually holding them captive on the rig for the full length of their hitch (three weeks).

Communications from the rig back to Australia have been intermittent at best with Alliance members having to rely on those lucky enough to get ashore, local workers, who have been so kind to assist with the purchase of phone cards so that personal phones can be used from the rig.

Alliance Officials Ian Bray and Glen Williams have been in discussions with the employer of the workers, Offshore Marine Services (OMS), for the past week and whilst OMS have been willing to assist in the granting of shore leave Songa continued to refuse the workers the right to shore leave.

The Alliance can today announce that, through the solidarity of the members onboard the Songa Venus and the work of the officials behind the scenes, all workers on the Songa Venus now have the right to shore leave at anytime during their off shift time. The continual frustration of the consultative process led the Alliance to develop a comprehensive strategy to apply pressure to Songa which finally forced their hand and achieve what is nothing short of a great result for the members. This once again shows what can be achieved if there is unity in the workplace amongst the workers. This has been an unprecedented attack on the most basic human right, the right to your freedom and all involved should be congratulated for seeing this dispute through to an outstanding conclusion.

During the dispute one Songa representative onboard the rig has been quoted as telling workers that "There will be no shore leave because you have gone to the union for assistance". The right to belong to a union is enshrined in legislation through freedom of association laws and the Alliance now calls on Songa to denounce the statement by one of its managers and immediately issue a public apology to all workers on the rig.

The Alliance will continue to fight for the rights of its members and all workers on drilling rigs as it is clear drilling companies operating in the Australian offshore oil and gas industry have scant regard for the rights of its workers.

Join the campaign and make your rig a union rig.

The MUA-AWU Offshore Alliance is YOUR voice!!

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