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# Australian sailors travel to Denmark to protest against the Maersk company

When AP Møller - Mærsk holds a general meeting today after a year in which they have shoveled in money, the company's management will be met by angry sailors from Australia, who are protesting about poor conditions.

Maersk landed a record profit of DKK 203 billion in 2022, but now Australian seamen are protesting their terms.

Mads Claus Rasmussen/Ritzau Scanpix

Australian seafarers are dissatisfied that the shipping company Svitzer, which is 100 percent owned by Denmark's Mærsk, has not yet entered into a new, binding agreement in Australia after four years of dispute.

On the contrary, the company is trying to be released from an existing collective agreement, which, according to the trade union Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), will mean almost halving the salary for the employees, who at the same time lose job security.

That is why the Australian sailors have traveled thousands of kilometers to protest on the Esplanade in Copenhagen, where Maersk has its Danish headquarters.

- We have come to Copenhagen because we have run out of options. The sailors have not had pay increases for four years despite the massive inflation. And if the company succeeds in canceling the collective agreement,

the employees may end up on the minimum wage instead. This will mean that wages will drop by 47 percent, says Jamie Newlyn, vice-chairman of the MUA.



A number of trade unionists from Australia and the Netherlands as well as the International Transport Workers' Federation, ITF, will hold a press conference on Tuesday about the pending conflict in front of AP Møller - Maersk's headquarters on the Esplanade at 2 p.m., just before the shipping giant's general meeting.

Maersk landed a record profit of DKK 203 billion in 2022. It is the largest profit a Danish company has ever presented.

## **“Advice to pay a decent salary”**

According to the trade union MUA, the seafarers in Australia risk becoming temporary workers instead of permanent employees and thus find themselves in a much more precarious situation.

- Maersk has had billions in profits in recent years, and Svitzer is an excellent business. They can afford to pay a decent salary. We do not believe that Maersk meets its own ethical guidelines when fighting collective agreements in Australia, says Jamie Newlyn.

Svitzer is a global tugboat company that operates in 32 countries and has been owned by AP Møller - Maersk since 1979.

The company has a wide range of activities in Australian ports with a fleet of around 100 boats.

## **Would paralyze 17 ports**

Since February 2022, Svitzer has sought to have its collective agreements with three Australian unions void through proceedings in the Labor Court of Australia.

In November last year, the conflict further intensified when Svitzer announced a lockout of 592 employees. However, it was initially prevented by the Australian authorities, who assessed that the company would thus threaten "the welfare of the population" and "damage the Australian economy", and therefore suspended the lockout.

Svitzer's tugboats are absolutely vital for the country: the authorities concluded that a lockout would stop container traffic in 17 Australian ports and paralyze as much as 65 percent of the country's imports.

## **Denies the charges**

Svitzer, which is headquartered in Copenhagen, rejects the criticism.

- Svitzer in Australia has negotiated in good faith over a period of almost four years to reach a new agreement and has participated in more than 80 meetings with trade unions, reads a written statement.

- The lockout announced by Svitzer in November 2022 was a legal response by employers to intensive and damaging work stoppages and actions by unions. More than 1,100 strikes were reported by the trade unions in the period October 2020 to November 2022, the company further replies.

In addition, the group's press department emphasizes in its response that it "faces increased competition and increased expenses" and lost more than 130 jobs in 2021.

It has not been possible to get a comment from Svitzer's managing director, Kasper Friis Nilaus.

In April last year, Svitzer in Great Britain was also hit by several strikes, as a result of the company freezing the employees' wages.

The trade magazine 3F has tried to get a comment from Mærsk, but here reference is made to Svitzer.