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Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers

OPEN LETTER

TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY CAUCUS

On August 13th Transport Minister Albanese announced a legislative review of the Shipping Industry. In late January 2011, he announced three separate Reference Groups to report on ways to rejuvenate the industry.

In these committees he has deliberately excluded the elected representatives of the maritime Officers from any meaningful role. The Minister has offered only minor roles to particular individuals, selected by him, on the committee that has by far the least relevance to the outcomes of reform ie: training.

Engineering and Deck Officers make up over 50% of the Maritime Industry and their relevant unions have had leading roles in every review since the Crawford Reports in 1982, almost 30 years. Why has this Minister denied us a seat at the main committees?

The AIMPE is an affiliate of the Australian Labor Party, a political party that extols the virtue of open and robust debate, why then do the foreign ship owners who have

- utilized the worst excesses of Work Choices Legislation
 - crew their vessels with up to 90% s.457 Visa non-domiciled officers
 - replaced Australian crewed vessels with foreign vessels in the coastal trade
- have a seat at the table and the elected representatives of those displaced officers do not?

In an article in The Australian January 2008, Minister Albanese said "The Howard Government was too busy picking fights with unions to fix the major infrastructure and skill shortages in Australian ports." The Minister in the same article proposed to canvass with ship owners and unions (plural) on shipping reform issues. By this exclusion he is not fulfilling that declared intention.

To deny the elected representatives of Harbour Masters, Pilots, Superintendent Engineers, Chief Engineers, Engineer Officers, Captains, Deck Officers, Surveyors etc, from the process of shipping reform defies logic. This denial is also contrary to the public interest as the Reference Group on Taxation will principally be concerned with benefits to shipowners as well as benefits to Deck & Engineer officers who work on international-trading ships of any country. These are core issues for the officer unions and of little relevance to any other union. Similarly the Reference Group on Regulatory reforms will establish the shape of reform of the Howard-era PERMIT & LICENCING weaknesses in the Navigation Act which have destroyed the viability of Australian ownership and operation of ships. Neither the companies currently sailing in Australia's domestic industry with Mixed-Crews of Australian Ratings and s.457 foreign officers, nor any other union, is able to represent our professional and strategic interests.

Significantly, the Minister expects all 3 unions to support the outcome of this process by agreeing to a 'union-shipowner' compact of trade-offs and efficiencies; this will be impossible for our membership to accept without full participation in the entire process.

As some of the caucus know, we have attempted to deal with this exclusion internally via party channels. This has been unsuccessful. It seems that while a strategic union that contributes as heavily as it can to party aims can be excluded, the foreign ship owners who use expensive lobbyists are not. We ask that the caucus collectively hold the Minister to his public undertakings.

There must be at least a semblance of balance.

Labor Party factional bias should play no part in the selection of only the MUA on these committees. The Minister has a greater responsibility to the party as a whole and to the public interest.

I remain fraternally yours,

Terry Snee
Federal President AIMPE

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AIMPE