

“Don’t add my body to your deadline!”

by Nick G

Another worker’s body has been added to the line of dead from construction sites around Australia. Yet another workplace has been added to those whose walls are built over a framework of human flesh.

The latest act of industrial manslaughter has taken place at the Adelaide Desalination Plant site where a 35 year old man - a father of a twelve month old child - was crushed to death by a steel beam that fell from the soft sling of a crane.

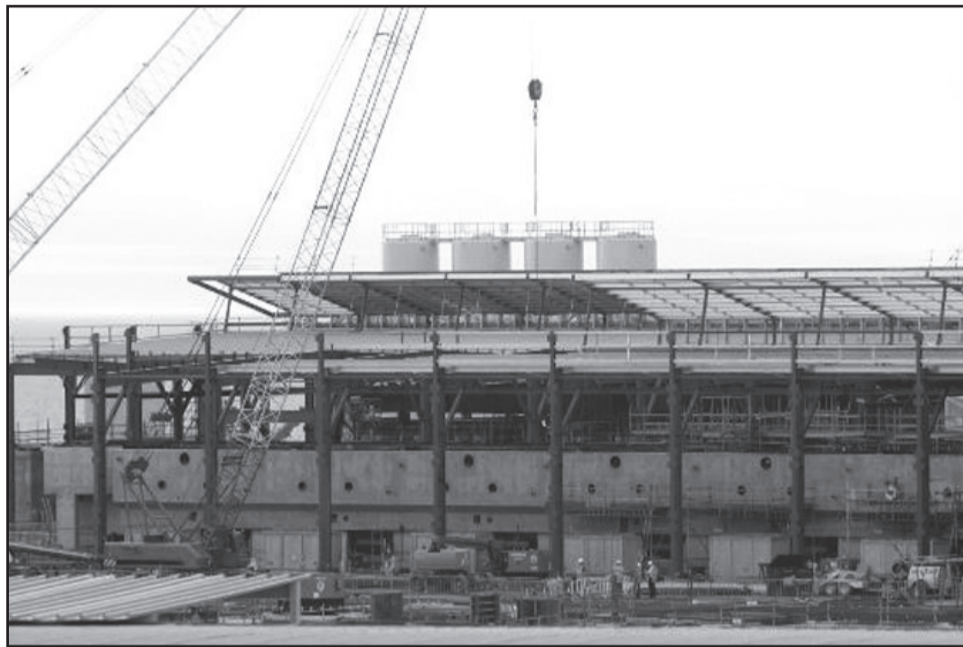
The death occurred the day after the site had been given a safety clearance by the Federal Safety Commission.

It occurred three days before Ark Tribe, facing six months gaol for refusing to attend an ABCC interrogation into a safety-related issue, was due to return to the courts of the capitalist class.

It occurred at a time when there is growing concern -and rightly - about the mounting death toll of Australian soldiers in Afghanistan, but complete silence from politicians of both major parties about the growing death toll of the army of the industrial working class.

Seven thousand die each year in this country from work-related causes.

State Secretary of the CFMEU Martin O’Malley said the desalination plant site had been working at full speed for several months, with three shifts of up to 1300 people working seven days a



Adelaide Desalination Plant worksite

week, “just so some bloody politician can turn on a tap in December”.

Short-cutting safety

State Treasurer Kevin Foley declared in April 2008 that he wanted to deliver the Adelaide desal plant “as fast as we can”.

Political grandstanding around an unwanted, environmentally dangerous project that would see water rates soar, combined with a savage disciplining of labour time as three separate sub-contractors struggled to ensure a continuous flow of materials and coordination of tasks throughout the site.

Hence the use of the soft slings - fibreglass threaded material that ensures that steel is not scratched when it is lifted: scratched steel needs to be painted before work can proceed.

But soft slings do not secure steel beams in the same way as slings made from chains and wire. They are meant to be subjected to regular stress tests, but are difficult to examine for wear and fatigue and can weaken and fail without notice.

This has been pointed out time and again by the union on sites all over the city, but the practice continues because repainting scratched steel means a loss of labour time used in the production of

surplus value - the source of capitalist profit.

“Soft slings are useless,” O’Malley said. “We are not going to have these bloody slings in the industry. We’re not going to cop another death.”

More problems identified

To clean up the desal plant site, the CFMEU and AMWU have met with site operators Adelaide Aqua (a consortium consisting of Spain’s Acciona Aqua, the UK’s United Utilities, Germany’s Abigroup Contractors and Australia’s McConnell Dowell) and identified around 300 matters that need to be fixed.

Some workers have refused to go back to work until the problems are fixed.

While the bosses were driven by greed for profits, workers at the plant have selflessly pledged a day’s pay in support of their dead colleague’s family.

The important lesson from this tragedy - from this crime of industrial manslaughter - is for construction workers not to be intimidated by the thugs of the ABCC, but to stand tall like Ark Tribe and dare to defy the monopolies and their deadlines.

No more bodies for the deadlines of the boss!

Scrap the ABCC and demand a safe workplace!

Staff take action at University of New South Wales

by David B.

If anyone thought the ‘WorkChoices’ legislation is dead they should have a look at the situation of staff at the University of NSW (UNSW).

UNSW Staff have been subjected to a systematic assault to extend and uphold ‘WorkChoices’ individual contracts and oppressive Enterprise Bargaining

Agreements over the last year. Action by the National Tertiary Education Union has grown progressively over the last 18 months as a recalcitrant administration, led by media darling former Fairfax CEO and current UNSW Vice-Chancellor Fred Hilmer, has stonewalled.

Efforts to negotiate an agreement hit a brick wall of management recalcitrance early in the piece.

The brick wall relied on Howard’s ‘WorkChoices’ and Higher Education Workplaces Relations Requirements (HEWRRs) to oppress

and exploit staff. The much trumpeted Gillard ‘Fair Work’ changes don’t make a skerrick of difference to existing individual contracts and EBAs. For months on end, university management refused to even agree to an acceptable schedule of meetings with the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) to negotiate an Enterprise Agreement.

Management refused to progress key issues for staff including academic workload, pay and conditions for casual staff and limits on the dependence on casual staff. The staff affected included all employees from cafeterias to security and maintenance as well as academic staff. UNSW Staff went on strike in September 2009.

Strikes and picket lines

By February and thoroughly fed up, staff voted for fortnightly strikes through March and April. This

“protected action” was followed by bans on the release of student results.

On March 18th, pickets were set up at the entrances to the Kensington campus from early morning, followed by a lunchtime rally. Turnout was as good as at any previous action.

The Students Representative Council, the Islamic Students Society and others passed motions supporting the staff action. The administration, through Deputy Vice-Chancellor David Henry, tried to play students off against staff, asserting pay saved from the strike would be devoted to student services. After staff were informed of a 3% “administrative pay adjustment” soon after the March action, the administration thought union action would be stymied.

Instead, staff dug in for the long haul. Academic staff decided to withhold student results until successful negotiation of the various issues in the enterprise agreement with management.

By mid July more than 80 staff from seven faculties had been stood down without pay for withholding student results. Tutors and lecturers have reported intimidation by university management in an effort to keep the old ‘WorkChoices’ EBA.

So much for democracy and people’s rights at work! Staff stood down have been receiving some support from the NTEU defence fund, including donations from students and other unions, such as the CFMEU. (Donations can be made via the NTEU website at www.nteu.org.au).

1300 students have also joined Facebook pages supporting staff.

On July 14th, the NTEU held one of its biggest ever meetings at UNSW which overwhelmingly voted to continue the ban on the transmission of results into the first week of teaching, and to escalate into strike action if the administration doesn’t concede to staff demands soon after.