
BlueScope and AWU unite to save jobs at Port Kembla steelworks

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It is reported that sparring between BlueScope Steel and Australian Workers' Union are being pushed aside as attempts are made to save thousands of jobs at the Port Kembla steelworks.

As per report, unprecedented measures are being approved by the union and BlueScope to avoid job cuts, including allowing employees to complete tasks not normally their responsibility during lulls in production.

Mr Andy Gillespie branch secretary at BlueScope said that "It's a bit of a credit to the company that they've taken the initiative and they haven't put anybody off. By the same token the union and its members have worked through these issues; we've recognized the company is in some hard times and we've done some things that we wouldn't normally do."

Mr Gillespie said that his challenge was to also protect the interests of contractors some who have taken a hit due to the crisis and to ensure role shifting endured only while steel demand was low. He added that "There is always area of disagreement, but I would say the company's industrial relations and attitude have improved over the past 12 months. We've just gone two weeks without being in the Industrial Relations Commission so that's somewhat of a record."

BlueScope Steel recently listed the range of measures it has taken in a deliberate effort to protect jobs and the long term future of our business during the global financial crisis. These include asking staff and wages employees to take some of their accrued annual and long-service leave, cutting back on discretionary spending not related to safety, idling the plant and equipment during the Christmas and Easter periods in response to reduced orders and cutting back on travel and non essential activities.

A BlueScope Steel spokesman said that "Employees are now doing some tasks previously done by contractors. We have been most appreciative of the way our employees have responded to these initiatives."

Meanwhile, Paul Howes national secretary of Australian Workers' Union also praised how BlueScope, the union and Illawarra federal MPs had been working behind the scenes to save jobs. He said that "On this question of how BlueScope have reacted with the jobs, the company should be congratulated for the way they have handled this crisis thus far. We represent 135,000 working men and women across a range of industries and in the manufacturing industry alone we have had many companies that have taken the knee jerk reaction of asking for pay cuts and pay freezes and laying off staff straight away. In the steel sector the companies have been quite responsible in the way they have handled this crisis they haven't asked for pay cuts, they haven't started with mass redundancies. I don't want to get to a situation where we see mass lay offs at the steelworks."

(Sourced from www.illawarramercury.com.au)

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