



MERSEYSIDE PORT SHOP STEWARDS

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South African Dockers to Boycott Fruit Exports to Sheerness

In a dramatic echo of the international Outspan boycott during the apartheid years, South African dockers plan to halt fruit exports to the UK in solidarity with sacked Liverpool dockers.

Oranges and other South African citrus fruit marketed by Capespan land in the UK at the Port of Sheerness, which is 100% owned and operated by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company through Medway Ports Ltd. A twenty year contract to handle Capespan imports was recently announced by Mersey Docks.

According to Medway Ports, fresh produce represents over a third of activity at the Port of Sheerness. Mersey Docks has invested over £9 million to upgrade cold storage facilities at the Sheerness Produce Terminal and a further £8 million on its new hinterland complex.

Liverpool dockers were sacked by Mersey Docks two years ago for refusing to cross a picket line, and have mounted an international campaign to win reinstatement. US longshoremen shut down all major West Coast ports in solidarity for 8 - 24 hours in January, with other industrial action stretching through 27 countries.

The South African Transport and General Workers Union has expressed strong support for the Liverpool men, recalling the 1988 blockade of South African and Namibian uranium in the Port of Liverpool before the abolition of the UK National Dock Labour Scheme.

The TGWU, affiliated to the main South African union federation COSATU, is pressing for a Dock Labour Scheme to be created in South Africa.

General Secretary Marvin Mfundisi today stated that his union is "fully behind" the planned boycott.

Mfundisi can be contacted at the TGWU on 0027 21 461 9410

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SENATOR WILLIAM ROTH, chairman of the Senate's finance committee, urged the pact's other signatories not to abandon it because of delays in Congress.

He said the finance committee's delay in considering OECD implementing legislation was "unavoidable" because of the need to complete work on US budget legislation.

But he reassured president Bill Clinton that the delay "should in no way be interpreted as a lack of resolve to bring the OECD shipbuilding agreement implementing legislature to closure".

In a statement made just before Congress entered its August recess, he added: "I strongly urge other signatory countries not to take any action that might forever

ting the legislation necessary for completion of US ratification of the agreement.

"It would be terribly counterproductive and inappropriate for other signatory countries to abandon this important agreement at this juncture in reaction to this relatively minor and unavoidable delay."

Senator Roth noted that his colleagues on the finance committee, Senators Trent Lott and John Breaux, had made "substantial progress" in resolving controversial issues surrounding some elements of the legislation.

"I expect that their work on the implementing legislation and the resolution of certain procedural issues will be concluded shortly so that we can complete committee consideration and congressional passage of

amendments to the Senate Bill which other countries may find unpalatable.

He is especially keen to protect the Jones Act, which limits US cabotage trades to US-built, US-flag vessels.

He has proposed mandatory withdrawal from the OECD pact if trade counter-measures are authorised against US shipbuilders who continue to build for the domestic market.

Congressman Bateman has also suggested the favourable Title XI loan guarantee programme should continue to be available to vessels constructed for the Jones Act after the enactment of implementing legislation.

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African union joins Mersey dispute

By Dee Rissik, Africa Editor, and David Osler

ONE of South Africa's largest trade unions has pledged to boycott vessels heading for Liverpool and sister port Sheer-

zambique, which has improved its citrus terminal and is currently seeking extra business.

ness, the long-running dispute at Mersey Docks and Harbour Company.

dispute with 329 Liverpool dockers for almost two years, when the men were dismissed after refusing to cross a picket line in September 1995.

new dedicated terminal was destroyed in what police are treating as an arson attack.

the UK, said: "We have never used Liverpool and we do not see why South African ports should be brought into this when it is not being supported in British ports."

The first major victim of any solidarity action will be fruit exporter Outspan, and its international arm Capespan.

A statement issued by Liverpool shop stewards said that Capespan had been targeted after signing a 20-year contract to ship through Sheerness which, like Liverpool, is owned by Mersey Docks and Harbour Company.

Mr Mfundisi added that if Outspan did not "do something" about the Sheerness deal, the South African TGWU could hit the company directly. "We might take action against Outspan if there is no development in favour of our Liverpool brothers," he said.

The first vessel expected to be hit by the boycott is due on the South African coast on September 9. Liverpool leaders will supply the South African union with a list of vessels that should be boycotted.

Marvin Mfundisi, vice-president of the South African Transport and General Workers' Union, said yesterday that about 10,000 dockworkers would be involved in the boycott. His union would also endeavour to bring other port unions into the fray.

Mersey Docks has invested heavily in fruit handling facilities at the Kent port, but last

ports such as Maputo in Mo-

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