

POVERTY AND INTIMIDATION AT THE GATEWAY TO MADAGASCAR

Madagascar is famous for its splendid nature and exotic animals. But this beauty hides a reality of severe, endemic poverty and labour rights violations. Poverty in Madagascar was exacerbated by a coup in 2009. Madagascan dock workers are some of the lowest paid in the world. A casual dock worker may take home less than US\$40 per month, and will struggle to support themselves and their families despite long hours doing difficult, dangerous work. In 2012, many of these workers joined the Syndicat Général Maritime de Madagascar (SYGMMMA) to fight for an end to precarious, low-paid, and unsafe working conditions at the port. These workers faced intimidation and threats to their employment, with 43 dock workers unfairly dismissed for union activity in 2012.

The *Class Struggle* is supporting these workers in their fight to improve working conditions, and to have their union SYGMMMA recognised as the representative of these workers.

Survival vs. Super Profits

The Port of Toamasina (Tamatave) handles 90 per cent of Madagascar's container traffic. The concession to operate the terminal was awarded to Filipino port company, International Container Terminal Services, Inc. (ICTSI) in May 2005. ICTSI operates 30 container terminals globally. Local ICTSI subsidiary MICTSL directly employs permanent and casual workers at the Toamasina container terminal. They also employ workers through labour-hire firm Société de Manutention des Marchandises Conventionnelles (SMMC), a state-owned enterprise.

In 2013 and 2014, the maritime research and advisory firm Drewry reported that ICTSI had the highest earnings per standard container unit (TEU) of all container operators globally, with all but one other operator reporting less than half their earnings per TEU (see Table 1). Despite this, many workers on ICTSI's container terminal in Toamasina struggle to survive.

Permanent workers are typically the more highly skilled on the docks, and perform roles such as vessel planners, gate checkers and engineers. These workers start on a base rate of US\$112/month. The more dangerous and dirty work - like lashing - is undertaken by casual workers. All but a handful of these casual workers are employed on a piece rate basis. The rate per 20-foot container is 1600 Malagasy Ariary (MGA) (US\$0.50), which is split between the 24 workers working on a shift.

The maximum number of containers that can be moved in a single eight-hour shift is 440. In other words, the maximum that each dock worker can earn in a single shift is 29,333 MGA (US\$9.15), before deductions.

However, these workers often earn significantly less, and may even return home from a shift without being paid if a ship is delayed or fails to arrive. Casual dock workers report that they are frequently rostered to work when there are no ships to unload, and they must wait around until the ship arrives to begin unloading. If the ship does not arrive before the next shift is rostered, these dock workers will return home without payment.

Some casual workers report only being paid for four shifts a month, taking home less than US\$40 a month.

Although they struggle to meet basic living costs on this salary, their ability to supplement their income is curtailed by the requirement that they wait at the docks until the ship arrives to be unloaded. Dock workers report that it is not uncommon for them to stay at the terminal overnight, sleeping at the edges of the dock, and waiting for the next ship to arrive.

Dock workers are struggling to survive. One married dock worker with two children states that his wage is only enough to cover food. His wife meets additional expenses such as rent and electricity. If their children are sick, they must borrow money so that they can see a doctor, and they cannot afford to send their children to school.

This experience contradicts ICTSI's claims to support education in the countries where it operates. While local subsidiary MICSTL may have donated three classrooms to the Analamboanio Primary School in Toamasina, to allow more than 180 students to attend school each year, this does not address the issue of

wage rates being too low to afford school fees, uniforms and material expenses. With Madaga-scan dock workers some of the lowest paid in the world, it is not difficult to see how the Port of Toamasina has become one of the primary contributors to ICTSI's revenue.

Unacceptable safety standards

Dock work is dangerous work. Every day workers face hazards like: crush injuries, death from heavy vehicles and containers, falls from heights, suspended loads, and exposure to hazardous chemicals. The ITF has long advocated for minimum safety standards at container port facilities internationally. The conditions in the ICTSI terminal fall alarmingly short of global minimum standards, including the ILO Code of Practice Health and Safety in Ports. The dock workers regularly work at heights without fall protection or safety equipment. While management may provide harnesses for workers who work at heights, these harnesses are often not secured to a tether line. All dock workers should be provided with protective equipment when working on container terminals – including safety shoes and boots. Casual workers on the ICTSI terminal report that safety equipment is insufficient, and the need to purchase their own boots in order to avoid injury, as boots provided by ICTSI are in disrepair. A new pair of boots costs 160,000 MGA (USD\$50) in Madagascar. The equivalent of a month's wages for the average casual dock worker.

Workers intimidated and dismissed for joining the union

On the 1st of March 2012, SYGMMA appointed three dele-gates to represent workers employed by the SMMC at the Port of Toamasina. Management's response to their new role was swift. Less than two weeks later, on the 13th of March 2012, SMMC management ordered the dele-gates representatives to sign a letter stating that they would resign from the union and agree not to hold union meetings. The delegates refused and were subsequently dismissed. In July 2012, SYGMMA held a strike in support of the dismissed dock workers.

Following the strike, a further 34 workers were dismissed. This is in addition to six workers who were denied shifts for union activity in May 2012.

This has been a five year fight. SYGMMA has exhausted all attempts to have the union recogni-sed at the Port of Toamasina, and the workers reinstated. SMMC has repeatedly refused to meet with the union and the regional Labour Inspectorate to discuss their case. SMMC has failed to enforce a 2014 court ruling recognising the right of SYGMMA to organise at the Port of Toamasina. None of the 43 workers who were dismissed for union activity have been reinstated. Most have struggled to find regular work, and subsist from traditional fishing, driving rickshaws, helping their wives sell vegetables at the markets, and intermittent work as gardeners and cleaners. Madagascar Govern-ment to respect its commitment to the ILO Conventions by ensuring that these workers are reinstated immediately and that SYGMMA is allowed to organise workers at the Port of Toamasina.

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