

Port dispute moves to central mediation

- *But Hamnarbetarförbundets [the Swedish Dockworkers' Union] strike notice remains in force*

No resolution has been reached in the dispute between Hamnarbetarförbundet section 4, and APM Terminals. In view of that, the parties agreed last Monday to move the negotiations to central level. This means that the first central mediation between Sveriges Hamnar and Hamnarbetarförbundet will start (in Gothenburg) on Wednesday.

Despite the agreement to initiate central mediation, Hamnarbetarförbundet threat to begin strike action on Tuesday of next week has not been withdrawn.

"I would like to make it clear that, since day one, the company has been keen to reach a solution to the dispute, and bring about a work climate in which all parties' interests are satisfied. At the same time, it has been obvious that we and Hamn4an, are a long way apart when it comes to achieving concrete results. That's why we felt it was a good idea to bring fresh energy to the negotiating setting," says APM Terminals Head of HR and Labour Relations, Sophia Tuveson, who took part in the negotiations.

While she is optimistic about taking the negotiations to the next level, she does not want to speculate about how the negotiations might end:

"During the dispute, the Swedish dockworker union section 4 has expressed a wish to sign a collective agreement with the company. This is, unfortunately, not something that we at APM Terminals can do on our own, since collective agreements are signed centrally with Sveriges Hamnar."

What is the dispute about?

In addition to the issue of a collective agreement, Hamn4an put forward a list of 11 negotiating points, of which 8 still remain unsolved. Slightly simplified, the points can be divided as follows:

Negotiation procedure

Just over a year ago, we adopted a negotiation procedure under which each union, through its local chairman, represents its own members. The scope of this representation falls clearly within the framework of the Labour law. For that reason, the company sees no reason to sign any separate local agreement covering something that already falls within the legislation. In this way, no distinction is made between Hamn4an and the local branch of the Swedish Transport Workers' Union, despite the fact that only Transport has a collective agreement that includes a no-strike rule.

Holidays and customer service

Due to very extensive holiday requests, the company is finding it difficult this year, as in the past, to

draw up a plan for the summer which satisfies the increasing demand to provide normal service to our customers during the summer period. Overall absence among our workforce is around 20–25 % under normal circumstances, and around 40 % in the summer. A key answer to this problem, both for this summer and future summers, is to allow our temporary workers, colloquially known as “Blixt” workers, to drive straddle carriers, which are the most widely-used method of lifting containers at our terminal. There are no barriers to this in the collective agreement, and our neighbouring terminal can use Blixt staff for their key tasks. But long-standing local custom and practice, reinforced by a local agreement that has been in force for some years, limits this at the container terminal.

Points settled in previous negotiations

In respect of a number of issues that had previously been settled in full compliance with current labour market policy, Hamn4an has demanded changes, since their members are not happy with the outcome. It would be problematic to sign agreements with Hamn4an on these points, given that they have been settled in negotiations with parties who are covered by collective agreements, in this case the Transport Workers’ Union. At the same time, we feel that, as the employer, we have been perfectly reasonable in satisfying our workers’ interests, and the Transport Workers’ Union has not opted to take up these matters centrally, nor has it participated in the current dispute.

Staff welfare

For some considerable time, we have had very generous arrangements in place for the welfare of our staff, and we have decided to change some of them for various reasons. In some cases this is because the previous arrangements are no longer permitted, and in others the previous arrangements have been renewed. These benefits arrangements are wide-ranging, including such as TV channels and individual disciplinary issues. We feel it is unreasonable to discuss these under the threat of strike action.

About APM Terminals Gothenburg AB APM Terminals Gothenburg is the largest container terminal in the Nordic region. Over 50 per cent of all container freight to and from Sweden passes through the port. The terminal handles at least 20 arrivals each week. These include direct calls, ocean-going vessels that come directly from other continents and feeder vessels from other ports in northern Europe. APM Terminals Gothenburg is the only terminal in Sweden with the capacity to receive and handle the largest ocean-going vessels. Around half of all the container traffic to and from the port of Gothenburg is transported by rail, which has major benefits for the environment. APM Terminals, with its headquarter in The Hague, employs 20,600 people in 69 countries and has a turnover of USD 4.24 billion (2015).

