

## As Shippers Call for Biden to Intervene in Longshore Negotiations

# All Out on Juneteenth, And Stay Out to Win!

### Fight for Workers Control of Safety and Technology!

On Friday, June 2, the Port of Oakland shut down after a reported breakdown in contract negotiations with the bosses' Pacific Maritime Association. On the morning shift, SSA and TraPac terminals closed, and by Saturday a.m. nothing moved in the port, the hiring hall was empty. Also on Friday and into the weekend there were reports of terminals shutting down in Los Angeles, Long Beach and Puget Sound. In Tacoma employers fired a gang working a ship for following the safety code. On Monday, TTI, the largest terminal in Long Beach, locked out its a.m. shift. And in Seattle, starting on the night of June 1, port bosses fired whole containership operation shifts, continuing these twice-daily mass firings for a week and counting (as grain and cruise ships continued to work).

Negotiations have been going on with the PMA since May 2022. The employers are offering "raises" far less than the rate of inflation (= pay cut), and are balking on retroactive pay, let alone a COLA (cost of living adjustment) to compensate for inflation. "No contract, no work" used to be a principle for the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, but our members have been working without a contract for almost a year. The International is saying there is no breakdown, no slowdowns, no nothing: all quiet on the Western docks. Except it isn't. In April, Local 13 shut down L.A./Long Beach docks over safety issues. This time, after Local 10 in the Bay Area led off, it was echoed up and down the coast. Seattle Local 19 has braved employer sanctions for days on end, and even some bananas sat in ships' holds in Port Hueneme.

A year ago, ILWU International president Willie Adams met with the PMA and Joe Biden aboard the *USS Iowa* and issued a joint statement with the PMA, promising that "Neither party is preparing for a strike or lockout." Until June 1, the International issued periodic press releases saying that negotiations were going well, we're getting close to a positive outcome, all without any need for major industrial struggle on the docks. So much for the naïve illusion that the employers might treat us benevolently, or at least reasonably!

Now that the phony question of *whether* such struggle must occur has been dispelled, we can finally have the real discussion of *how* our side, that of labor, should organize ourselves to win this *class* struggle with capital.

On June 2, ILWU Local 13 issued a press release stating: "the rank and file members of the Southern California ILWU has taken it upon themselves to voice their displeasure with the ocean carriers' and terminal operators' position. However, cargo operations in the ports continue as longshore workers remain on the job..." This, unfortunately, is pretty accurate. It was the action of the ranks, which was quickly called off, but all the ILWU longshore division should be out on the picket lines. Meanwhile, jobs are threatened by PMA's plans for wholesale automation in the ports. There should be coordinated walkouts in all 29 West Coast ports *NOW*, and *the ILWU should call a coastwise strike demanding union control over job-killing technology.*

After the initial struggle of the first weekend in June, the National Association of Manufacturers and National Retail Federation, two of the top business cartels in the country, along with Amazon, Walmart and other big shippers are "imploping the White House" to step in and "broker a deal" (*Washington Post*, 6 June). They're looking for Democratic president Biden to do what he did to railroad workers last December when he banned an impending strike by imposing a contract on them which a majority of the union members had voted against! The workers were fighting for safer conditions in a dangerous industry like ours and for time off for doctor visits. They never got these basic demands.

*We say, "Hell no Biden!" We remember what he did in the Obama administration in 2012 when they sent an armed Coast Guard cutter down the Columbia River to escort a scab grain ship to break our action to shut down the scab EGT grain terminal in Longview, Washington. The truth is that both Democrats and Republicans represent the bosses – any reliance on them is bad news for us.*

Retro pay is an important issue, especially since ILWU members have been working without

a contract since July 1 last year. Also wages, and a COLA as workers' real incomes (after accounting for inflation) have been falling across the country. But the key item in this bargaining is automation. At issue is the future of our jobs. If we fight for 4 shifts of 6 hours with pay equivalent to an 8-hour day that will add another shift. Use automation to protect our livelihoods and open jobs for new workers. We must fight for **union control of technology. and safe working conditions.** The PMA complains about red-tagging unsafe equipment? We should make a bottom-line demand that **no red-tagged equipment goes back into service until the union says it's okay.**

To make sure these demands are met we need an **elected union strike committee**, which can be recalled by the membership at any time. And bring back "fishbowl negotiations" so we can all see what's being bargained for.

This is not pie in the sky. We can win it if we stick together. Since 1934, ILWU has won contracts setting wages and working conditions all along the coast, but lately there has been no coordinated coastwise action. It's all port by port. We need to say: *if one port goes out, we all go out!* We can't allow employers to fire the gangs on the ship while the yard longshore workers continue working, as happened in Tacoma and other ports. To show real unity, Tacoma Local 23 should join Local 19 in Seattle for the Juneteenth rally. The whole ILWU should also take the lead fighting for all working people and defending the oppressed, as our action pointed to on Juneteenth 2020, shutting down the whole coast to demand an end to systemic racism and police terror.

***This Juneteenth, 19 June 2023, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union should again shut down all West Coast ports, and keep them shut until our demands are met! And we should call on the International Longshoremen's***

June 9, 2023

Jack Heyman Local 10 Oakland (#8780 retired)  
David "Newt" Newton Local 10 Oakland (#101386)  
Dan Coffman (#92556 past president of Longview, WA Local 21)  
Jack Mulcahy Local 8 Portland (#82013 retired)  
Larry Wright Local 10 Oakland (#8534 retired)

***Association (ILA) and its locals to join us on Juneteenth in what would be a historic coast-to-coast dock strike commemorating the final abolition of chattel slavery in the U.S. and continuing the fight against racial oppression.***

Yes, it will take a hard-fought strike to win this. To make sure the shipping bosses don't undercut it by shifting cargo to Gulf and East Coast ports (as they have been doing in anticipation of labor turmoil on the West Coast), **ILWU must call on the ILA to refuse to work cargo of ships diverted because of labor struggle.** When workers are in struggle, **diverted cargo is scab cargo.** In 2000, ILWU took solidarity action to support the Charleston longshore struggle. Now it's time for East and Gulf Coast longshore workers to reciprocate, especially since the ILA is itself facing the threat of job-killing automation.

And against the threat of bringing in the White House (and Congress!) to crush our fight, as they did with railroad workers, we need alert all of labor and organizations of the oppressed to prepare to unleash powerful **union-led mass action to bust the union-busters!** The potential for widespread workers action **and** solidarity is also highlighted now with 340,000 UPS Teamsters taking a strike authorization vote. Teamsters and longshore workers together – that's the kind of power that can shake the country. Right now ILWU Canada is taking a strike vote, while the APWU (American Postal Workers Union) is closer to a potential strike situation than at any time since the early 1970s.

It all takes leadership. For working people to win, it is necessary to **break with the Democrats and build a class-struggle workers party** to lead the multiracial, multiethnic and international fight for a **workers government** that will put the bosses out of business for good. If we stick together and mobilize our forces, the ILWU can galvanize millions to fight. We can do it!

In honor of longshoreman Rich Lira #9315, who died in the crane on Tuesday, June 6, Local 10 shut down the Port of Oakland for 24 hours in the best tradition of the ILWU.