

US docks union accepts job cuts, concessions in tentative contract

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The tentative agreement between shipping companies and West Coast dockworkers announced on November 25 is the end product of months of cowardly maneuvering and retreat by the leadership of the International Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union (ILWU) and the AFL-CIO in the face of a joint offensive by the Pacific Maritime Association and the White House.

The contract, if ratified by the rank and file, will represent a major setback for West Coast dockworkers, eliminating hundreds of jobs and opening the door to the introduction of nonunion workers at port facilities. The ILWU membership should reject it.

ILWU President James Spinosa hailed the agreement as a “win-win for business, labor and our national economy.” President George W. Bush used almost identical language: “This agreement is good for workers, good for employers, and it’s good for America’s economy.”

The AFL-CIO union federation—in the person of Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka—played an essential part in the closed-door negotiations that led to the agreement. His role was hailed by the rabidly anti-union *Wall Street Journal* in a November 26 editorial: “Even the labor movement had lost patience” with the dockworkers, said the *Journal*, “one reason why the more moderate AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer, Richard Trumka, parachuted into negotiations to take the Luddite longshoremens in hand.”

“It was Mr. Trumka who declared this weekend’s tentative agreement showed that ‘Workers can harness technology and make it work for them.’ Technology was at the heart of the dispute, and in that regard (despite Mr. Trumka’s spin) the ports won. Pacific Maritime Association, which represents port operators, will pony up more pension money, but in return it can

implement badly needed technology, such as optical scanners and barcodes. Moreover, the PMA can continue instituting new cost-saving technology as it comes along, so that it can compete with rival docks in Europe and Asia.”



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