

ILWU ends Los Angeles port strike

Our reporter
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The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) on Tuesday ended the eight-day strike by clerical workers, which had shut down the major US ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach, California. While details of the agreement have not been made public, a spokesman for the Harbor Employers Association said the deal included “some compromise on staffing issues that were important to the employers.”

Clerical workers are expected to vote on the six-year deal over the next two weeks.

The picket lines of the 800 clerical workers were honored by thousands of dockworkers, leading to the shutdown of 10 of 14 terminals at the nation’s largest port complex and producing an estimated \$8 billion in corporate losses. The ILWU shut down the strike just at the point of its strongest impact and under conditions of a growing determination by dockworkers on both coasts to fight the decades-long attack on jobs, living standards and working conditions.

At the end of the strike, Jonathan Gold of the National Retail Federation expressed relief, saying, “We now hope the parties on the East Coast can reach agreement before their contract extension ends at the end of the month so we don’t have to go through a similar situation impacting all container ports along the East and Gulf coasts at the start of the new year.”

The ILWU came to an agreement shortly after accepting the demands of Los Angeles’ Democratic mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, for the intervention of a federal mediator. While the Obama administration did not intervene openly, behind the scenes it demanded a quick end to the strike.

A consortium of business interests had urged the White House to use the Taft-Hartley Act to break the strike. President Bush utilized the 1947 legislation to end a port lockout on the West Coast in 2002.

Management demanded that they not be forced to replace retiring workers or provide temporary staff to cover workers on leave if they thought it wasn’t necessary.

Predictably, the ILWU declared its sellout a “victory,” with ILWU leader John Fageaux claiming, “This was a community effort that will benefit working families for many years to come.” Officials said the deal won “new protections that will help prevent jobs from being outsourced to Texas, Taiwan and beyond.”

Rejecting any fight for the international unity of the working class, the ILWU and other unions have responded to outsourcing by collaborating with big business to systematically lower the wages of American workers in order to make them competitive with workers in low-wage countries. In order to maintain “American jobs”—and millions of dollars in union dues—the ILWU has fully embraced the “in-sourcing” strategy, which the Obama administration has put at the center of its economic policy.

The ILWU recently sought and received an extension of negotiations with Northwest US grain terminal owners, from November 28 to December 8. In February, the ILWU gave away significant concessions in a contract with the Export Grain Terminal, including the union’s hiring prerogatives. Without the extension, strike actions would have broken out in the Northwest almost simultaneously with those in Los Angeles.

Recognizing the growing anger of clerical workers, who have been working without a contract for two years, the ILWU called a limited strike to let off steam, and then cut a deal before the struggle threatened to get out of hand. A similar maneuver was carried out by the Service Employee International Union, which called a 24-hour walkout last month, involving 220 Port of Oakland workers. Electricians, janitors, clerical and security workers set up pickets. These actions, which have earned the union apparatus great enthusiasm from

a host of middle class “left” groups, including remnants of the Occupy movement, have been aimed a refurbishing the image of the discredited trade unions.

The other dockworkers union, the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), which represents about 15,000 dockworkers at ports stretching from Maine to Texas, is set to meet with the US Maritime Alliance and federal mediators for two days of negotiations beginning Monday. The ILA called off a potential strike in September—and agreed to extend the contract to December 29—after federal mediators stepped in.

The eight-day strike revealed the enormous potential power of the working class. The main obstacle confronting the working class is the unions, which deliberately isolated the strike and prevented it from spreading and becoming the focal point for a counter-offensive against the corporate-government drive to impoverish the working class.



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