

As port disruptions continue, big business lobby groups call on Biden to step in with railroad-style intervention

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In the face of militant dockworker actions that have continued to cause disruptions at several major international West Coast ports, two major trade groups—the National Retail Federation and the National Association of Manufacturers—issued statements on Monday demanding that President Joe Biden intervene and dictatorially force through a contract, as he did last year with the railroad workers.

On Monday, the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), which represents the major international shipping companies, reported that “work actions” at the ports by dockworkers “have slowed operations at key marine terminals.” The PMA accused workers of “slowing operations, and making unfounded health and safety claims.”

In a statement posted on Twitter, June 5, Jay Timmons, the president and CEO of the National Association of Manufactures, wrote that “even a temporary shutdown at the West Coast’s busiest ports will result in massive economic loss and endanger thousands of manufacturing jobs. Manufacturers implore the @WhiteHouse to bring negotiating parties together and reopen America’s shipping gateways on the West Coast.”

David French, Senior Vice President of Government Relations for the National Retail Federation (NRF), issued a statement also on Monday warning that the West Coast ports “play a critical role in the vitality of the American economy. Thousands of retailers and other businesses depend on smooth and efficient operations at the ports to deliver goods to consumers every day.

“It is imperative,” French wrote, “that the parties return to the negotiating table. We urge the administration to mediate to ensure the parties quickly finalize a new contract without additional disruptions.”

This is the third statement in the last year that the NRF has issued demanding the White House intervene to force a contract on dockworkers. Notably, the NRF also spearheaded Wall Street efforts to force through a railroad contract last year, issuing similar statements demanding Biden keep the trains running on time.

Following the bipartisan passage of H.J. Res. 100, which imposed a contract railroad workers had already rejected, the NRF released a statement commending “congressional leaders” for “Swift Action to Prevent [a] Catastrophic Rail Strike.”

Negotiations between the ILWU and the PMA have been ongoing since last May. Since last July, over 22,000 West Coast dockworkers at 29 ports from Washington to California, in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), have been forced to work without a contract. In that time, the PMA and ILWU have released several joint statements pledging no lockouts or strikes, and to keep discussions between the negotiating teams secret from the public, and from dockworkers themselves.

Making a mockery of the longtime labor maxim “No contract, no work,” the ILWU bureaucracy, which has worked hand in glove with the Biden administration to keep ports operating on a 24/7 schedule since October 2021, have not even given their members the option to

even vote on a strike authorization.

Beginning last Friday and continuing through this week, operations at several West Coast ports, including the Ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, Seattle and Oakland, have slowed to a crawl after furious dockworkers found out last week that the proposed tentative agreement included an across-the-board \$1.56 wage increase, well below inflation.

On Wednesday, the *American Journal of Transportation* reported that the ILWU was requesting a \$7.50 wage increase per hour, for each year of the proposed six-year contract, a demand that will never be met by the corporations without a massive strike by dockworkers.

Speaking to AJT, Peter Tirschwell, vice president for global intelligence and analytics at S&P Global Market Intelligence, told the publication, “The longshoremen want the type of increases that fully reflect the profitability that the carriers had earned during Covid as if that profitability was continuing—and it’s not, that’s where the clash is.”

As was the case with the rail struggle last year, the Biden administration has made it clear it will not brook any major disruptions on the ports that would interfere with profits, or the ongoing delivery of war material to Ukraine and Taiwan.

Asked by a reporter during the White House press briefing on Wednesday if the administration had any plans to “intervene” in the dockworker’s struggle, or the upcoming potential strike by 340,000 UPS workers, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre affirmed the White House was actively doing so.

“When it comes to the West ports,” Jean-Pierre said, “Acting Secretary [of Labor [Julie] Su and others in the administration are regularly engaging with the parties, encouraging them to stay at the negotiating table and finish their work.”

Pressed if Su, who has yet to be confirmed by the Senate after being nominated by Biden this past March, could play an “active role” as an “acting secretary,”

Jean-Pierre quickly responded, “Absolutely. Remember this was an acting secretary that was a deputy secretary under Secretary [Marty] Walsh for the first almost two years and so we have complete confidence in acting Secretary Su.”

Jean-Pierre added that Su, the former secretary of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, had “strong relationships with these different labor organizations and we believe with her leadership, certainly she will engage in a way with the parties that will be effective.”

In an article posted on Tuesday, the *Washington Post* confirmed through a Labor Department spokesman that as recently as last Friday, Su was meeting with ILWU bureaucrats and the PMA. “Talks are progressing, and she will continue to do what is necessary to help them continue to work toward a deal,” the spokesman told the *Post*.

The fact that the Biden administration is, and has been, actively involved in the “negotiations” with ILWU and PMA representatives, while workers are left in the dark, is a serious warning to dockworkers that a massive state-imposed sellout is on the horizon. The White House is preparing similar police-state style measures against longshore workers.

In order to defeat this conspiracy, it is imperative that dockworkers begin to organize independently of the Democratic Party-controlled ILWU, and instead begin to form networks of rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves, in alliance with other sections of the working class, such as UPS workers, Clarios workers, and striking writers. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges all dockworkers interested in this fight to contact us by filling out the form below.



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