

ILWU local president at Port of San Diego threatens to blacklist dockworkers who talk to reporters

David Rye
12 June 2023

Officials from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) are terrified that rank-and-file workers are speaking out and discussing collective action to defend their wages and working conditions. On Monday, June 12, an ILWU local union president at the Port of San Diego went so far as to threaten the job and livelihood of any longshore worker who spoke to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about the issues in their struggle.

For nearly a year, the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), the Biden administration and the ILWU bureaucracy have kept over 22,000 West Coast dockworkers on the job without a contract or even a strike authorization vote. Tensions on the docks are beginning to boil over. Since June 2, major job actions by dockworkers have slowed, or in some cases, closed terminals at the Ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, Tacoma, Oakland and Seattle. As reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*, these job actions were taken by rank-and-file workers after learning that the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) was proposing a \$1.56 pay increase across all three tiers: A, B and casual.

In an attempt to break through the information blackout that has been imposed by the ILWU, PMA and the White House since the onset of “negotiations” more than a year ago, on Monday WSWs reporters distributed dozens of leaflets and spoke to longshoremen on the public sidewalk outside ILWU Local 29 dispatch in National City, California, where the Port of San Diego is located. The leaflets included copies of a WSWs article warning that the same major business groups that demanded that the Biden administration outlaw a strike by railroad workers last

year and impose a pro-company contract on them were calling on Biden to do the same thing to dockworkers.

After about 30 minutes of discussions with dockworkers, WSWs reporters were confronted by ILWU Local 29 President Raymond Leyba. In the video below, Leyba is seen in a yellow vest holding a leaflet and demanding to know who the WSWs reporters were. After they identified themselves and said they were there to gather interviews from dockworkers, Leyba replied, “You are not interviewing anyone out of this local. The only one you are allowed to interview is me, I am the president, and I don’t interview.”

WSWS reporters stood their ground and asserted their right to interview workers and for workers to express themselves without harassment. Leyba, who has been an official in the local since 2007, responded by threatening to retaliate against any dockworker who spoke with the WSWs. “You may have a right, but if they talk to you, I have a right to *not give them any work* [emphasis added],” Leyba declared.

Immediately afterwards, Leyba addressed a group of casual dockworkers waiting in the parking lot, demanding they turn over the WSWs leaflets to him.

This attack on democratic rights shows just how far the ILWU has degenerated. One of the key demands won in the historic West Coast Longshoremen Strike of 1934 was an end to the “shape up” system, by which the company controlled hiring and blacklisted left-wing and militant workers. As a result of the strike workers won union hiring halls, which gave the ILWU some control over jobs and hiring.

Instead of company goons threatening to deprive workers of their livelihoods if they expose and fight the miserable conditions they face, the port and ship owners rely on ILWU functionaries like Lebya to blacklist workers who exercise their First Amendment rights.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact