

Stop the ILWU's threats of blacklisting against workers for talking with reporters!

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Send in your statements of support for workers targeted for speaking out by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The World Socialist Web Site demands an immediate halt to all threats by the bureaucrats of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) against workers for speaking with reporters.

On Monday, ILWU Local 29 union President Raymond Leyba threatened longshore workers with their jobs during the morning call for speaking to WSWs reporters. In a tirade caught on video, Leyba threatened, “You may have a right, but if they talk to you, I have a right to *not give them any work.*” [Emphasis added]

Leyba doubled down in a post the following day in the Local 29 Facebook group, where he has called out three casual workers for taking leaflets from WSWs reporters, who asked about working conditions.

“I have a MAJOR issue with these casuals,” Leyba roared. “It was reported that you three gave a statement to the WSWs reporter. ... You are just casuals, you do not have liberty to speak to anyone representing any publication in regards to ILWU/PMA contact [sic] negotiations. No matter how much you think you know, you don’t! We will have a conversation ASAP about you speaking to these people yesterday (Monday morning). Also be advised; to the registered members who were speaking to the press, there will be consequences.”

Leyba speaks to the workers who fund his salary with their dues in the manner of a dictator. Leyba may think that workers “don’t have the liberty to speak to anyone,” but workers are not his peasants. They have the right to freedom of speech and association under the First Amendment.

He denigrates the history of the struggle on the West

Coast docks. One of the central aims of the historic 1934 strike was an end to the retaliation against workers for their political views. Now, acting as management’s attack dog, he threatens workers with termination for speaking out.

What is Leyba and the ILWU bureaucracy afraid of? The WSWs reporting team was speaking to workers about the lack of a strike authorization vote, more than a year after their contract expired, and was bringing them news of a more than 99 percent strike authorization vote of ILWU members in Canada and discussing the prospects of a joint struggle by workers in both countries.

That, to the ILWU apparatus, is totally out of bounds. As far as they are concerned, workers do not have the right even to the most basic information.

Leyba treats workers as though they were stupid and “don’t know anything.” This from a bureaucracy which refuses to tell workers anything! There have been no meaningful updates from the union in more than a year of contract talks. The ILWU has announced periodic “tentative agreements” on various issues without telling workers a single thing about what it is they agreed to. Meanwhile, there are no secrets between the bureaucracy and the Pacific Maritime Association or with Biden Administration officials, who have been involved in the talks from the start.

At the beginning of talks, the ILWU announced a “no strike, no lockout pledge with the PMA,” a deal which was brokered by the White House, which wants to block a strike which could spread to other industries and to keep the ports open for the transit of weapons for use against Russia and China. Not a single worker was ever notified, much less consulted, before the pledge was signed. This is because workers would have refused to approve it.

Now, the “no strike pledge” is crumbling against growing rank-and-file opposition. For months, dockworkers have carried out a series of escalating job actions, which have grown as workers become more aware of the sellout terms being negotiated. Leyba’s outburst is a sign that this has the bureaucrats terrified and that they are furiously lashing out in response. It is a taste of what is to come from ILWU officials if workers decide to reject whatever sellout agreement they cook up.

A particularly sinister aspect of Leyba’s tirade is his singling out of casual workers. The ILWU bureaucracy treats this lowest tier of the port workforce like garbage. The creation of casuals was a major concession granted by ILWU President Harry Bridges in 1960. Casuals have no rights, are not even union members, and are made to line up each day waiting for a small chance of getting work. They are strung out for years, and even decades, before attaining full-time status. Leyba is trying to utilize the economic insecurity of casuals, which the ILWU has signed off on for decades, as a weapon against free speech.

Anyone who speaks in such terms to workers forfeits any claim to leadership. Workers must call out Leyba and all other ILWU bureaucrats who act similarly to account.

This incident is also a serious warning. Workers cannot afford to leave the conduct of their struggle in the hands of these would-be dictators in the union apparatus but must organize themselves to take the initiative into their own hands. Dockworkers must form rank-and-file committees to oppose this and all future attacks on their democratic rights and to fight for the principle that the will of the membership takes absolute priority.



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