

“We should have struck!” West Coast dockworkers decry White House-brokered sellout agreement

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Are you a West Coast dockworker? What do you think about the tentative agreement? Fill out the form below to let us know. All submissions will remain anonymous.

Anger is building among rank-and-file workers on the West Coast following the Wednesday announcement of a White House-brokered tentative agreement between the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) and International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). Some 22,000 dockworkers at 29 West Coast ports from Washington to California have been working without a contract for a year due to a no-strike pledge between the PMA and ILWU.

While dockworkers have not seen the agreement, the big business lobby groups that called on Biden to impose the contract already have, and are urging dockworkers to “quickly ratify” it.

“The West Coast ports are a critical artery for retailers and other businesses into the US market,” National Retail Federation President and CEO Matthew Shay said in a statement Thursday. “We urge the parties to quickly ratify the tentative agreement to bring certainty back to the West Coast ports. It is essential to begin the negotiation process early for the next labor contract and avoid a future lapse in continuity.”

While details of the agreement have not been officially made public, in a report Thursday night, the *Wall Street Journal* claimed that dockworkers would get a 32 percent pay increase over the life of the six-year contract, with a \$4.62 raise the first year and a one-time “hero bonus” for working, and dying, through the pandemic, which claimed the lives of at least 43 ILWU dockworkers.

A 32 percent increase over six years translates to just over a 5 percent raise a year, which is less than the current rate

of inflation in California. Meaning if dockworkers were to accept this contract they would, in essence, be taking a pay cut.

Immediately after the agreement ILWU International president Willie Adams and PMA President James McKenna released a joint statement noting they were “pleased to have reached an agreement” and we are ready to “turn our full attention back to the operation of the West Coast ports.”

Both the ILWU and PMA congratulated acting Labor Secretary Julie Su, who was dispatched by President Joe Biden on Monday, for giving the ILWU the necessary cover to come down from their wage demands, thereby ensuring that record profits for the shipping companies will continue unabated.

Confirming the central role of Su in forcing through the sellout agreement, Adams noted in a statement Thursday, “I want to thank all who worked so diligently on these negotiations along with a special thank you to Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su whose leadership helped us cross the finish line.”

In a video posted on Friday afternoon, Adams revealed that rank-and-file dockworkers will not see the details of the tentative agreement until at least next month, but possibly longer.

Acknowledging the mass discontent among dockworkers, Adams said, “There’s a lot of negative media going on out there about our process. For over 90 years, we’ve had, probably, the most democratic and fairest process on how we come to a conclusion for bringing the contract to our

membership.”

Adams explained that “next month we will have a longshore caucus which is the highest governing body in the longshore division. And the delegates there will see the contract in its entirety.”

Adams made clear that it is these select few in this longshore caucus that will have the privilege of discussing and debating the contract. “And then at that point,” Adams said, “they will decide if this comes to you, the rank-and-file.”

In other words, it will be weeks, or months, before rank-and-file dockworkers will have the “privilege” of seeing the agreement worked out behind closed doors by Su, the PMA and the ILWU. In the meantime, according to Adams and the ILWU, dockworkers are expected to “stay focused” and continue laboring under the current contract.

Adams did not attempt to explain why the same US president and then deputy labor secretary, who dictatorially imposed a contract that railroaders had already rejected last year, had the privilege of seeing the tentative agreement prior to the dockworkers who will be forced to labor under it for a lengthy six years.

While workers are supposed to take miserly wage increases that don’t keep pace with inflation, the container shipping CEOs have gorged themselves on multi-million dollar salaries and generous stock options. Soren Skou, former CEO of Dutch shipping giant A.P. Moller-Mersk, received a total compensation package of \$7.16 million in 2021, over a million more than he received in 2019.

Rolf Habben Jansen, CEO of Hapag-Lloyd, made \$3 million in 2021, compared to \$2.51 million in 2019, a 14 percent increase over 2 years.

Hawaii-based Matson’s CEO Matthew Cox collected \$5.96 million in total compensation in 2021, \$500,000 more than in 2020, representing a nearly 10 percent increase.

Eli Glickman, the CEO of Zim, the 10th largest liner operator in 2021, collected nearly \$10 million in compensation in 2021, a 255 percent increase from the \$2.79 million he “earned” in 2020.

While just these four CEOs commanded over \$26 million in compensation in 2021, the one-time “hero” bonus for over 20,000 dockworkers will take the form of \$70 million divided up, per the WSJ.

“Bonus are like pizza parties,” a dockworker said on social media. “A one time expense to buy us off. [An] increase in base pay would be better.”

Commenting on the central role the Biden administration played in forcing through the tentative agreement, a mechanic told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Julie Su hasn’t even been confirmed yet... Nobody wants Biden getting involved, he ruins everything he touches.

“The agreement Su helped impose on the rail workers invoked a no-strike clause, she’s no good,” he added.

Reflecting on the PMA, ILWU and White House frame-up against dockworkers, he added, “Nobody is for labor anymore... We should have struck! But what will that get us? A contract shoved down our throat by Su and Biden. There’s really no hope until politicians and CEOs are held accountable.”

In order to fight back against the Biden-imposed sellout it is vital that dockworkers reject the ILWU’s attempts to block information and keep them on the job while they work to sell a rotten agreement that has the backing of all of Wall Street. The *World Socialist Web Site* urges all rank-and-file dockworkers interested in fighting back against the ILWU, PMA, and White House frame-up to contact us today.



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