

“If we got to go on strike, so be it,” Southern California dockworker tells WSWs

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West coast dockworkers: Tell us what you think about the TA by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Two weeks after the Biden administration intervened on the West Coast docks to broker a tentative agreement, in response to a series of job actions conducted by rank-and-file workers in defiance of a union “no strike” deal, tensions on the ports have not lessened.

Since last July, over 22,000 West Coast dockworkers have continued on the job at 29 ports from Washington state to California without a contract. The West Coast docks are a pivotal chokepoint in the global economic system, with some 40 percent of US imports arriving through the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach alone.

Far from taking advantage of this, since last year the International Warehouse and Longshore Union (ILWU) has refused to even hold a strike authorization vote. Instead, ILWU president Willie Adams has released multiple joint statements with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) affirming the bureaucracy’s commitment to keeping workers on the job.

The ILWU is also deliberately isolating American dockworkers from their brothers and sisters in British Columbia, Canada, who might begin a strike as soon as this Saturday.

In an extended interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, Kevin, an A-tier Southern California dockworker (whose name has been changed to protect him from retaliation), agreed that the ILWU was working with the PMA to isolate dockworkers.

“This is supposed to be a union of the workers, and it’s ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’ The ILWU need to change that motto to ‘I will screw you 50 ways every time I can as long as I profit.’ It’s clear to see. It’s clear to see.”

“I personally don’t mind going on a strike,” he said. “I don’t know how a company can continue to make billions and billions of dollars and then offer the workers, the ones that get you these profits, pennies. It’s really frustrating. We just want what’s fair and equitable. We want to have a decent living. We want to keep up with the rising cost of everything. We want to have a decent living, and to maintain a decent lifestyle.”

“The [Tentative Agreement] is still garbage. The powers that be, all the government agencies, to me it’s just like they are padding their pockets,” he added. “The way that the [Pacific Maritime Association] is structuring this thing, they want us to starve. But you want us to do this work and provide the labor so that you continue to prosper.”

“It’s frustrating” Kevin explained. “Are we just supposed to die off, or suffer and keep dealing with poverty? While this guy’s over here eating high on the hog, wearing suits and ties, he’s not out in the field working, he’s removed from reality. So it is very frustrating. And again, me personally, I don’t have a problem with going on strike. I don’t have a problem with a strike, however long it lasts. But the point needs to be made that we’re just not gonna take this anymore.

“So if we got to go on strike, so be it,” he concluded.

Asked to comment on claims in the corporate press that A-tier dockworkers regularly make \$200,000, or more a year, Kevin replied, “No, I’m not making \$200,000 a year. It would be great. Even if I do make \$200,000 a year, then there’s taxes on that. I’m not getting a tax break. The companies are getting tax breaks.

“It’s asinine that PMA puts out just BS to try to make the laborers look like the villain, when they have been the villain the whole time. The thing is, the PMA put it out in the media over the last three to four years, the amount of profits they have made. Well, they didn’t make anything, because they were not out working on the docks.

“You didn’t come out there and turn a cone. You didn’t come out there and drive a UTR [utility tractor rig]. You didn’t come out there and stack containers in the yard or put them on the rail cars or put them up on the ship. So for you to sit there and brag about these billions and profits that you made and they offer me, pennies, I have a major problem with them.”

Drawing the connection between inequality and poverty, and mass shootings in America, Kevin said, “Everybody in America is concerned with crime and mass shootings. I don’t condone violence, but I understand how somebody can just get so frustrated and go and do something like that. I don’t understand how it is, that the powers that be, just sit here and watch everything that we need to survive rise in cost but you don’t want to give a decent raise for a person that’s out here working. How do they expect him to survive or not get involved in whatever to survive? It makes absolutely no sense to me. To me, it’s basic modern day slavery.”

“If I did half of the things that some of the people that are on the news every day are doing, you know, the ones that are wearing neckties in the Senate and the Congress, the ex-president, man, I’d be in jail forever until I prove myself innocent. Meanwhile, just because they got money, they can run around and continue to lie. And it’s a blatant lie.

“Donald Trump still walking around free, causing havoc, lock him up, there is no fair justice system.

There is no equal justice system. There’s just a system for the rich and then there’s just a system for the poor. And the poor is always going to lose.”

Kevin explained, “I have no problem going to work every day under a fair system. No problem whatsoever,” but the current system is “slavery.”

“It’s got to be the workers” in control of society, Kevin said. “We are the majority, and we produce all the wealth.”



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