

North American workers must mobilize to defend the Canadian dockworkers' strike!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
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The strike by 7,400 Canadian dockworkers in British Columbia is a major struggle that requires the support of workers across North America and the entire world.

The strike demonstrates the unity of the interests of the international working class. This is not simply a slogan, but an objective fact. The conditions that the strikers are fighting against are the same that workers around the world confront, including wages that fail to keep pace with inflation and job losses through automation and subcontracting.

Dockworkers have powerful enemies, but their allies, the international working class, are more powerful. Workers around the world must mobilize to defend the strike. A particular obligation of dockworkers in the United States is to support the strike by refusing to handle freight rerouted from Canada to ports south of the border. American dockworkers must not allow themselves to be forced into scabbing against their brothers and sisters.

Dockworkers are in a powerful position because they occupy a key choke-point in the Canadian and world economy, accounting for approximately C\$800 million in trade each day. Indeed, 15 percent of freight bound for the United States passes first through ports in British Columbia, demonstrating the deep economic integration across national borders.

The port operators are in no mood to make even the slightest concessions, and talks broke down Monday between the International Longshore & Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the BC Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA). The port operators are emboldened because they know they can count on the support of the Canadian federal Liberal government of Justin Trudeau to criminalize the strike—as it did against a strike of Port of Montreal longshore workers in 2021—if it can't work with its union “partners” in the coming days to impose a sellout.

All over the world, capitalist governments are resorting to dictatorial measures to suppress strikes and protests. Last November, the Ontario government suspended the country's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the Canadian equivalent of the US Bill of Rights) to criminalize a strike by 55,000 Ontario school support workers and impose huge real-wage cuts by government decree.

Last year, the Biden administration went to Congress to

obtain a ban on strike action by 120,000 US railroaders. In France, Emmanuel Macron, the “president of the rich,” imposed cuts in retirement benefits without a vote in Parliament and with massive police violence. Faced with mass protests in recent days over the police murder of a minority youth, it has again deployed tens of thousands of riot police across the country and is considering imposing a state of emergency.

There can be no doubt that Trudeau in Ottawa is in close contact with President Biden in Washington over how to defeat the dockworkers' strike.

The strike shows that any strategy that defines workers' interests in the framework of the national state and isolates workers in one country from their brothers and sisters in other countries is hopelessly obsolete. A warning must be made: As long as the strike remains isolated to Canada, it is in serious danger of being defeated.

Both Trudeau and Biden view the strike in the framework of their global geopolitical strategy. Under the hegemony of US imperialism, together with its junior partner in Canada, the entire North American continent is being transformed into a base of operations for imperialist war abroad, especially against Russia and China. Under the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) trade deal and other measures, the North American imperialists are “near-shoring” manufacturing and supply chains from Asia to Mexico and other spots in their own “backyard” that are more closely under their control.

Both governments cannot tolerate major strikes anywhere along these supply chains, not only because these could quickly spread to other sections of the working class, but because they would undermine their plans for World War III.

This is why, as they draw the entire continent more tightly into their grasp, they are compelled to rely more directly on the trade union bureaucracy to enforce artificial national and sectional divisions within the working class.

Both US and Canadian dockworkers on the Pacific coast are members of the ILWU. But the ILWU union apparatus and the union bureaucracy as a whole is joined at the hip with the capitalist governments on both sides of the border. The American unions are staunch supporters of Biden and the Democratic Party, while Canada's are helping prop up

Trudeau, whose minority Liberals are in a parliamentary-governmental alliance with the union-sponsored New Democrats (NDP). Consequently, they are working deliberately to sabotage workers' struggles and to isolate workers in each country from workers in the other. Significantly, the ILWU is also a fervent supporter of the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, and pledged last year not to handle any cargo delivered on Russian ships.

The ILWU has kept 22,000 US dockworkers on the job without a contract for more than a year, having signed a "no-strike pledge" behind their backs. The ILWU leadership has been working closely with the Biden administration, which has been involved in the talks from the start, to keep the docks under control. When workers began defying the no-strike pledge with wildcat actions that seriously impacted operations on the US West Coast, the union responded by suddenly announcing a phantom "tentative agreement," brokered by the White House.

Workers have heard nothing more about the deal since, or even when they will be allowed to view the contract or to vote on it. In fact, a deal as such may not even exist. What little details are known show that it falls far below workers' wage demands. It is evident that the ILWU apparatus only announced the agreement in order to break the unity of US and Canadian workers and prevent the development of a transcontinental strike.

The experience on the docks is a repetition of that on the railroads last year, when a strike by Canadian Pacific railroad workers was isolated from workers in the US, where the unions tried to ram through a Biden-sponsored pro-company tentative agreement. When that failed, the bureaucracy stalled to give Congress the time it needed to preemptively ban a strike.

While Biden and Trudeau prefer to enlist the services of the union bureaucracy to enforce de facto strike bans, similar measures to the law banning a rail strike are being prepared, if necessary, against every major potential strike across both the United States and Canada.

The patriotic defense of "their own" national states' predatory global interests and the right of "their own" native capitalists to a profit is the most direct expression of the bureaucracy's hostility to the workers they falsely claim to represent. For decades, they have promoted a bankrupt national strategy. In the auto industry, Canadian bureaucrats split from the United Auto Workers in the 1980s, claiming that they could take advantage of a favorable exchange rate and universal healthcare to strike better deals with the auto companies. This totally failed, serving only to facilitate the automakers' efforts to pit workers against each other in a race to the bottom. Unifor, the successor to the Canadian Auto Workers union, regularly engages in racist agitation against Mexican autoworkers.

Now, under conditions of the shift towards electric vehicles, which the companies will use to cut jobs and wages in the

factories, US and Canadian autoworkers both have contracts that expire this September, posing the need for a joint struggle. But Unifor and the United Auto Workers will do the exact same to autoworkers as the ILWU is doing to dockworkers.

This hostility of the bureaucracy to the workers is not the product of mistaken policy. It is determined by material interests, with the six-figure salaries of countless union officials resting upon the control of billions in financial assets funded through workers' dues money.

In response, workers must mobilize themselves by building rank-and-file committees, composed of and run by the workers themselves, to shatter the influence of the apparatus and transfer control to the rank-and-file.

The strength of the working class comes from its central role in the production process, and it is objectively unified by the global economy. Workers only have to know how to use that strength. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) fights to unite workers across national boundaries, coordinate their struggles against the transnational corporations, the capitalist governments and their alliances for trade war and military conflict, and break the stranglehold of the bureaucracy in each country.

The IWA-RFC calls on rank-and-file dockers in the US, Canada and Mexico to build rank-and-file committees in opposition to the shipping bosses, the threat of anti-strike laws and the ILWU bureaucracy. These committees should raise definite demands, including that no freight be handled that has been re-routed from Canadian ports. All dock workers should fight for joint action to shut down all West Coast ports until the demands of the strikers are met.

The IWA-RFC includes striking National Steel Car workers in Canada, postal workers in Britain and Germany, autoworkers in the US, teachers across the world and other key sections of the working class. The committee provides the platform for working out a common strategy and planning joint actions of workers around the world.

We urge both Canadian and US dockworkers: Join the IWA-RFC today to fight for a new perspective.



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