

# As Canadian dockworkers strike enters second week, container ships bound for British Columbia are being diverted to American ports

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Shipping companies are attempting to break the strike by West Coast Canadian dockworkers, which has shut down 30 ports in British Columbia, by re-routing dozens of container ships to US west coast ports. It has been estimated that nearly 290,000 containers with products valued at \$12 billion or more are at anchor and cannot be unloaded in western Canada.

US dockworkers, who have been working without a contract for more than a year, must resist being forced to scab on their Canadian brothers and sisters. As a statement earlier this week by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees declared, US workers should refuse to handle re-routed Canadian cargo.

Vessels Value tracking data revealed on Thursday that two container ships originally bound for the Port of Vancouver are changing course and have been diverted to the Port of Seattle. The container ships that are being diverted have been identified as the MSC Sara Elena and the OOCL San Francisco. The first of the diverted container ships is expected at the Port of Seattle on July 10, according to port authorities.

This is the first of what is expected to be widespread re-routing of ships to US ports.

ITS Logistics told CNBC it has containers on the OOCL San Francisco. They were scheduled to arrive at the Port of Vancouver on July 3 and were then destined by rail to cross the US border and be delivered to Memphis, Tennessee. Paul Brashier, vice president of drayage and intermodal at ITS Logistics, said clients are now looking for alternate American ports.

“Right now we are advising all clients with freight that was booked to Vancouver or Prince Rupert to work with their booking agents to track the US ports of call of the vessels that their containers are on and see if the ocean liners will allow re-consignment (switching container final

destination) to a US port,” Brashier said.

New data from MarineTraffic shows 15 containerships bound for Vancouver and 9 containerships bound for Prince Rupert. The containers that would be moved by these combined vessels is equal to \$10.7 billion.

The Port of Vancouver, Canada’s largest, is a critical part of the North American economy, moving more than \$300 billion in goods each year and contributes nearly \$12 billion to the country’s GDP. Moreover, about 15 percent of its consumer trade is headed to or coming from the US.

According to CNBC, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) declined to comment about whether its members plan on working any of the diverted vessels. The ILWU covers west coast dockworkers on both sides of the border.

Their silence is of a piece with its deliberate efforts to isolate and sabotage the strike and prevent sympathy actions in the United States, even as the danger grows that the Canadian government will ban the strike. In 2021, the Canadian government also criminalized a strike by 1,100 Montreal dockworkers.

It is a clear sign that they are prepared to force their US members to scab on ILWU members in Canada. To prevent this from happening, workers must organize themselves to take the initiative out of the hands of the ILWU bureaucracy.

For the past year, the ILWU has forced its 22,000 members in the US to keep working without a contract under a “no strike” pledge it had worked out in secret with the Pacific Maritime Association, in talks followed closely by the Biden administration. But for the past several months, workers had been defying this agreement with a series of escalating job actions which significantly affected port operations.

US dockworkers were doing so as Canadian ILWU

members were voting by more than 99 percent to authorize a strike. This raised the possibility of a powerful, transcontinental movement uniting US and Canadian dockworkers.

In order to suppress this movement, the ILWU suddenly announced a tentative agreement last month, which was brokered by acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su. ILWU International president Willie Adams and Pacific Maritime Association 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.”

“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,” Adams declared.

The suddenness with which the deal was announced has been followed by weeks of silence. Workers have not been given details about the agreement or even when they will be allowed to vote on it. What little information is known about the contract, if one even exists, shows it falls far below workers’ demands. It is evident that the reason for the sudden urgency in announcing the US deal was the looming strike in Canada.

At the same time, ILWU officials began trying to witch-hunt dockworkers who spoke to the press. San Diego Local 29 President Ray Leyba confronted WSWS reporters outside of the dispatch hall, and later tried to blacklist casual workers whom he had accused of speaking with them.

The isolation of American dockworkers from Canadian workers not only plays into the hands of the Canadian government’s preparations to ban the strike. It also plays into the hand of the Biden administration’s preparations to ban strike action on the docks in the United States, as it did last December on the railroads. Last month, the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Retail Federation and the Retail Industry Leaders Association sent letters urging the White House to intervene against the dockworkers.

In another ominous development, Canadian Labor Minister Seamus O’Regan Jr., who has been urging both sides to come back to the table to negotiate, met with acting U.S. Labor Secretary Julie Su Thursday evening about the impact of the strike on the North American supply chain.

It is difficult to overstate the powerful position West Coast dockworkers occupy in the world capitalist economy. For nearly half a century, in the era of globalization, a substantial amount of world trade has passed through the ports they make run. It is for this reason that both US and Canadian governments and corporations are uniting against dockworkers, while using the trade union bureaucracy to

enforce arbitrary and harmful divisions on workers on either side of the border.

But if the rank-and-file takes action to unite across national boundaries, they can launch a counteroffensive against the operators and galvanize support among workers everywhere.

The conditions facing North American dockworkers are the same ones facing dockworkers throughout the world. Powerful dockworker strikes have taken place in recent months in England, France, Argentina, South Africa, Chile, South Korea, Germany and elsewhere over the same issues at stake on the West Coast of North America. Dockworkers on the West Coast of Mexico had also threatened strikes this spring, including in the city of Manzanillo, in the state of Colima.

But the development of a powerful international movement depends on the ability of dockworkers to break out of the straitjackets imposed by the corrupt union bureaucracy. They must respond by building rank-and-file committees independent of the apparatus. This is the only means for workers to seize control of the strike from the ILWU bureaucracy and place decision-making in the hands of the rank-and-file.

Through such committees, dockworkers will be able to make a direct appeal to their fellow workers at all ports, both in Canada and the US, as well as Mexico, to demand:

- No ships diverted from Canada be unloaded in the US or Mexico!
- All dockworkers in the US and Mexico must support and join the strike! Any action to outlaw strike action in any country must be met with a joint response from workers across North America!

For assistance and for more information about rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below:



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