

As scab freighters arrive at US ports to avoid strike in Canada, US dockworker calls for joint strike action across North America

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As the strike by 7,400 dockworkers at major ports in Vancouver and Prince Rupert in British Columbia enters its 11th day, dockworkers at 29 West Coast ports in the United States, who are also part of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), are increasingly demanding joint action with their brothers and sisters.

Jonathan (whose name has been changed to protect his identity), a casual dockworker in the San Francisco Bay area, told the WSWs over the weekend, “If they are on strike, we need to be on strike with them to shut down the whole North American West Coast.”

For over a year, some 22,000 West Coast dockworkers in the US have been forced to work without a contract by the union bureaucracy. While they have been forced to call a strike in Canada, the ILWU has yet to hold a strike authorization vote in the US. Instead, the ILWU and PMA have released multiple joint statements pledging no strikes or lockouts.

The *Ever Safety* and the MSC *Sara Elena* are the first of many ships being diverted from striking ports in Canada to American ports to be unloaded. Jonathan said, “It would be a slap in the face if they unload that cargo. It would really hurt their strike.”

For casuals, Jonathan explained, “Things are very slow. We’re unloading our own cargo, and none of the casuals are getting out this weekend. Still, we should not be unloading those ships.”

ILWU President Willie Adams said in a statement that

the union will “not be unloading Canadian bound cargo in solidarity with our Brothers and Sisters in ILWU Canada.” But the fact is that the diverted ships, with billions of dollars in cargo, would not go to US ports if they did not have a reasonable expectation of it being unloaded.

In an interview with CNBC, Destine Ozuygur, head of operations at maritime data and vessel tracking company eeSea, confirmed that both of the ships would not be returning to Canadian ports. “This has been confirmed by the ocean carrier,” said Ozuygur.

According to CNBC, the *Sara Elena* “was worked on in Seattle. After the service, the carrier announced it would not be heading back to Vancouver, which means the Canadian-bound freight was unloaded or will be unloaded in future US ports.”

CNBC noted that it would be “very hard for the ILWU to identify containers that had their final destinations changed because the union workers do not have access to container information for security reasons.”

That the ILWU is keeping US dockworkers on the job during the British Columbia strike confirms the role of the union bureaucracy as labor police. To fight back and to unite with their brothers and sisters across North America, dockworkers must organize rank-and-file committees to transfer the initiative from the apparatus to the workers themselves.

The ILWU is not only deliberately isolating US workers from their Canadian workers, but it is working with the International Longshore Association (ILA) to divide US workers on the West Coast from the East Coast. Since the ILWU contract in the US expired last

July, cargo has been diverted to the East Coast and Gulf ports under the ILA in order to undercut the position of West Coast workers.

While the ILA issued a statement of “solidarity” in support of ILWU negotiation efforts last year, the union has been effectively scabbing on dockworkers on the West Coast by allowing the diversion of shipments to ILA ports.

In defiance of the ILWU’s “no strike” pledge, dockworkers had been taking increasingly significant job actions throughout the spring. After an insulting PMA pay proposal was leaked at the beginning of June, dockworkers took matters into their own hands and launched wildcat job actions that caused the shutdown of major ports and terminals.

Seeking to prevent a strike, the Biden administration dispatched Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su to personally intervene in the ILWU and Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) negotiations, which began last May. Within 72 hours of Su’s arrival, the ILWU announced that a tentative agreement had been reached. Since this announcement, ILWU President Willie Adams has provided no updates to the membership, and no rank-and-file dockworker has seen any aspect of the agreement.

While the Biden administration has had its eyes and ears in the negotiations from the start, rank-and-file dockworkers have been left in the dark. “The government shouldn’t even be involved in this,” Jonathan said. “Like the railroad workers, they are coming to screw us, too.”

He spoke about the pay and living conditions for dockworkers. “If you just became a B man and all you’re getting is non-skilled work, that’s \$46 an hour. That’s like \$90,000 a year. You cannot live off that in California. That’s like \$40,000 somewhere else.

“The salary is not that good if you live in the Bay Area or Seattle. I think the guys over on the East Coast, New York, I think their pay is better. I looked at their contract. They get double-time on Sunday. In today’s society, \$45 an hour is like \$20.

“Here, sometimes guys work a shift, then go back to the hall and work another shift. Other guys just want to work 40 hours a week.

“Some guys don’t want to spend all their life at work. That tells me that the salary is not keeping up with the economy. If they sign this agreement, they’re going to be that much behind, they’re going to be \$50 behind where they should be to make a living wage.”

Speaking of the sacrifices casuals make, he explained, “A lot of the casuals have a full-time job. You go in there for the weekend and stay the whole weekend. There’s no movement, then the day you have to take your kid to the doctor, you miss your number. Then you might not get another shift for another month.”

Jonathan called for a joint struggle with not only US and Canadian dockworkers but also with the 340,000 UPS workers, whose contract expires at the end of the month. “I was talking to the guy who delivers to my house. I said you guys need to go on strike to help us fight. He said he only gets one day off on Sunday; no ACs in the trucks.

“You hear about UPS drivers and longshore workers making over \$100,000, but hourly wages aren’t that high in my opinion. You only make this because of overtime. What would your salary be with just 40 hours a week, no OT (overtime)?”



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