

# ILWU leadership forcing Canadian dockers to vote on government-dictated sellout contract previously rejected by union delegates

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*Are you a dockworker in British Columbia? Contact us here or by filling out the form below to tell us anonymously what you think of the ILWU's decision to force you to vote on a sellout contract dictated by the union-backed Liberal government.*

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union Canada (ILWU) leadership announced Friday that it will force 7,400 west coast Canadian dockworkers to vote on the same government-dictated tentative agreement that was rejected just days earlier by a meeting of union delegates for failing to reach workers' demands. The union leadership is now recommending that workers accept this agreement.

The decision marks yet another miserable capitulation by the union bureaucracy to the pro-war, pro-austerity Liberal government, which made clear its intention to employ ruthless state repression if dockers had resumed strike action. The Trudeau government intervened so aggressively because the dockworkers' struggle cuts across Canadian and American imperialism's waging of war and aggressive military operations around the world based on policies of economic protectionism and the gutting of workers' democratic and social rights at home.

The ILWU confirmed that workers will vote on the deal Tuesday after its Longshore Caucus met for the second time in three days Friday. In a statement the same day, the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA), which represents 49 private-sector employers across British Columbia's 30 ports, confirmed that the agreement was identical to the one agreed to by the parties on July 13.

Last Tuesday, the Caucus, which consists of several hundred union delegates, voted the agreement down by an overwhelming majority amid massive pressure from the rank-and-file to relaunch strike action. The 13-day strike by the dockers began July 1 and was called off July 13 by the ILWU after the Trudeau government invoked a rarely used provision of the anti-worker Canada Labour Code that permits a government-appointed mediator to dictate the terms of a tentative agreement.

Following the Longshore Caucus' first vote Tuesday, ILWU Canada president Rob Ashton asserted in a press release that "the employers have not addressed the cost of living issues that our

workers face," and that a four-year contract is "far too long" in "today's uncertain times." Ashton's statement also noted that no steps were taken to curb the contracting out of port maintenance work, a mechanism which the profit-hungry shipping giants are using to undermine the rights and conditions of all workers.

By contrast, the ILWU's Friday statement urged dockworkers to accept the contract, noting that the union leadership would "recommend the terms" of the government-drafted agreement at meetings to be held during the 8 a.m. shift Tuesday.

The intervening three days witnessed a massive intervention by the state in order to whip the union bureaucracy into line. After the initial rejection of the government-dictated tentative agreement by the Longshore Caucus led to a relaunching of the strike Tuesday, the Trudeau government prevailed on the unelected Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB), a key mechanism in the pro-employer "collective bargaining" system, to issue a "cease and desist" order against the ILWU.

The CIRB's ruling that the job action was "unlawful" was based on the spurious claim that the union failed to give 72 hours' notice for the strike to go ahead. The CIRB arbitrarily ignored the fact that the ILWU bureaucracy rode roughshod over the democratic rights of dockworkers by calling off the 13-day strike without so much as providing a summary of the terms of the government-dictated tentative agreement, let alone allowing workers to vote on it. All of this was deemed perfectly "legal" under Canada's rigged "collective bargaining" system.

On Wednesday morning, the ILWU capitulated to these efforts at intimidation and called off the strike, while at the same time issuing a 72-hour strike notice to enable a new walkout to commence that Saturday. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded by calling an emergency meeting of the Incident Response Group (IRG), a highly secretive body that includes federal government ministers and senior officials from the military and intelligence agencies. The IRG's purpose is to respond to issues affecting Canada's "national interests" or that may affect "national security." At the meeting, Trudeau insisted that the ports must be "open."

Although no specifics about how the government intended to

respond to a renewed strike were made public after the meeting, there can be no doubt that Trudeau and his ministers gave the ILWU bureaucrats their marching orders. This fact was made clear Thursday in remarks by Trudeau, who venomously attacked rank-and-file workers for their “unacceptable” opposition to a government-imposed contract that was agreed to between the BCMEA and ILWU bureaucrats.

The Trudeau government’s determination to dictate a settlement to avoid further strike action is bound up with the fact that much more is at stake for Canada’s ruling class than the terms of the dockworkers’ contract.

The strike represented an objective challenge to Canadian imperialism’s participation in US-led aggressive wars and military operations around the world, above all the US/NATO war on Russia and preparations for war with China. The dockers hold a key position in North America’s supply chains, which both the Trudeau and Biden governments see as crucial to consolidate the economic and logistical capabilities necessary for the continent’s twin imperialist powers to combat and defeat their strategic rivals. Corporate Canada also demanded that Trudeau make an example of the dockers in order to intensify the push for “global competitiveness,” i.e., maximum corporate profitability and exploitation for working people.

Canada’s union bureaucracy and New Democratic Party (NDP), two key pillars of support for the Trudeau government, fully endorsed the government-led drive to impose a sellout on the dockworkers. Former Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) head Hassan Yussuff, who was appointed by Trudeau to Canada’s upper house of parliament, the Senate, for services rendered to the ruling class, was present at talks in Vancouver earlier this month. The CLC member unions, which claim to represent millions of workers, ensured that no solidarity action took place to support the dockers against the government’s vicious attacks.

The Trudeau government is only in a position to act so ruthlessly because it can count on the support of the trade union-sponsored NDP in parliament to secure it a majority. In the spring of 2022, the NDP finalized a “confidence-and-supply” agreement with Trudeau’s Liberals that was orchestrated by the CLC and commits the NDP to keep Trudeau in power through June 2025. The agreement provided the “political stability,” in the words of NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, for Trudeau to massively increase military spending, expand Canada’s involvement in the US-led war on Russia, and launch a savage attack on the wages and conditions of workers to pay for the war and the massive bailouts given to big business during the pandemic.

As recently as Wednesday, BC NDP Premier David Eby was appealing to the federal government to do “everything” to get the BCMEA and ILWU back to the “bargaining table.” This “everything” presumably included mobilizing the heads of the military and intelligence agencies to discuss contingency plans to smash a strike by dockworkers, which was then used to bully the bureaucrats into presenting their members with the same rotten sellout that the union delegates felt compelled to reject only days earlier.

The courageous struggle waged by dockworkers over recent weeks has made clear that they confront a political battle not just

against greedy employers, but the entire state apparatus, the Trudeau Liberal government, and its servants in the union bureaucracy. Workers’ legitimate demands for wage increases commensurate with inflation, job protection against automation and an end to contracting out can only be achieved if the dockers make their struggle the spearhead of a broad worker-led counter-offensive against the ruling elite’s class war agenda of austerity at home and imperialist war abroad.

The *World Socialist Web Site* strongly urges dockworkers to vote “No” on the government-dictated contract Tuesday. But this can only be a starting point for the development of rank-and-file control over the struggle. A resumption of strike action would immediately be met with ruthless state repression, which workers can and must counter by making the broadest possible appeal to workers across Canada and internationally. A special appeal must be made to US West Coast dockworkers, who have been working without a contract for a year and are members of the same union as their Canadian colleagues, to join the struggle.

As the Socialist Equality Party argued in a recent statement, “To mobilize the social power of the North American working class in their defence, the BC dockworkers must seize control of their struggle through the building of rank-and-file strike committees. The ILWU bureaucracy, which is closely allied with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the NDP, is implacably opposed to mounting a mass working class industrial and political offensive against the very Trudeau government they all support on the grounds it is a ‘progressive’ alternative to Pierre Poilievre and his Conservatives...”

“Conditions are extremely favourable for the development of such a broad-based movement in the working class. A strike wave is currently developing across North America, including ongoing strikes by tens of thousands of US screenwriters and actors, 1,400 National Steel Car workers in Hamilton, Ontario, and 1,400 Wabtec workers in Erie, Pennsylvania. The contract for over 300,000 UPS workers expires in just over a week, and it is less than two months until contracts expire for 170,000 autoworkers on both sides of the Canada-US border.”



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