

Betrayal on the docks: ILA sells out longshoremen's strike

Tom Hall
4 October 2024

In a massive betrayal, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) shut down the powerful strike by 45,000 dockworkers Thursday afternoon.

Longshoremen must reject this effort to sabotage their struggle. The strike demonstrated the vast power of the working class, threatening to bring the operations of major corporations to a halt and threatening the conduct of the United States' global war. But the more powerful the strike, the more rapidly the trade union bureaucracy feels it must be shut down.

The ILA bureaucracy felt compelled to ride to the rescue of the Biden administration and ensure the flow of weapons for America's global wars. Having already pledged to continue moving military equipment during the strike, the union apparatus was eager to prove to the political establishment that it can be relied upon to enforce order on the "home front."

The shutdown of the strike followed the announcement Thursday afternoon by right-wing Florida Governor Ron DeSantis that he would deploy the National Guard to ports in Florida in order to break the strike, falsely claiming that the strike was interfering with relief efforts after Hurricane Helene.

In shutting down the strike, the ILA officials announced a "tentative agreement" on wages only, but no full contract. Workers are being sent back under a 90-day extension to the existing contract which expires on January 15.

The agreement on wages is rumored to be for a 61 percent increase over six years. But there is no agreement on other aspects, including job protection from automation. This was the biggest issue behind the strike in the first place.

The union bureaucrats claim that the three-month extension will give negotiators "time" to hash out this

and other terms. This is absurd, given the fact that they have willingly given up workers' leverage by shutting down the strike before these talks have even begun.

As with the United Auto Workers' limited "stand-up strike" last year and the Teamsters union's empty "strike ready" campaign at UPS last year, the stage is being set for massive automation-driven layoffs. Bureaucrats from each union likewise claimed "historic victories" on wages and other issues, only to allow thousands to begin losing their jobs within weeks of ratification.

Over the past two days, there has been a massive campaign in the corporate media against the strike. A series of statements, including from the *Wall Street Journal* and *National Review*, have urged Biden to issue a Taft-Hartley injunction. *Business Insider* called the strike one of "a trio of crises" threatening to upend the Harris presidential election campaign.

Many outlets, including so-called "liberal" newspapers such as the *New York Times*, ran pieces about ILA President Harold Daggett's close to \$1 million union salary, reminding him on which side his bread is buttered.

On Wednesday, Biden, who banned a strike on the railroads two years ago, called the dock strike a "man-made disaster" and called on the union and port operators to "get this strike done." This amounted to marching orders to the ILA bureaucrats that they could not allow the strike to go on any longer.

DeSantis's strikebreaking threat exposes the populist pretensions of Trump and the Republicans, who have been able to capitalize on the Democrats' obsession with war and manifest indifference to the social crisis facing workers. Their attempt to build a fascist movement, through racist incitement against immigrants, is aimed at crushing all resistance to

corporate profit-making and imperialist war.

For months, Daggett and others have postured with longwinded, vulgar tirades against the port operators. But this was only done to get out in front of the real driving force of the strike, the massive anger of the rank and file. As the WSWS warned, they have shut down the strike at the first opportunity.

The dock strike demonstrated the capacity of the working class to stop war and reshape society in the interests of the broad majority of the population, not the wealthy few. The same profit interests driving the wars abroad are also behind the attacks on the working class in the form of automation, forced overtime and wage stagnation.

The international workforce in the shipping industry, involving workers from every continent employed by global corporations, is a microcosm of the global unity of the working class, which has no interest in being pit against itself in wars of conquest.

But the betrayal of the strike shows that the power of the working class can only be organized through a relentless struggle against the pro-corporate union bureaucracy. The task of the workers is a rebellion against the apparatus and the formation of new organs of struggle, rank-and-file committees, to assert democratic control and to establish broad lines of contact with workers around the world.

In Detroit, rank-and-file autoworkers facing mass layoffs sanctioned by the UAW bureaucracy, including 2,400 next week at the Warren Truck plant, said they should follow the lead of the dockworkers and strike to defend jobs too.

The strike met with widespread support from workers across the country who wanted to join the dockworkers in a collective fight to press for common demands. On Thursday afternoon, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement calling for unity with dockworkers to “defend jobs and stop world war.”

“We have to press our advantage,” the statement read. “Union officials everywhere are on the back foot because of the scale of rank-and-file anger after years of soaring inflation, declining healthcare and unresolved and deadly safety issues.”

Dockworkers must organize themselves to oppose this betrayal by building rank-and-file committees to lead a real fight, which is directed against the port operators and the capitalist parties, together with their

lackeys in the union apparatus.

At bottom, this is another stage in a growing conflict between the union bureaucracy and the working class. The more shamelessly the officials act in defiance of the will of the ranks, the more workers will conclude that a new strategy is needed. They must decide to join the growing movement of rank-and-file committees, to put workers in control to organize a real fight, uniting workers across the US and around the world.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact