

Sellout deal announced for US East Coast docks as ILA bureaucrats praise Trump

Tom Hall

9 January 2025

Dockworkers: Speak out against the sellout deal by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On Wednesday night, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and the US Maritime Association (USMX) announced a tentative agreement for more than 40,000 dockworkers on the US East and Gulf Coast ports.

The agreement is a highly political decision. In October, a three-day strike was shut down via a 90-day extension of the old deal. The tentative agreement averts the resumption of a strike when that extension expires on January 15, only five days before the inauguration of Trump.

By blocking a strike, ILA officials are trying to prevent an open conflict between dockworkers and the incoming fascist administration, which would puncture Trump's right-wing populist rhetoric about being pro-worker. By reining in opposition from the working class, the ILA bureaucrats are also giving Trump a free hand to carry out mass deportations from day one, as part of his drive to rip up democratic rights and establish a dictatorship.

The ILA issued an extraordinary statement Wednesday night calling Trump "one of the best friends of working men and women in the United States." Citing a two-hour meeting with Trump at his Mar-a-Lago, Florida estate last month, ILA President Harold Daggett declared that "President Trump gets full credit for our successful tentative Master Contract agreement."

Daggett also pointed to Trump's social media post last month attacking "foreign" companies for cutting dockworkers' jobs through automation. The purpose of this post was to present Trump's trade war measures as a boon to American workers. In reality, they are designed to benefit US capitalists at the expense of workers, both in the US and worldwide. Only a few days prior, Elon Musk, who is playing a key role in the new government and who is carrying out mass layoffs at Tesla, had attacked dockworkers for being lazy and entitled.

During the October strike, Florida Governor and Trump ally Ron DeSantis threatened to deploy the National Guard to forcibly reopen the ports in his state. If dockworkers struck when their contract extension expired on January 15 and closed some of America's most critical ports, this would have created a significant political crisis for the newly inaugurated Trump administration and rapidly forced it to take similar anti-strike measures.

The ILA bureaucrats are working diligently to prevent that and promote the fascist president as a champion of the working class to boot.

Reflecting the US oligarchy's support for the would-be dictator, USMX Chairman and CEO David Adam said the deal was "[t]hanks

in large part to President Trump's leadership," and that the USMX looks "forward to working with President Trump and his Administration."

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* call for workers to vote the deal down by the widest possible margin. As the WSWS wrote on Tuesday, "Workers can win their demands, but it requires building rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the ILA apparatus to workers themselves. This must be connected with a global strategy of uniting with other sections of the working class, including dockworkers in every country as well as railroaders and other workers in key supply chains."

In particular, ILA members must demand adequate time to study the entire contract, not just self-serving highlights handed out at "informational sessions" controlled by union officials. Workers must also organize rank-and-file oversight of the voting process. Given the corruption of the ILA bureaucracy and the extreme political sensitivity of the vote, it is entirely likely that the union is prepared to deal with opposition to the contract through fraud, intimidation and other underhanded tactics.

Sellout contract

There can be no doubt that the contract is a betrayal which gives into port operators' main demands to automate away thousands of jobs. This issue was supposedly so acrimonious that talks broke down again almost immediately after they restarted in November following the strike.

Yet a new tentative agreement was supposedly reached little more than 24 hours after talks restarted on Tuesday. In fact, secret discussions were already ongoing: CNBC reported an eight-hour meeting last Sunday where the parties agreed on language including: "there is a commitment by the parties to research and utilize all technology that would assist an operator in being more efficient and productive."

This exposes the supposed bitterness of talks as theatrics designed to sell the pro-management deal to the rank and file as the product of "hard bargaining."

In Wednesday's joint statement, the ILA and USMX said they would not be providing details on the contract in order to "allow ILA rank-and-file members and USMX members to review and approve the final document." What this really means is that the contract would

have no chance of passing if workers knew what was really in it. The use of such information blackouts is the typical method used to prevent workers from examining and discussing the details in the deal so contracts with secret concessions can be rammed through.

In contrast, the ILA had shouted from the rooftops that it had won a 62 percent wage increase as part of its deal to shut down the October strike.

In a Freudian slip, the *Washington Post* said, “The wage gains and the new protections preventing automation from replacing jobs come after similar gains in recent years were won by unions representing autoworkers, Hollywood actors and screenwriters, and UPS delivery drivers.” In reality, every one of these contracts was passed under false pretenses, using wage increases as a cover for tens of thousands of job cuts, which began almost before the ink had dried.

Union bureaucrats back fascism

More than a week before he even takes office, the deal shows that an essential part of the fight against Trump is a fight against the union bureaucracy. The working class will be thrust into struggle against his policies, which include ripping up core democratic rights and massive austerity and war on a scale not seen before in American history. Those workers who sought to register their anger at the status quo by voting for Trump will soon be afflicted with buyers’ remorse.

The bureaucracy, on the other hand, is openly aligning itself with fascism and the oligarchy which Trump represents. They are promoting his “America First” protectionism and anti-immigrant policies, falsely equating the interests of American capitalism with those of “native” workers.

A fundamental turning point is underway in American history. But the union bureaucrats’ support for Trump was preceded by their role under Biden, who relied on them heavily to limit strikes and impose sellouts. This was seen as key to preparing the home front for war, such that Biden called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO” last summer.

Decades of anticomunism, support for imperialist war and regime-change, nationalism and its deep dependence on ties with management and the government have made the union bureaucracy a natural base of support for fascism. The ILA bureaucracy vented this outlook in an anti-communist statement over the weekend, defending in particular its decision to move military equipment during the October strike.

The unions are lining up with plans to convert the entire western hemisphere into a US-dominated fortress as a first step for US imperialism to conquer the rest of the world, especially China. While Trump was involved in talks between the ILA and USMX, he publicly threatened invasions of Greenland, Panama and Mexico, and has taken to calling Canada the “51st state.” In particular, Trump has attacked growing Chinese business interests in Latin American shipping, where China has invested billions of dollars.

Teamsters General President Sean O’Brien, an early union backer of Trump, has given several interviews endorsing Trump’s extreme right policies, especially his attacks on immigrants. While he is himself descended from Irish immigrants, his ancestors supposedly came here “the right way,” O’Brien has declared. “I have a problem,” he said, “when people come into this country with the agenda to commit crimes and do things that are not popular in America. That’s a

problem.”

Global working class

In addition to the racist attack on immigrants as criminals, this separation between “foreign” and “American” workers is false to the core. The shipping industry expresses in the most direct form the international character of the working class. US ports, handling cargo from every continent, from ships crewed by workers from all over the world, are critical nodes in world supply chains.

The ports themselves include many foreign-born workers who are full participants in the class struggle alongside their “native” brothers and sisters. Two-and-a-half years ago, Nicaraguan immigrant Uriel “Popeye” Matamoros was crushed to death at the Port of New York and New Jersey. Port truckers on the West Coast are overwhelmingly immigrant, mainly from Africa, Latin America and South Asia. In 2022, these workers conducted blockades and appealed to dockworkers, who themselves were being kept on the job by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union without a contract, for support against a law which would force them to give up their status as independent contractors.

In the transportation sector generally, there are over 2.5 million foreign-born workers, according to official government statistics, equal to 22 percent of the total workforce. Immigrant labor also plays a key role in US shipbuilding, which has been affected by a severe labor shortage.

In addition to artificially dividing workers in the US between immigrant and native-born, the ILA sellout will weaken the global working class by arbitrarily dividing US workers from their allies in the rest of the world. How will the ILA’s support for Trump be interpreted, for example, in Latin America? Or in Europe? Or in Canada, where the federal government recently banned a nationwide dock strike? How will the population of Gaza, where the trade unions called for global strike action to halt the flow of weapons to the Israeli war machine, interpret the ILA’s support for US imperialism?

The only viable strategy on the docks or anywhere else is one based on the global unity of the working class. In fighting against the ILA sellouts, and to prepare for a confrontation with the new Trump government, dockworkers must appeal to their brothers and sisters around the world for support. The watchword must be: not “America First,” but “Workers of the World, Unite!”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact