

# Reject the sellout contract on the East and Gulf Coast docks! Build a rank-and-file committee of dockworkers to oppose the ILA-company-Trump conspiracy!

**John Conrad**  
23 February 2025

*Take up the fight for workers' control! Contact the WSWS to begin building a rank-and-file committee by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

The tentative agreement between the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) union bureaucracy and the United States Maritime Association (USMX), and described by both parties as "historic," is a miserable sellout that meets none of the essential demands advanced by over 40,000 dockworkers on the East and Gulf Coast ports of the United States. Worked out with the collaboration of the would-be dictator Donald Trump, it is part of a massive assault on the democratic and social rights of workers across the country.

In voting this Tuesday, dockworkers must reject the proposed contract by the widest possible margin and fight for the establishment of an independent rank-and-file committee to facilitate the democratic self-organization of rank-and-file dockworkers, united across ports and coasts and with workers across industries and workplaces internationally, to prepare for broad-based action to secure workers' basic social, economic and democratic rights.

If ratified, the tentative agreement, announced by the ILA and USMX on January 8 to avoid a powerful strike, will only further advance the erosion of dockworkers' living standards and working conditions.

## **The ILA's "solution" to automation: work harder**

The contract's so-called "safeguards" against the implementation of automation to eliminate workers' jobs are, in fact, based on a pledge by the ILA bureaucracy to work its members so hard that automated technologies will be unnecessary to further boost corporate profits.

"For this incredible package, the ILA did pledge to USMX

that the union would address and resolve the issue of absentees," ILA President Harold Daggett declared in a video statement released earlier this month. "We cannot jeopardize the value of this landmark tentative agreement by having members indicate that they will take a job, and then, not show up for work," shouts Daggett before declaring, "I am personally going to make sure this issue is resolved."

Daggett then roars, "The ILA must continue to demonstrate that we can out-perform automation. How can we fight against automation and then tell the companies we are not going to show up? This has got to stop!"

Like the folk hero railroad worker John Henry, whose heart supposedly gave out after going toe-to-toe with a steam-powered drill, dockworkers will have to "out-perform" new automation technology to avoid being sacked.

Tragedies like the avoidable death of dockworker and Nicaraguan immigrant Uriel "Popeye" Matamoros, already common on the docks, will become a much more regular occurrence at ports across the East and Gulf Coasts.

The so-called "protections" offered in the proposed contract are meant solely to allow the ILA bureaucracy to work dockworkers past the breaking point. In fact, not even back-breaking overwork will guarantee workers' jobs.

According to the TA, New Technology Committees, comprised of ILA bureaucrats and company officials, will oversee the gradual implementation of new automation and artificial intelligence technologies at port terminals to eventually cut jobs and increase profits.

The development of advanced automation and artificial intelligence technologies marks a tremendous progressive achievement for humanity. However, under the control of the ruling capitalist class, these technologies will be implemented to secure ever-higher profits at workers' expense.

Only under the direct and full control of rank-and-file workers can this technology be fully utilized to significantly lessen the burden of work and improve the lives of workers not

only on the docks, but in every industry. This requires rank-and-file workers to take the leadership of their struggle into their own hands through the building of rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-corporate unions and both capitalist political parties.

## **Bureaucrats lock arms with Trump**

In their struggle against layoffs, the deterioration of working conditions and relentless exploitation, dockworkers confront not only the corporations, but the corporatist trade union apparatus and full force of the US government.

The trade union apparatus, comprised of wealthy bureaucrats tied to the companies and government, is a vicious enemy of the working class, prepared to link arms with the most reactionary political forces to crush the basic democratic, social and economic rights of rank-and-file workers.

The ILA bureaucracy is not only promising to work dockworkers until they break, but is openly offering up its services as a labor police force for the Trump administration.

Daggett's fawning praise of fascist US President Donald Trump as "a friend of working men and women in America, especially longshore workers," is aimed at dividing the working class and suppressing the struggle of dockworkers.

Trump and his cabal of fascists are no friends of workers. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has stressed repeatedly, the Trump administration is an administration by, for and of the American corporate and financial oligarchy. The first month of the administration, overseen directly by billionaire Elon Musk, has included the firing of tens of thousands of workers in the federal government, preparation for the destruction of critical social programs, elimination of all constraints on corporate profit-making and the establishment of a surveillance regime to suppress opposition.

Trump has launched a massive assault on immigrant workers—including many ILA members and workers' friends and family members—as the spearhead of the effort to abolish the basic democratic rights of all workers and establishing the groundwork for a fascist dictatorship.

Trump's "America First" trade war promises to cause a massive economic crisis, the burden of which will be borne by the working class. Because of their central position in the world economy, dockworkers will be among the first to feel the effects of tariffs and counter-tariffs as management seeks to compensate for rising prices with job cuts.

"America First" really means the attempt by US imperialism securing of the North American continent for full scale global war to secure critical resources and markets Daggett and the ILA bureaucracy support this.

The ILA's backing for Trump is part of a broader shift

towards collaboration by the trade union apparatus. Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien, a leading Trump ally in the trade union bureaucracy, recently declared his indifference to the sacking of tens of thousands of federal workers in an interview with Fox News.

## **Build rank-and-file committees!**

What is required is a revolt by rank-and-file dockworkers to wrest the leadership of their struggle from the talons of the trade union apparatus. Through its entire history, even before the over 25-year regime of notorious pro-boss President Joseph Ryan (1927-1954), the ILA was dominated by nationalist, pro-company bureaucrats who worked to suppress the dockworkers' struggles on both coasts.

The gains that dockworkers made in the 20th century—wage increases, shorter working hours, load limits, gang sizes, opposition to the shape-up system—were the result of rank-and-file revolt against the trade union bureaucracy. In particular, mass wildcat rebellions of the rank-and-file between 1945 and 1954 won workers concessions on wages and working conditions.

These traditions must be revived. This can only be accomplished through the building of new organizations of struggle, rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by the working themselves, opposed to the organizations and institutions of the capitalist class and unleashing the independent strength of the working class.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is building a movement of these committees in industries all over the world. From the standpoint of the working class, "America First" is completely bankrupt. It is impossible for workers in one country to defend their interests at the expense of workers in every other country. Instead of the dead end nationalism of the ILA, the slogan of dockworkers in the US and around the world must be, "Workers of the world, Unite!"

All dockworkers opposed to this sellout contract and looking to take up a serious fight against conditions that exist must reject the tentative agreement and reach out to the IWA-RFC to build a committee of dockworkers against the ILA-company-Trump conspiracy.



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