As Trump accelerates attacks on the working class

Dockworkers union pushes through contract offering “labor peace for the next 6 years”

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The International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) announced Tuesday the ratification of the master contract for 40,000 dockworkers at ports on the East and Gulf Coasts. In his statement announcing the results, multimillionaire ILA President Harold Daggett declared, “We now have labor peace for the next six years.”

The deal was pushed through with the active participation of President Donald Trump, who met face to face with Daggett in December, prior to the announcement of a tentative agreement two weeks ahead of the inauguration in January. For the president, who has launched unprecedented attacks on the working class since returning to office, a settlement on the docks was seen as essential to limit the immediate potential for another economically devastating strike and merging of struggles.

According to the ILA, the contract was approved overwhelmingly, with 99 percent voting in favor of the agreement. The ILA’s narrative of widespread enthusiasm for the deal is thoroughly dishonest, however. The union did not reveal how many workers actually voted. The ILA’s sabotage of the three-day strike in October, absent even the outlines of a deal on the core issue of automation, undoubtedly contributed to an understanding that the ILA could not be trusted to wage a fight for a better deal.

The terms of the contract, together with the broader political and economic conditions surrounding it, make certain that dockworkers will face intensifying exploitation and increasing threats to their livelihoods. The key issue in the contract struggle was over automation, which port operators are seeking to expand in order to impose speedups and job cuts. While the contract bars the retrofitting of existing terminals for full automation—a process that takes years of planning and billions in investment—the deployment of semi-automated technologies may proceed, overseen by joint union-management committees.

Ominously, ILA President Daggett, in his video touting the “highlights” of the tentative agreement, stated, “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!” The union is thus positioned to take an active role in forcing workers to speed up cargo handling operations, using the threat of full automation to help port operators increase profits.

The contract struggle has revealed that the ILA bureaucracy is not only lining up with the companies to increase exploitation, but the union apparatus is also completely prostrating itself before President Trump, openly offering up its services to discipline workers under the program of America First nationalism.

The ILA’s groveling to Trump is unrestrained. The union’s statement on Tuesday read:

> ILA President Daggett continued to praise U.S. President Donald Trump for his invaluable assistance in helping the ILA achieve this new agreement. Following a December 2024 meeting at Mar-A-Lago between President Trump and the ILA’s Harold Daggett and Dennis Daggett, President Trump expressed his full support of the ILA and its position against job-threatening automation that proved to be a

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> major boost for the ILA in reaching a successful settlement with [US Maritime Alliance].

President Trump responded in a statement Wednesday on Truth Social lauding the deal, writing:

> Congratulations to the U.S. Dockworkers on your great new deal. Also, thank you for your overwhelming support in the Presidential Election. Slowing down automation, just a little bit, is an OK thing to do!!!

The ILA's embrace of Trump comes as the president is launching an unprecedented attack on the working class, initially targeting both federal workers and immigrant workers. Trump has assigned Elon Musk, who recently attacked dockworkers as "lazy and entitled," the task of completely gutting the civil service. Thus far, he has axed more than 30,000 jobs while preparing to cut hundreds of thousands more. More than 600,000 postal workers are also under threat, as Trump last week announced plans to take direct control of the independent agency, paving the way for privatization and mass layoffs.

Trump has also made a centerpiece of his first month in office a brutal offensive against immigrant workers, many of whom work in industries connected to the docks. In addition to the raids, which have already targeted workplaces in Newark and other near-port communities, Trump has used the fascistic scapegoating of immigrants to assert unlimited power. In just the first month, he has laid the basis for dictatorship through such measures as attempting to nullify the 14th Amendment's birthright citizenship via executive order, deploying the military while fraudulently declaring a national emergency, preparing military bases as concentration camps, and requiring the forced registration and ultimately mass deportation of immigrants.

His attempt to consolidate dictatorship is part of a broader effort on behalf of the corporate and financial elite to attack the social and economic rights of all workers, whether in the public sector or private sector, whether immigrant or native-born.

The ILA has embraced Trump's America First nationalism, even as Trump's expanding tariffs and other trade war policies threaten to crater port cargo volumes—and consequently, the need for longshore labor. As with the threat of automation, a decline in port throughput will be used by the companies and the ILA to pressure workers into productivity gains and threaten job cuts.

Trump and the ILA have both railed against the foreign-owned companies that operate many of the large terminals in the US, as if US capitalists are any less bloodthirsty in their pursuit of profits than their overseas counterparts. Trump's trade war measures are presented as a means of protecting American workers, while in reality, they are designed to secure the domination of US capitalism over the rest of the world.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its statement urging a rejection of the sellout contract:

> 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!"

In the coming period, dockworkers and every other section of workers will face an intensifying assault on their jobs, living standards and basic social rights. Contrary to the hopes of Harold Daggett and the other bureaucrats in the ILA, the immediate future promises not "labor peace" but unrelenting class war. It is critical that dockworkers prepare now by organizing rank-and-file committees independent of the ILA to wage a genuine fight to protect jobs and oppose dictatorship.

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