California dockworker dies at Port of Long Beach, the same night union called off strike

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A dockworker died on the job at SSA Terminal 94 in the Port of Long Beach last Friday. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Locals 13, 63 and 94 confirmed the death on Saturday and identified the deceased as a member of Local 94.

Coworkers have identified him on social media as foreman Jason "Jake" Radisic. One recalled that he and Jake had become close after he trained Jake's son during his first shift as a casual worker. "Really solid boss," he wrote. He remembered him simply: "Jake was a good dude." Another wrote: "Rest in peace to one of the greatest bosses on the waterfront. This loss hurt my heart."

Jake's colleagues have launched a donation fund for his family at San Pedro First Thursday Grinchmas.

Jake died on the day approximately 250 ILWU Local 26 watchmen faced a midnight deadline to reach a contract agreement with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) or risk a strike. Thousands of longshore workers, marine clerks and foremen, including members of Local 94, were expected to honor their picket lines, potentially bringing operations across the Los Angeles-Long Beach port complex to a halt.

Late that same night, Local 26 reached a tentative agreement with the PMA, preventing the walkout.

The ILWU officialdom made no effort to connect Jake's death to the broader struggle over safety conditions at the ports. It could not, because its function is to prevent that connection.

Mario Medina, (Local 13 president), Joe Gasperov (Local 63 president) and Daniel Miranda (Local 94 president), who signed the empty condolences letter, are an integral part of the corporate-state apparatus, and their own privileged positions depend on the suppression of the class struggle.

Their bulletin provides no name, no description of the operation involved, no information about the equipment or hazard and no account of what workers should know before returning to the terminal. It announced that dispatch to SSA would be suspended on Saturday, with work resuming on the second shift Sunday, and asked members not to spread rumors or speculation.

Chulaih Ang was struck and killed by a transtainer in January 2022: the ILWU did not publicize the death. It was only after rank-and-file workers shared cellphone photos of the accident scene that the union issued a formal warning demanding that workers cease sharing images.

SSA's Long Beach operations have a long record of fatal failures. On November 4, 2010, Bert Tufele, a Local 13 longshore worker, was killed at Berth 94. According to OSHA, Tufele was operating a utility tractor pulling a bomb cart when it collided with another tractor's cart; he was thrown through the windshield and run over. Heavy vehicles are still allowed to move through congested terminal work areas.

On January 19, 2012, Steve Saggiani, a 47-year-old Local 94 foreman, was killed aboard the Cosco Japan when a spreader cable dislodged an adjacent 40-foot container weighing approximately 8.8 tons. That container crushed him.

OSHA cited SSA Marine for five safety violations, including a willful violation concerning workers' exposure to crushing hazards, and found that employees had been permitted to pass around deck loads and enter danger zones without a safe route of passage. The proposed $70,000 measly penalty for the willful violation was subsequently rescinded following proceedings before the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission.

A California State Auditor's report released in July

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2025 found severe staffing shortages and systemic deficiencies in Cal/OSHA's enforcement apparatus. The division had an overall vacancy rate of 32 percent in fiscal year 2023–24, rising to 81 percent among industrial hygienists. Separate departmental staffing figures showed a 46 percent vacancy rate among field inspectors in August 2024. In fiscal year 2023–24, Cal/OSHA conducted on-site inspections for only 17 percent of valid worker complaints.

Governor Gavin Newsom, with the help of the Democratic-controlled legislature, slashed Cal/OSHA's enforcement budget by $16 million for 2025-26. Meanwhile, the jurisdictional fracture between federal OSHA, which governs shipboard operations, and Cal/OSHA, which governs shoreside terminals, creates a regulatory no-man's-land that terminal operators exploit with precision.

Other SSA locations are no less deadly. In May 2012, Paul Stuart, 61, of Local 19, was fatally injured at SSA Marine's Terminal 18 in Seattle. In January 2018, forklift operator Phillip Vargas died at the Port of San Diego after his forklift hit a concrete column and threw him from the vehicle; Cal/OSHA held SSA Pacific Inc. responsible. On March 31, 2020, Jarvis Haskin, a 59-year-old longshore worker, died at SSA's Berth 58 terminal in Oakland.

Since 2000, the International Cargo Handling Coordination Association's Severe Risks Dashboard has recorded more than 500 fatalities involving port workers, contractors, visitors and other third parties. Four categories account for the overwhelming majority: crushing by cargo, 27 percent; vehicle-pedestrian collisions, 23 percent; falls, 18 percent; and confined-space incidents, 14 percent.

SSA bears direct responsibility for conditions at its terminal. The PMA is guilty for the wider system of employer practices.

But the union apparatus also bears responsibility. Section 16.15 of the 2022-2028 collective bargaining agreement commits the union to cooperate in accident prevention and develop procedures to influence workers to participate in the program. The union is formally integrated into the industry's "safety" arrangements, or lack thereof.

The ILWU's letter about the death did not contain a full account, no explanation of the safeguards required before workers return, no records of previous complaints, near misses and unresolved hazards, no commitment to make the findings available to the membership.

The hazards persist because every safety measure is subordinated to the velocity of container throughput, and because the union bureaucracy is structurally integrated with management. Its own position depends on the suppression of the class struggle, and it cannot defend workers' lives without threatening that position.

Workers cannot entrust their safety to management or to a union apparatus bound up with the employer-controlled system. Independent rank-and-file safety committees must be established at the terminals and must be controlled by workers themselves and independent of both the PMA and the ILWU bureaucracy, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

These committees must launch independent investigations, have access to accident reports, inspection records, equipment maintenance logs, near-miss reports and safety committee minutes. They must be able to investigate hazards, demand immediate corrective action, communicate across terminals and stop dangerous work without fear of retaliation. The formation of rank-and-file safety committees is literally a matter of life and death.

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