

East Coast dockworkers: Unite with Boeing workers to build a movement of the working class! Build rank-and-file committees to take control out of the hands of ILA bureaucrats!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
25 September 2024

Take up the fight for rank-and-file control! Fill out the form below to be contacted about forming a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.

With the September 30 deadline between the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) union only a few days away, 45,000 dockworkers at 36 ports on the East and Gulf Coasts are preparing for a strike to bring corporate America to its knees. There is broad, determined opposition among rank-and-file dockworkers to unsafe working conditions, job cuts through automation of the ports and reckless cost-cutting.

Dockworkers have immense power. The Atlantic and Gulf ports handle over 100 million tons of cargo every year from Europe, South America and Asia. Unimpeded operations are critical to the already-shaky global supply chains of the major corporations, as well as moving military equipment to US proxy wars in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The key question which they confront is how to use this power. Establishing lines of communication with workers in other strategic industries, they must build their struggle into a broad counteroffensive by the working class against worsening conditions and automation-driven layoffs.

Dockworkers will join 33,000 Boeing workers and 5,000 Textron Aviation workers on strike after they rejected sellout contracts. One hundred thousand railroaders are fighting against even deeper concessions than those imposed two years ago by Congress and the White House. Autoworkers, UPS, postal workers and others are fighting against mass layoffs.

A class movement requires that workers take control out of the hands of the union bureaucracy. ILA President

Harold Daggett is threatening to strike by October 1 and the cancellation of formal talks over automation at the Port of Mobile. But this is hot air. He is using the same playbook the bureaucrats in the International Association of Machinists used to try to impose a deal on Boeing workers in mid-September.

The IAM, after setting a strike deadline, said that it remained "far apart" from Boeing management less than two days before it announced a deal which met none of workers' demands. The union leadership lied to workers. In reality, it had a deal all along.

But Boeing workers rebelled against the attempt to blindside them and defeated the contract by 95 percent. After forcing a strike, many took the next step and formed the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to enforce democratic control over their struggle and link up with the broader working class for support.

Through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the Boeing workers are establishing contact with workers around the world who are also fighting against sellout officials in the union bureaucracies.

East Coast dockworkers must follow the Boeing workers' example and form a Dockworkers Rank-and-File Committee of their own. They must be prepared to leverage the power of the working class against sellout maneuvering by the ILA bureaucracy.

Rank-and-file revolt is nothing new in the over 180-year history of the struggle of longshoremen in the US. Between 1945 and 1954, workers rebelled against the corrupt administration of ILA President Joseph P. Ryan, the favorite "labor leader" of the shipping bosses, the New York Democratic Party and the Mafia.

Subsequent ILA administrations, first under William Bradley, then “Teddy” Gleason and on through the decades, have played critical roles in implementing containerization and other technologies used to destroy jobs.

As a first step, dockworkers must demand real rank-and-file control over all talks. This includes not only future talks, but the full publication of the content of all previous talks, both in formal bargaining sessions and informal side discussions. In particular, all conversations between ILA and USMX officials with the Biden administration must be published in full.

Dockworkers must also be prepared to answer open intervention by the White House, including a Taft-Hartley anti-strike injunction. Biden officials are laying low for the moment, claiming they will not intervene. But nobody can believe this from the same administration that banned a strike on the railroads less than two years ago.

Biden will not sit idly when a strike on this scale threatens profits across America. Last month, 150 trade groups, including the US Chamber of Commerce, sent an open letter to the Biden administration urging it to directly intervene to prevent a strike on the East Coast docks.

No doubt the White House has been involved in talks from the start, as it was in contract talks on the West Coast as well as every major national contract since then. Biden, a capitalist, pro-war politician, is using “collective bargaining” between major corporations and sellout union bureaucrats to limit strikes and impose sub-inflation wage increases.

On the West Coast, his administration worked closely with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which kept dockworkers on the job for more than a year without a contract. When workers rebelled by staging wildcat job actions, Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su was dispatched to rapidly cram a new deal down workers’ throats.

Biden’s strategy is to use the union bureaucrats to secure US supply chains and contain domestic dissent in order to prepare the country for war.

The East Coast strike deadline will take place as NATO unleashes unrestricted missile strikes against Russia, risking nuclear war. Backed by dozens of US warships, Israel is preparing a ground invasion of Lebanon—and after that, potentially full-scale war with Iran.

These wars cannot be fought without securing the “home front,” above all by suppressing the working class, whose struggle against inequality could jeopardize the ruling class’ war plans.

The central lesson of the last four years is that workers are in a fight not just against greedy individual corporations, but against the capitalist class and the profit system itself. But the working class, the source of all the world’s wealth, is more powerful than any corporate government or a few hundred union bureaucrats.

To prepare, workers must organize their power independently, establishing a Dockworkers Rank-and-File Committee and establishing lines of contact with other workers through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Through the committee, workers must also begin to democratically formulate their own demands, without which they will reject any contract. We propose they include:

- Inflation-busting wages, including sharp increases in pay at the ports in the South to bring them up to parity with the rest of the country.
- Workers’ control over safety, including the right to override management decisions which endanger people and the right to shut down operations when they are unsafe. Such unsafe conditions include outbreaks of the coronavirus or other dangerous diseases.
- Workers’ control over automation and other new technologies. Properly used, they could lessen the burden of work and shorten the working day with no loss in pay. But that is only if decisions over technology are not subordinated to the profit motive, which uses these advances to more deeply exploit workers.

If you agree with this, contact us today for assistance building a committee by filling out the form below.



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