

Tens of thousands of dockworkers launch strike on US East and Gulf coasts, joining Boeing workers in growing strike wave

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Tens of thousands of dockworkers from Maine to Houston, Texas, launched a strike Tuesday at 12:01 a.m. US Eastern Time in their first East Coast-wide strike since 1977. The strike is part of a growing movement of the working class against exploitation and miserable working conditions.

The key issues on the docks are the same as everywhere else. Workers are fighting against low and stagnant pay, demanding a 70 percent wage increase over six years. They are also demanding protections against automation and other emerging technologies, which the corporations are using to slash millions of jobs globally. And dockworkers are fighting for better working conditions, including less punishing schedules and better safety.

Dockworkers are joining 33,000 Boeing workers, mostly located in the area around Seattle, Washington, on the West Coast, who rebelled against a sellout contract to force a strike that has lasted more than two weeks. Other significant strikes that have emerged in recent weeks include 5,000 machinists at Textron Aviation in Kansas and 525 Eaton aerospace workers in Michigan.

On Monday, warehouse workers from the Teamsters union launched a strike at the Smart & Final grocery store chain in California. Video of the start of the strike was viewed on X more than 3.5 million times as of this writing.

Also on Monday, dockworkers at the Port of Montreal in Canada launched a 72-hour strike, raising the potential for a global struggle.

Conditions are emerging for a broader class movement pitting the working class against US and global capitalism. The East Coast docks occupy a key place in US and global supply chains, including half of the 10 largest ports in North America. Estimates of the cost of a strike range between \$1 billion to \$5 billion per day, and a protracted strike could impact supply chains into 2025.

East Coast dockworkers are demonstrating their immense social power, and their strike will be taken as a call for workers across the country and even the world to press for their own demands. Throughout history, dock strikes have frequently developed into general strikes, including in Seattle in 1919 and New Orleans in 1892.

Tens of thousands of railroaders are currently fighting against new sellout contracts brought by the union bureaucracy, including

an agreement at BNSF that paves the way for eliminating conductor positions. In the auto industry, UPS, the post office and elsewhere, workers are fighting against massive cuts to jobs driven by both automation and sellouts by the bureaucracy.

Tens of thousands of educators across the United States, including in Seattle, Chicago, Detroit and other major districts, are fighting against massive school closures caused by the government diverting funding from education to war.

The role of the White House and the capitalist state

The strike movement is also, objectively, a conflict against the entire political establishment, from the Biden White House—which for years has worked with its allies in the union bureaucracy to limit wage growth—to Trump and the Republicans, who are building a fascist movement to rip up the democratic rights of the working class.

For now, the White House has laid low in order to avoid inflaming the situation further. But corporate America has given Biden his marching orders in the form of yet another letter from the US Chamber of Commerce demanding the government intervene with an injunction under the notorious anti-worker Taft-Hartley Act (also known as the “Slave Labor” law when it was passed shortly after World War II) to block a strike. They also published a self-serving poll, which claimed to show a narrow majority of voters supporting government intervention.

The White House has thus far publicly stated it will not invoke Taft-Hartley, with Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declaring Monday, “We have never invoked Taft-Hartley to break a strike, and we are not considering doing so now.”

This claim is completely disingenuous, since the White House intervened under different legislation to block a railroad strike in late 2022. Only weeks ago, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg intervened to pressure the Canadian government to shut down a rail strike there by imposing binding arbitration. The White House has also spent enormous resources on ensuring “supply chain security,” as a key element in the expanding wars, enlisting the help of pro-corporate union bureaucrats.

But the Biden administration's preferred method has been to enforce *de facto* strike bans through the assistance of the union bureaucracy without having to resort to more open methods. On the West Coast, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) kept workers on the job for more than a year after their contract expired, while acting Labor Secretary Julie Su eventually helped broker a sellout deal.

These experiences show that the government and the whole corporate political system will not sit idly by as the strike begins to impact profits. Workers must be prepared to respond by mobilizing their immense social power, as the source of the world's wealth, behind the striking dockworkers.

While capitalist "democracy" circles the drain in the lead-up to the presidential election and the US teeters on the brink of igniting World War III in Russia and the Middle East, the working class is emerging as a countervailing force capable of profoundly changing the situation, if it is mobilized independently.

To place their fight on a serious footing, dockworkers must establish their independence from the ILA bureaucracy. While union President Harold Daggett threatened strike action for months and broke off talks over the summer, it is highly likely they had intended to announce a last-minute deal like the International Association of Machinists (IAM) tried to at Boeing, itself patterned on the Teamsters sellout at UPS last year. But the unexpected rebellion by Boeing workers, who rejected the deal by an overwhelming 95 percent, not only forced a strike there but seriously jeopardized similar maneuvers by bureaucrats elsewhere.

Indeed, the *New York Times* reported Monday on supposed movement in talks yesterday, with the ILA and the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) trading proposals on wages.

Build rank-and-file strike committees of dockworkers! Unite the struggle for workers' interests with the fight against war!

Having been compelled to call a strike, the corrupt ILA bureaucracy, with more than a century of ties to the Democratic Party and even organized crime, will look to shut it down at the first opportunity.

The key issue for dockworkers is to establish new structures, rank-and-file strike committees, and democratic control over the strike, giving them the ability to countermand decisions that violate the will of the membership. Any attempt by the ILA officialdom to shut down the strike before all of workers' demands have been met must be overridden.

Boeing workers have founded a rank-and-file committee of their own after forcing a strike, and similar committees have been founded all over the world. Affiliated through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), these structures open lines of communication between workers in different industries to prepare common actions.

A central demand should be rank-and-file control over contract negotiations, with all future communications with the USMX livestreamed publicly. All correspondence between union officials

and the Biden White House must also be made public.

Dockworkers must also reject the ILA bureaucracy's pledge to continue handling war materials during the strike. In a statement posted to its website, the ILA crudely declares "I Love America" and explicitly cited its enforcement of a no-strike pledge during World War II as a model for its policies today.

For all of Daggett's bluster about "demanding" Biden stay out of the contract talks, his commitment to imperialist war demonstrates the ILA's allegiance to American capitalism. Even the language about World War II mirrors statements made by Biden about the "Arsenal of Democracy" to justify his corporatist alliance with the union apparatus, which he considers key to preparing the home front for war.

But the US government is not fighting the Nazis today but repeating their crimes. It is supporting neo-Nazis in Russia as part of its proxy war to dismember Russia and seize its natural resources. This policy has brought the world closer than ever to the brink of nuclear war.

The government is also supporting Israel's genocide in Gaza and is fully involved in instigating a region-wide war.

The ILA's commitment to handle military equipment is a betrayal of the Palestinian working class. Last year, the Palestinian trade unions issued a call to workers around the world to refuse to handle military shipments to Israel.

A refusal to handle war materiel is also crucial because it is impossible to defend the rights of workers at home while supporting imperialism. The trillions being sucked out of workers' pockets are being used to fund wars to defend the profits of US corporations.

What makes the dockworkers' strike such a major event is not simply their demands for job protections and wage increases, but that it is part of a broad struggle objectively pitting the working class against capitalism.



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