

“We will not accept business as usual”: Workers across the US support East Coast docks strike

Tom Hall
2 October 2024

Tens of thousands of dockworkers across the East and Gulf coasts continued their strike into its second day Tuesday, part of a broader upsurge of the working class which also includes a strike by 33,000 Boeing workers.

Workers are determined to bring corporate America to its knees in order to win their demands, including 70 percent wage increases and no jobs lost due to automation.

A defiant mood was present on the picket lines. In New York City, workers chanted, “Who runs the country? We do!”

A second-generation New York dockworker said, “I don’t consider myself a political person. But I think that everybody should be able to feed their family, have a house and raise their children well.”

He said the huge amounts of wealth passing through the docks each day is evidence that there is more than enough money for workers. “There’s no reason why we should not be able to get what we all deserve.

“I make \$40 per hour, which I know *used* to be a good wage. Do you want to know how much my rent is? I pay over \$3,000 every month. So \$40 an hour is not what it used to be.”

When asked about the role of profit in automation, he said that these technologies should be used to reduce the burden of the workload. “Production should exist to create jobs and better people’s lives, not to make people miserable and stressed just so that a handful can be rich.”

The corporate press is making feeble attempts to slander dockworkers as lazy and entitled. The *New York Times*, the mouthpiece for the Democratic Party and the military, published an article yesterday trying to whip up port truckers, who have been temporarily put out of work by the strike. But two of the three workers they interviewed supported the strike.

In reality, there is widespread support for turning the strike into a broader movement of the working class against exploitation. It is also emboldening workers in other industries to press for their own demands.

Railroad workers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* say their coworkers are even more indignant now over sellout contracts which the rail unions are attempting to ram through. In particular, the dockworkers’ demand for a 70 percent raise over six years and the port operators’ counter-offer of 50 percent expose the poverty 17.5 percent pay increase over four years

which the rail union bureaucrats are attempting to paint as a tremendous victory in their contracts with the rail corporations.

The strike also casts into sharp relief the consequences of the strike ban two years ago by the White House and Congress, which imposed a deal on workers with no sick days and only 24 percent wage increases. Currently, Biden claims he is not considering an injunction under the Taft-Hartley Act against the dock strike, insincerely claiming that he “does not believe” in it. (The strike ban on the railroads was imposed through different legislation.)

Meanwhile, the Harris campaign issued a statement Tuesday claiming to support the strike, while diverting attention away from Wall Street towards “foreign-owned shipping companies.” But the strike ban on the railroads shows that it is holding more direct measures in reserve if the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) bureaucracy is not able to shut it down soon.

The threat of such attacks underscores the need for workers to rally in support of the strike, leveraging the power of the working class to prevent intervention. As the WSWs wrote yesterday, dockworkers also face the key issue of building rank-and-file strike committees to enforce democratic control over the strike and to establish lines of communication with workers in other industries.

Boeing strikers: “We must join forces”

There is enormous support at Boeing for the dockworkers. Boeing workers are in the third week of a strike which they forced with a rank-and-file rebellion against a sellout contract brought by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) apparatus, which workers rejected by 95 percent. Afterwards, many formed the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee to build a fight against both the company and the union bureaucracy and to reach out for support in the wider working class.

“This is eye-opening,” one Boeing worker said. “Corporate America is selling out the workers.

“Corporations in America and other countries don’t care what your bills are or what your health is, as long as their wallets are full!

“To the port workers: Stand strong, stand for what you believe in. ... The only people who make this country strong is the working class!”

Another Boeing worker said, “As a member of the IAM 751 currently on strike, I stand in solidarity with the 45,000 dockworkers who are fighting for their rights and fair treatment. Our struggles are interconnected. Just as we demand better wages and working conditions for ourselves, we recognize the vital role that dockworkers play in our economy and supply chain.

“Their fight for justice reflects the larger battle for labor rights across all industries, and we believe that when one of us stands up, we all must stand together. Our strength lies in our unity, and together we can demand the respect and dignity from the bureaucrats that every worker deserves.

“This strike is not just about our individual grievances; it’s about obtaining a future where all workers can thrive. The dockworkers’ commitment to improving their working conditions resonates deeply with our own goals at Boeing. As we rally and picket together, we highlight the importance of collective bargaining and the power of our voices.

“Our solidarity is a powerful statement that we will not accept business as usual while our fellow workers are treated unfairly. By joining forces, we aim to create a more equitable landscape for all laborers in the foreseeable future and beyond, ensuring that our contributions are recognized and valued.”

Autoworkers: “They’re drawing a line in the sand”

The strike also has enormous support from autoworkers, who are battling mass layoffs. Like the cuts being threatened at the docks, the layoffs in the auto industry are being spearheaded through automation and other new technologies.

“All workers must stand shoulder to shoulder with the dockworkers and launch a joint struggle that unites all sections of the working class,” declared Will Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran for United Auto Workers president to abolish the bureaucracy. “At the Stellantis Warren Truck plant in Michigan, more than 2,000 workers are facing imminent layoffs, but UAW President Shawn Fain and the UAW have done nothing to stop them.

“Autoworkers and other workers must now join forces [with Boeing and dockworkers]. This is not just a struggle to defend what we have—We must turn the tables and go on the offensive.”

Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US Vice President, visited Warren Truck and other plants throughout the Detroit area on Wednesday. “It is time for [autoworkers] to draw a line in the sand,” White declared in a statement outside of Warren Truck.

“The conditions for a struggle are rapidly emerging—45,000 dockworkers on the East Coast and the Gulf Coast went out on strike. Boeing workers in the Pacific Northwest have also gone out on strike.

“But unifying all these struggles will not come from above,” he

continued. The union bureaucracies “are tied to the corporations and to the Biden administration which wants to suppress all forms of opposition in order to wage endless wars in the Middle East and against Russia and China.” Trump, meanwhile, wants to incite “violence against immigrants.”

Uniting these struggles “must be done from below,” he concluded. Workers must build “a powerful network of rank-and-file committees to organize strike action to defend the social rights of every single worker to a good-paying and secure job.”

White also issued a separate statement on Boeing the same afternoon.

“I agree with [the Boeing and dock strikes],” one Dana auto parts worker said. “You have a right to do that. You want us to do a job, then come and say you’re laid off? No, that’s not fair and write to me as a worker.”

Another Dana worker declared: “I’m supporting the brothers, and I’m going with them all the way! They’re drawing a line in the sand to defend everyone!”

He continued: “We need all the support we can get. Every industry ... it’s like a domino effect, so you need to stick together.”

War is funded “with our tax dollars,” he continued. “And people gotta eat. And you’re giving people free money [who are] rich. They get stock options and all kinds of stuff. They’re not worried about anything. Their family is well taken care of.”

The worker, a veteran, also opposed the Israeli war on Gaza. “That’s genocide, man. They need to stop supporting Israel and start supporting the people in this country.”

Another Dana worker said, addressing the dockworkers, “I am supporting you guys, and I think you guys are doing a great job.” Automation “will put me out of work,” she said, “so I’m fighting with you guys.”

The fact that the United Auto Workers bureaucracy claimed its new contract was a “historic” victory, only for thousands to now be losing their jobs, “is crap,” she said. “People thought they were going to live a better life, and now they are out of work.”

Asked about the fixation of corporate politics on war, she replied: “We’re living in war right now in here. We’re broke, we need jobs, the jobs are leaving. The rent is high, the food is high, everything is high. We are in war. You need to fix this before you try to go fight someone else.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact