

# Trump promotes “America First” nationalism to head off potential second strike on US East Coast docks

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*Dockworkers: Take up the fight for workers’ control! Contact the WSWS below for information about how to start a rank-and-file committee.*

Little more than a month remains until the January 15 expiration of a contract extension for 45,000 US dockworkers from Maine to Houston, Texas. The extension was imposed by the International Longshoremen’s Association in October to shut down a three-day strike, in exchange for 62 percent wage increases.

However, workers’ main demand for job protections from automation, which threatens to more than offset wage hikes through mass layoffs, remains totally unresolved. The United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) continues to stake out a hard line in talks, which broke down again almost as soon as they restarted last month.

Dockworkers are furious over this betrayal by the ILA and determined to resume their struggle. One dockworker wrote on social media: “We got hosed! We lost all leverage by going back during the holidays.” Another worker wrote, “No way a handshake agreement is made, only for automation to remain a deal killer just a few weeks later. All the Thanksgiving talk was willful misdirection. By May it will be a matter of how much automation we can tolerate and a \$5 bump.”

A third worker wrote, “We back to work for nothing in my opinion ... We should have stayed on strike.”

## Trump’s right-wing posturing

With the extension expiring only five days before the presidential inauguration, this threatens to emerge as one of the first major domestic crises of the second Trump presidency. Whatever illusions exist among workers who voted for Trump, who was able to capitalize on social discontent by default thanks to the open indifference of the Democrats, will be quickly shattered.

The same president who has promised to deploy the military to deport undocumented immigrants and even their citizen relatives will use similar ruthless methods against the working class, against whom such measures are ultimately aimed.

In the meantime, Trump is attempting to channel workers’ anger

behind his right wing “America First” program, presenting automation and job cuts as the fault of “foreign” corporations. To accomplish this, he is closing ranks with the union bureaucracy, which supports this divisive program which pits American workers against immigrants and “foreign” workers.

On Thursday, Trump posted to his personal social media platform Truth Social that he had “Just finished a meeting with the International Longshoremen’s Association and its President, Harold Daggett, and Executive VP, Dennis Daggett.”

He continued: “I’ve studied automation, and know just about everything there is to know about it.

“Foreign companies have made a fortune in the U.S. by giving them access to our markets ... For the great privilege of accessing our markets, these foreign companies should hire our incredible American Workers, instead of laying them off, and sending those profits back to foreign countries. It is time to put AMERICA FIRST!”

## What “America First” really means

This attempt to present his right-wing fascist policies as a boon to American workers is absurd. Trump’s incoming cabinet is packed with billionaires who are planning massive attacks on workers, cuts to social spending and deregulation of corporations.

Trump’s expressed his real attitude to the working class at Economic Club of Chicago two months ago, when he compared autoworkers to children. Elon Musk, whom Trump appointed as head of the so-called “Department of Government Efficiency” only days before denounced dockworkers for their opposition to automation.

Wall Street, which knows they stand to reap massive profits under these policies, has responded to Trump’s election with a massive stock market surge. Jeff Bezos, founder and chairman of Amazon which has spearheaded automation in its warehouses, donated a million dollars to the Trump inauguration and praised him in a recent media appearance.

What Trump’s “America First” policies really mean is to first crush domestic opposition within the United States to prepare for

conflict with China and other rivals of US capitalism.

A real fight for jobs requires workers prepare a struggle first of all against the oligarchs in the United States, as part of a global movement of the working class. Workers are united by their common interests, but the ruling elite tries to pit workers against each other by promoting nationalism and racism. Their watchword must be not “America First,” but “workers of the world unite!”

The ILA’s support for Trump shows the bureaucracy is on the side of management. Bureaucrats across the country are flocking to Trump, pledging to work with him on his xenophobic policies aimed at falsely blaming foreigners for job losses carried out by US capitalists, with the support of the trade unions.

There is a remarkable continuity of Trump’s declared labor policy with those of the outgoing Biden White House, showing the degree to which all factions of the ruling class see the bureaucracy as key to suppressing a challenge from below. Only weeks ago, Daggett shut down the first dock strike through a White House mediated deal, the latest in a series of contracts where Biden personally intervened to limit or block strikes.

He has relied centrally on the services of the union bureaucracy, whom he called his “domestic NATO” over the summer, to impose labor peace while the government wages war abroad. If anything, Trump is seeking to build upon the corporatist policies already established under Biden.

This underscores the need for dockworkers to organize a rank-and-file rebellion against both parties and the ILA bureaucracy. To prepare a real struggle against automation, they must form a Dockworkers Rank-and-File Committee, fighting to take the initiative out of the hands of the government and bureaucrats, and appealing for unity with workers across the US and the world who are fighting the same attacks on their jobs.

## **Corporate America prepares for second strike, tariffs**

There is tremendous concern among the corporate and financial oligarchy over the possibility of another strike at the East and Gulf Coast ports.

Last week, a coalition of 267 trade associations, led by the US National Retail Federation (NRF), sent a letter to ILA President Daggett and David Adam, chairman and chief executive of the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX), demanding an immediate resumption of contract talks.

The companies are still dealing with additional costs from the three-day strike in October. The backlog created by the short strike action took several weeks to clear and it is estimated that every day a port is closed it will take five days for supply chains to return to normal.

Adding to the concerns of the trade associations is the potential financial impact of the tariffs threatened by the incoming administration. Trump has vowed to impose a 25 percent tariff on all Canadian and Mexican products and a 35 percent tariff against China. Most recently, the US president-elect threatened to impose a 100 percent tariff on any member of the BRICS group of nations

that challenges the global dominance of the US dollar.

Canada, Mexico and China have indicated that they will respond in kind, imposing their own tariffs on trade with the US. In 2023, China, Canada and Mexico accounted for over \$1.32 trillion in US imports, 45 percent of all American imports and over \$820 billion, or 41 percent, of US exports.

The imposition of such tariffs would dramatically rock the world economy, immediately impacting global production chains. Corporations will seek to offload the cost of these policies with price hikes and attacks on workers’ jobs. Dockworkers, at the center of world trade and economy, will face the brunt of these reactionary policies as the maritime shippers cut jobs, wages and oversee a further degeneration of working conditions to compensate for the hikes in import and export prices.

Maritime shippers are seeking to mitigate the impact of these potential tariffs on their bottom lines by “frontloading,” pulling forward imports to beef up the supply chains and build up inventories, ahead of Trump’s inauguration at the end of next month.

According to the most recent report by Global Port Tracker, produced for the NRF by maritime trade consultancy Hackett Associates, container imports at US ports are surging. The report expects an over 14 percent increase year over year for November and December of 2024. It further predicts significantly higher volumes through the spring of 2025.

Nearly half of all US imports and billions of dollars in trade monthly are at stake for the corporate and financial oligarchy.

Threats of astronomical tariffs and emphasis on the maintenance of dollar dominance are driven by the ever-deepening economic crisis of American imperialism and will, eventually, lead to open military confrontation with the central target of US imperialism: China.

Under the Trump administration, open ports will remain essential to US war plans. As under the Biden administration, the uninterrupted supply of war materiel for wars abroad and further development of global supply chains in preparation for all-out war with China will be of central importance.

Dockworkers cannot defend their jobs and standard of living without engaging in a political struggle, independent of and opposed to both parties, against dictatorship and war.

The extraordinary power of the dockworkers was demonstrated in October. But to effectively combat the transnational corporations, their governments and labor stooges, workers must take up a political struggle aimed at unifying the working class as the international revolutionary social force in a fight against capitalism. This requires the formation of new organizations, rank-and-file committees, which workers and not pro-management bureaucrats control.



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