

IT'S TIME TO FIGHT BACK!

The Pacific Maritime Association has locked out the ILWU because it thinks it has the union on the run. The PMA thinks the ILWU is holding a weak hand. The PMA plan is to let the trucks pile up in full view of the TV cameras and fill the corporate media with talk about how port workers with ILWU “fat checks” are driving up the prices. Of course, the PMA forgets to mention the tier system on the docks and how even in the best of times, a lot of ILWU members are out of work, while the PMA rakes in the profits. Nor does anyone hear anything on the “news” about how dangerous longshore work is, with five longshoremen killed just this year.

The maritime capitalists hope to isolate the union to make it easier for Bush to invoke the Taft–Hartley Act’s 80-day union-busting cooling off period. They figure that if the union shows any defiance, Bush will help his rich cronies by sending in soldiers and sailors to occupy the ports and scab on the ILWU. The PMA plans to eliminate our hiring hall. By bringing back the shape-up, they plan to break the ILWU and lay off many. They’d love the union to slink to and from work like whipped dogs.

Clearly, the ILWU needs a strong plan of action. What is needed are elected strike committees in each port to engage all members in the coming fight. If the PMA lifts the lock-out, the ILWU needs waterfront assemblies during work hours to discuss the negotiations. The ILWU needs to dispense with business-as-usual “business unionism” and return to our militant class-struggle roots. A negotiating committee of hard-core dockworkers could breathe some fire down the PMA necks.

The ILWU also needs to get as many volunteers from other unions to beef up picket lines and help prevent scab-herding. Workers across the country are fed up with getting kicked in the teeth by three-piece corporate “suits.” If the ILWU appeals directly to members of other unions, many will come out to support the picket line. The union fathers did it in 1934. Don’t forget Bloody Thursday, July 5, 1934. When the maritime bosses used their city cops to gun down six of the ILWU’s union fathers (Nick Bordoise, Shely Daffron, Olaf Helland, John Knudsen, Dick Parker and Howard Sperry), the union’s working-class uncles and aunts, union and non-union, shut San Francisco down tight in a general strike. Some of the ILWU union fathers gave their lives so to have a union hiring hall. Let’s mobilize now to keep it!

The Dockworkers Section of the International Transport Workers Federation has already pledged their support. The victory of the ILA Charleston 5 due to both ILWU and international hot-cargoing demonstrates the power of working-class solidarity.

A militant plan of action lets the bosses know that the union has the power to take them on. It also sends a signal to the bosses and the Bush Administration that they had better cease and desist in their offensive against the union. In 1919, Seattle dockworkers discovered that Russian bound crates labeled “sewing machines” contained machine guns and rifles to crush the Soviet workers. George Bush plans to use containers labeled “machine guns and rifles” to move containers of sewing machines to break our strike. The Seattle dockworkers organized a general strike to halt U.S. militarism in its tracks. The PMA cannot be permitted to use today’s militarism to break the ILWU. Locked-out or struck—No Scabs!—No Cargo!—No cops or troops on the docks! Government hands off the union!

Unfortunately, so far, the PMA knows that the ILWU business-union leadership has not come up with a plan of struggle. The PMA think it has the union on the run, that they can force a back-breaking contract down the dockworkers’ throats. So far, the rich scum are drunk on the “success” of their stalling tactics.

“So what do we do now?” First of all, ILWU members need to organize militant action committees in the union to mobilize our fellow brothers and sisters. The *presence* of such militant committees might even help persuade some of our more reluctant union officials to overcome their timidity. The Union must demand class struggle action from the AFL-CIO.

So far, some bureaucrats have toyed with organizing fruitless and purely symbolic expeditions to Payless Shoes and the like. These types of actions only dissipate the power of the union. The AFL-CIO leadership must be called on to put the bosses and the government on notice in no uncertain terms that the lock-out will not be tolerated. A staggered series of strike actions in other unions can have a sobering affect on the PMA. The AFL-CIO bureaucrats receive part of our dues and in return are supposed to defend our interests. Now is the time for them act forcefully on the behalf of the ILWU. The ILWU leadership should immediately demand that the AFL-CIO mobilize in our support. And if they don't, the ILWU and its supporters should march on the AFL-CIO to demand action!

Rank-and-file assemblies must be formed on the picket line—to draw up clear demands and to form waterfront strike committees. This struggle can't be left to those who have already let the rank and file member down—the struggle can't go on behind closed doors.

If these actions are not taken, the ILWU will flounder, leaving all workers open to a relentless offensive which will not stop until the ILWU, as it is known today, is destroyed, and with it, the livelihood. This will be a pattern that will be repeated among the entire US working class.

Having declared to the press “No more PATCO’s!” the union must take militant action to secure victory. The fathers of the ILWU stood firm in the middle of the Great Depression. They won then, the ILWU can now!

This struggle shows that what workers need more than ever today is a revolutionary workers party. If workers have their own party, they can challenge the capitalist class for state power. As it is, *their* government, run by *their* Democrat and Republican parties, will always defend *their* interests. Until workers have our own mass workers party and a workers government based on genuine democracy—workers’ democracy, workers will always be under attack from the capitalists and their government.

- ◆ ***Smash the PMA’s Union-Busting Scheme!—Defend the Union Hiring Hall!***
- ◆ ***Jobs For All!—6 Hour Day With No Loss In Take-Home Pay!***
- ◆ ***For an AFL-CIO Plan of Struggle to End The Lockout and Force the Negotiation of a Winning Contract!***
- ◆ ***No More Weak Negotiations Behind Closed Doors: Form Work-Site Assemblies on the Docks, Election of Local Strike Committees!***
- ◆ ***Open The PMA’s Books! They Lie When They Claim Poverty, They Plan to Bust The Union and Cut Jobs!***
- ◆ ***Keep The Military and Police Off the Docks! No Government Interference in Union Affairs!***

Organizing Committee for the Program of Permanent Revolution (OCPPR)

web page: <http://ocppr.placerouge.org> email: ocppr@yahoo.com
In the San Francisco Bay Area, call Vicente Balvanera: (415) 308-3068
Labor Donated October 2002