

One Longshoreman's Opinion

Stop PMA's Phony Legal Attack!

Defend Our Union!

Support the Caucus Resolution!

Around contract time, it often gets hot between unions and employers. I've been in the trade union movement 50 years. (I joined the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union when I was 14 years old.) I have never heard an employer use such bogus arguments to deny workers their right to a union meeting particularly at contract time. Longshore workers, by democratic vote, have decided to stop work on May Day to stop the war, a war that most people in this country oppose. It's the war that's illegal, not our decision to stop work. PMA legal threats will only anger longshore workers, especially now during negotiations, a time when Local 10 has usually led the locals on the Coast in job actions showing our union's strength to bolster the Negotiating Committee. Our action was decided by a democratic debate at the Longshore Caucus and that's the highest body in the ILWU Longshore Division when it's in session. PMA can't change that decision.

The ILWU International requested to change the date of our stop work meetings in April 1999 and PMA agreed. The purpose for the meeting change was to lead a demonstration of 20,000 people in San Francisco to help save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal, an innocent black journalist on death row in Pennsylvania. PMA didn't have a problem then and shouldn't have a problem now. We also had negotiations going on then and there was a helluva lot more shipping going on then. It's clear PMA is trying to test the will of the ILWU membership. Our antiwar action has the backing of many trade unions as well as the San Francisco Labor Council, the International Dockworkers Council and the International Transport Workers Federation, representing longshore unions in Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Labor action can stop the war. Pressuring the Democrats will not. They've proved it already. They got a majority in both houses of Congress in '06 because voters thought they would put an end to the war. And what happened? They keep voting billions for the war budget over and over, Clinton, Obama, McCain – all of them. The International has endorsed Barack Obama, but he, like the others, says he can't withdraw "combat brigades" from Iraq until some time in 2010, and he, like the others, says he will keep some troops in Iraq *indefinitely*. He wants to *increase* the U.S. forces in Afghanistan and attack Iran and Pakistan! I'm not voting for any Democrat or Republican. As I've said before, the labor movement needs its own party, a workers party. In any case, the Caucus resolution that passed is clear as can be. It says this is "a bipartisan and unjustifiable war in Iraq and Afghanistan but the two major political parties, Democrats and Republicans continue to fund the war." And that's truth.

The Caucus resolution doesn't get into the whole "support the troops" or "safe withdrawal" thing because it is a trap. The Democrats and Republicans in Congress, even the ones who say

they're against the war, say they vote for the Pentagon budget to show that they "support the troops." All that does is keep the war going. For an occupying army to withdraw only when it's "safe" means never because it's always violent and chaotic when a foreign military invades and oppresses people of another country. A lot of sisters and brothers in the ILWU, like myself, have friends and relatives in the armed forces, some of them in Iraq. Many of them got dragged into the military in what is being called the "economic draft" – basically because they didn't see any other way to get a skill or get a college education paid for. So instead they kill and get killed. And flag-waving doesn't do them any favors– it ends up with the flag draped over coffins.

Again, our resolution says clearly, we "demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East." And it's not just us. We're not in this alone. We're getting messages of support from around the world. To stop this war is going to take *international* action by the working class, not by phony appeals to patriotism. We're hoping that our action can get British workers and Japanese workers and Italian and French workers to stop work as well. Then we'll see some results.

No work should be done in any port on the Coast Thursday May 1st, nothing moves. If any port works, it undercuts the whole purpose of our action and shows a divided ILWU to PMA. We had a democratic vote to stop work and mobilize for a "No Peace No Work Holiday," remember? No work means no work, period.

We're doing something here that takes courage, something people all over the world are watching, something our kids and grandkids will be proud of us for. We're adding a new page to the ILWU history book, "The ILWU Story, Six Decades of Militant Unionism". Because when we stand up and say "no", we put our money where our mouth is. We're stopping work even though it's costing every one of us because we want to make a point. It shows we mean business and we don't want PMA to tell us what we can and can't do.

We're stopping work to stop the war. And if we shut the waterfront down tight as a drum, so that nothing moves on the docks to send the message that this war has got to end or we're pulling the plug – then the politicians, generals and bankers in Washington on Wall Street are going to take notice. You know it and I know it and they know it – we all know it. So let's get serious about this: no work means no work. If PMA sees that they can divide us, it will just encourage them to take a harder line in the contract bargaining. If they see that we're standing solid on May Day, it will tell them what's coming their way if they try to hardtime us in the negotiations.

Already you have the big business press reporting that shippers want to "streamline operations" by eliminating jobs, that they would like to "dispatch work assignments over the Internet rather than at union hiring halls," and that they "have shown an interest in moving work away from the docks, which the ILWU dominates." *But*, the article says, "workers in Vancouver, Canada's independent ILWU affiliate this February stopped work during two shifts as a show of strength during negotiations." And while "The significance of the May Day antiwar stoppage is small when compared to the threat of a longer shutdown," it adds, "this spring's wrangling, which pits union jobs against shippers' profits, might portend the sort of confrontation" that has economists up nights worrying (*Miller-McCune*, April 9). That's what the bosses' press is saying. So let's give them something to worry about.

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