

Support Occupy Call for Dec. 12 Coast Shutdown

Occupy Movement and Ports Workers: SAME STRUGGLE, SAME FIGHT!

NOVEMBER 28 – On November 2, some 30,000 demonstrators marched on the Port of Oakland, shutting it down on the evening shift in response to a call by Occupy Oakland for a “general strike.” One of the declared aims of the powerful march was to show solidarity with longshore workers facing a vicious union-busting attack by the EGT grain conglomerate in Longview, Washington. ILWU officials had scuttled calls by some rank and file longshoremen in the hiring hall that morning to stop work all day.

Now several Occupy groups have issued a call for a West Coast Port Blockade for Dec. 12. Once again they are highlighting the attack on the Longview ILWU, as well as that on the port truckers’ union organizing drive in Los Angeles/Long Beach, by the notorious anti-union SSA, majority-owned by Goldman Sachs. The Wall Street banksters and PMA are also pushing a robotics contract provision to cut longshore jobs to the bone in the largest port in the country. Occupy Seattle aims to shut down the port to protest Democrat governor Gregoire’s budget cuts.

Waterfront workers from Longview to Long Beach and beyond are facing a frontal attack threatening the future of our jobs and our unions. What’s needed to defeat these employer assaults is a solid union action, shutting down the Coast. The call by the populist Occupy movement to blockade ports should be *welcomed* as supplementary support for labor’s struggle. President McEllrath, on Oct. 5 publicized his “solidarity with Occupy Wall Street” statement. But now, the ILWU International officers are contradicting themselves, undermining unity with Occupy and saying the union wants nothing to do with the Dec. 12 blockade.



James Fassinger/Guardian

30,000 marched on the Port of Oakland in response to call by Occupy Oakland, Nov. 2, shutting it down in solidarity with Longview longshoremen.

This is more than a ritual CYA declaration. The voice of the maritime bosses, the *Journal of Commerce*, (23 November) noted that the union leaders were making clear that they were hostile to the Occupy initiative. The ILWU Coast Committee issued a Nov. 21 memo slamming “outside groups intent on driving their own agendas.” The next day it followed up with a press statement “clarifying” its stand on “third-party protests.” These shameful statements go against the grain of ILWU’s militant record of solidarity actions and don’t represent the rank and file’s sentiments. ILWU is bottom up not top down.

The Coast Committee said that a community demonstration or picket is not a picket line, as defined by the longshore contract. This flies in the face of “ILWU’s 10 Guiding Principles”, which say:

“Unions have to accept the fact that the solidarity of labor stands above all else, including even the so-called sanctity of the contract.”

Occupy’s enemies, EGT and SSA, are ILWU’s enemies too.

The ILWU Story, Six Decades of Militant Unionism and *The Dispatcher* document ILWU’s proud history of longshore workers honoring community pickets. For example, here are some community demonstrations or

pickets honored by ILWU:

- 1) 1970's-1980's community pickets in San Francisco opposed apartheid. In 1984, Local 10 longshoremen themselves refused to unload a ship from South Africa without need for a community picket. Mandela applauded that action which sparked the antiapartheid movement.
- 2) In 1998, in a stunning example of international labor solidarity with Australian wharfies, LA longshoremen respected a labor/community picket and forced the scab ship, *Columbia Canada*, to return to Australia to be loaded by MUA union workers.
- 3) In 2003, at the start of the Iraq War anti-war protesters blocked the gates of war profiteers SSA and APL at the port of Oakland. Longshoremen standing by on the safety clause in the contract were hit by police fire. An unprecedented lawsuit against the OPD by Local 10 was won by the union. Our legal brief documented a history of police violence against longshoremen going back to the Big Strike of 1934 when two strikers were shot in the back and killed by police.

Now the International turns its back on our history. We have to ask: Why would the Coast Committee place longshore workers in harms way by directing them to standby on safety if there is a large demonstration at the terminal gate when the danger to port workers is not from the protesters but the police? (Just look at the Longview longshore workers who have been beaten and pepper sprayed.) And why would the Coast Committee be concerned about a lawsuit against the union when all of these labor and community pickets were initiated by the ranks, not by the officers? ***Bottom up not top down!***

Their memo and statement underline that ***any port shutdown will come from the rank and file over the opposition of the International officers.*** It wouldn't be the first time. Last April 4, Local 10 shut down Bay Area ports in solidarity with Wisconsin workers, and a year ago it held a stop-work rally for justice for Oscar Grant, protesting the police killing of an innocent young black man. We welcomed community support for these mobilizations.

Their memo and statement reek of lawyers' arguments that accept anti-labor laws as gospel. They talk of "the union's internal democratic process." So, has the membership been asked to vote on shutting down the ports over the EGT attack? What about refusing to load or unload STX and Itochu ships, part of the EGT consortium along with the grain conglomerate Bunge? The truth is the union leadership has done everything to ***prevent democratic rank-and-file decision-making and action.*** Is there a secret plan?!

- 1) The Coast Committee tried to gag Longview Local 21's president Dan Coffman, by preventing him from talking to the press, but the local prevailed in their fight to allow him to speak.
- 2) The Coast Committee has blocked any kind of democratic forum to discuss the most important ILWU struggle in decades, whether it be a dual area meeting of the rank and file in Washington and Oregon or a Coast Caucus, representing longshoremen from all West Coast ports.
- 3) They've tried to thwart Local 21 members from going to other locals to give information and gain support. Now they try to stop ILWU from linking up with the populist Occupy movement.
- 4) The Coast Committee has exerted pressure on the small Local 21 to follow their orders or face losing the union's financial support for fines and legal costs approaching \$2,000,000, they say.

The ILWU has a long history of standing up to the employing class and organizing solidarity actions, often despite the International officers' positions. This is a source of pride for our membership and the ILWU is admired by other unions for its courageous stands. Longshoremen, as always, need to link up now with other port workers, truckers, machinists, warehousemen and the Occupy movement in a fight against the port bosses for our jobs and our unions, regardless of what the union tops put out.

The Longview workers are more than thankful for the support they have already received in their fight – *our fight* – against EGT. Speaking at a labor rally before a Nov. 19 march called by Occupy Oakland, Local 21 president Dan Coffman said, referring to the awesome Nov. 2 march that shut down the port in Oakland, "You cannot believe what you did for the inspiration of my union members who've been on the picket line for 6 months!"

The ILWU must support the Occupy move to shut down West Coast ports on Dec. 12. Most importantly, we must show the power of workers when the ship arrives in Longview days later to load scab grain at the EGT terminal. The call must go out: **PORT WORKERS: SHUT DOWN ALL U.S. PORTS !!**

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