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Defend the Dignity of Labour
**BC Port Workers on Strike in Defence
of Their Rights**



Centennial Terminal, East Vancouver, July 3, 2023

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Defend the Dignity of Labour
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of Their Rights**

Seven thousand four hundred port workers across BC went on strike July 1 to defend their working conditions and the pay and benefits they receive from the sale of their capacity to work. The conditions in which they work are such that they are profoundly concerned for the security of their employment in particular against contracting out, which targets them as disposable workers and weakens their unity as an organized force within a union. Should the employers prevail in setting the untenable working conditions and instability of employment which would result from the

concessions they are demanding, another major concern will become the workers' health and safety. Their employers are also introducing automation without taking into consideration the well-being of the workforce or the necessity to activate the human factor which takes up social responsibility. Automation without activating the human factor to take up social responsibility spells trouble.



Berth 10, July 3, 2023

BC port workers are facing difficult issues affecting their working lives and social conditions. The support they have received from their counterparts all over the world clearly shows that their demands are just and that workers all over the world are being abused for the same reasons and are also fighting back. Canadians also stand with them and demand that the authorities in control of the ports and governments address and resolve these matters in a respectful manner and reach a contract agreeable to the port workers.

That is what will provide stability to the supply chains, not the privatization of the ports, not contracting out, not lower wages and deteriorated health and safety provisions. All attempts on the part of government spokespersons or the monopoly media to put the blame on the workers for disruptions to supply chains are nothing but self-serving repetition of the narratives of the private interests which control the transportation networks and ports. They should be scoffed at as part of standing firm to support the port workers' just cause.





Statement from ILWU Canada Bargaining Committee

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Canada issued the following statement regarding the conditions that led their members to withdraw their labour in an effort to reach a suitable contract agreement:



Rob Ashton, President -- ILWU Canada

Free Collective Bargaining between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Canada (ILWU) and the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) has been ongoing since February of this year in an attempt to renew the industry wide collective agreement which expired March 31, 2023.

The Union is seeking a fair deal that respects Longshore workers, one that protects our jobs and our jurisdiction. We are seeking recognition for the hard work and sacrifices that Longshore Workers made during the pandemic and the extraordinary work that Longshore Locals did in getting workers out to the terminals during the lockdowns.

Our Main Objectives are:

- To stop the erosion of our work through Contracting Out
- To protect current and future generations from the devastating impacts of Port Automation
- To protect longshore workers from record High Inflation and sky rocketing Cost of Living

But the Employers and their bargaining agent, the BCMEA have repaid our hard work and dedication with demands for major concessions. Their only objective is to take away rights and conditions from longshore workers after having gorged themselves on record profits during the

pandemic.

Longshore workers kept this Province and the Country running during the Pandemic and when Canadians were told to shelter in place, our people went to work! We worked in difficult and hazardous conditions to ensure that the communities where we live, and all Canadians had the necessary supplies and personal protective equipment to defend against the Covid-19 virus. This was an unprecedented time in the history of the world and longshore workers stepped up and proved that we are here to support the people of Canada. It is unfortunate that our employers hold us in such contempt.

Unfortunately, the ILWU Canada Bargaining Committee has run out of options at the bargaining table because the BCMEA and their member employers have refused to negotiate on the main issues, and we feel we are left with no choice but to take the next step (strike) in the process.

We remain committed to negotiate an end to this dispute that respects Longshore Workers and we call on the BCMEA to drop all concessions and get serious about negotiating with the Union in good faith.

Rob Ashton, President — ILWU Canada



Port Moody, July 1, 2023

(Photos: ILWU Canada)



Significant National and International Support for BC Port Workers

No matter what attempts the federal or BC governments or the British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) make to isolate BC port workers and portray their demands as self-serving or unreasonable in today's economy, the port workers are part of an international working class movement which stands in the forefront of defending the rights which belong to port workers by right. They carry out hard, difficult work and require proper conditions of employment, wages and health and safety protections. The large number of messages they have received from their counterparts abroad is a clear warning to their employers not to abuse this work force which is the decisive component of the supply chains. From the time that the port workers announced the result of their strike vote they have been receiving significant messages of support from

transportation workers in Canada and around the world as well as from other unions. The messages are posted to their facebook page. They include:

The Canadian Merchant Service Guild expressed its full support saying that while they are limited by federal legislation on how they show their support on the picket lines they consider the west coast dock workers fight their fight and will find ways to show that support.



Young port workers from Tacoma, Washington, join members of ILWU Local 500 on picket lines in Vancouver.

The BC Ferry and Marine Workers' Union sent a message of support and solidarity from its 4,300 workers on the BC coast stating, "We applaud your strike notice to BCMEA due to their refusal to negotiate a fair deal including wages, automation and Union jurisdiction. BCMEA must have forgotten how essential ILWU members were during the pandemic, while they reaped massive profits off the backs of workers everywhere."

The Retail Wholesale Union BC sent a letter of support stating that its members will visit the dockers picket lines in support for as long as it takes for the workers to win their demands.

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) wrote to the federal Labour Minister Seamus O'Regan on behalf of their 425,000 members supporting the demands of the ILWU Canada and expressing their concerns about the federal government intervening in the dockworkers strike and stating that they sincerely hoped the minister was not considering denying the workers their right to free collective bargaining.

The International Longshoremen's Association pledged that their members would not handle any cargo diverted from BC ports during the strike saying, "Union dockers of the world stand united."

The International Dockworkers Council reiterated the main demands of the dockworkers and said, "All our support in your just demands. For a fair agreement that protects the workers, their jobs/tasks and provides socio-economic stability for the workers' families."

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITWF) stated that they will ensure the resources of the ITWF are made available to the dockworkers to get a just settlement stating that the proposals of the BCMEA "would bring about systematic destruction of their jobs, rights and entitlements which would have a catastrophic impact not just on the longshore workers but on the industry and their local communities.

The Dockers section of ITWF, representing some half million dock workers worldwide stated: "It's absolutely vital current and future longshore workers in Canada and elsewhere are protected from profit-driven inflation and rising costs, the destructive impact of port automation and new technologies, as well as the serious and harmful threat to quality jobs contracting out brings."

The Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union in Sri Lanka expressed their "fullest support and solidarity with your strike action against the employer who does not recognize the genuine needs of employees and look for ONLY their profit. It's a global trend that employers out source or use precarious types of workers to weaken unions and their bargaining power. This is a common threat we all face that needs more attention and a common struggle to defeat it. We wish you success in your strike action."

The Dockworkers of the Vakgroep Haven van Antwerpen in Belgium sent a video message of solidarity.

The FNV Havens Dockers in the Netherlands representing more than 6,200 workers in Dutch seaports expressed its outrage that the negotiations had dragged on for so long and stated that they have been able to negotiate that new jobs coming out of port automation would be covered under their collective agreements, pointing out that automation had to also benefit the workers.

The Grenada Technical and Allied Workers Union sent its greeting to the dockworkers saying, "Let us stand firm and united for the cause. Solidarity forever."

The National Federation of Dockworkers' Unions of Japan reiterated the main demands being put forward by the dock workers and expressed their full support.

The European Transport Workers' Federation stated that the federation representing more than 5 million workers in 38 countries fully stands by their side pointing out that during Covid "The dockers showed great sense of responsibility and dedication, ensuring essential goods and medical supplies were properly loaded and unloaded and that all shipments reached their final destinations, to the benefit of their communities." They stated that governments should not intervene in collective bargaining.

The Maritime Union of New Zealand states that maritime workers in that country have faced similar tough challenges in regards to automation and contracting out but through persistent work have made progress on both fronts. It said that the solidarity provided to them by the Canadian dockworkers in particular in the Port of Auckland strike will never be forgotten and they will do whatever they can to back the dockworkers in their fight.

Messages were also received from transportation workers in Uruguay, Argentina, the Ivory Coast and Australia.



Members of the BC Government Employees Union join port workers on the picket line in Chemainus, July 4, 2023

(Photos: ILWU Canada)



Officials' Response to Port Workers' Strike



Prince Rupert, July 3, 2023

The response from government and elected party officials has been to reiterate the view of the employer and business groups that the strike will cause great harm to the economy and supply chain for traded goods. They appear united in destroying through the mass media any public opinion of Canadians in support of the port workers' rights and just cause. Government officials and big business leaders are intent on laying the groundwork to use police powers to end the strike without reaching an agreement suitable to the port workers.

No official within the federal government of the ruling Liberal/NDP coalition or BC NDP provincial ruling party spoke in support of the port workers in their struggle with their employers. No official from any party in Parliament or BC Legislature detailed the demands and concerns of the union members who are dealing with a deterioration of their working conditions, price inflation and demands for concessions rather than improvements. No elected member from any party made it their duty to outline the context of the struggle, which includes the demands of the employer for concessions that would undermine the job security of workers, weaken their union and damage the

lives of port workers.

The federal office of Employment and Social Development Canada issued a statement on behalf of Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Labour, and Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport whose emphasis was the urgency of not disrupting supply chains. According to the logic of their argument, a strike disrupts the supply chains and so it should be ended, preferably through negotiations, but they have nothing to say about the disregard for the workers who keep the goods and services flowing through the ports and transportation systems. They say:

[...]

We support the collective bargaining process because the best deals are made at the bargaining table. That is our focus here.

We strongly encourage the parties to get back to the bargaining table and work together to reach an agreement. That is what matters most right now.

Everyone -- the employer, the union, the mediators, and the government -- understands the urgency and what is at stake for Canadians and our supply chains. The parties are responsible for moving goods both nationally and internationally, and industries and consumers would feel the effects of a work stoppage.

Senior mediators from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service are meeting with the parties and will keep supporting negotiations until an agreement is reached.

For his part, NDP Premier of BC David Eby refused to give an opinion on the workers' demands and their struggle against concessions. Instead he reiterated the federal government and big business concern for the damage a strike would cause the economy and supply chain.

The issue is not whether a strike causes damage to the economy or not. Obviously a disruption of work-time reduces the production of new value. The issue is not only the current relations of production leave workers with little choice but to defend themselves by withdrawing their labour power from time to time but also the anti-social offensive which seeks to take away protections against contracting out in the name of the security of the supply chain, both of which are unacceptable. Employers cannot be permitted to unilaterally control with dictatorial power the material means of production. The problem of outmoded relations of production must be resolved in favour of the workers so that the decisions which affect their wages and working conditions do not bring them and the society harm. The employers' demand for concessions and their refusal to negotiate and instead dictate cause harm to both the workers and society, no matter what self-serving arguments are provided by governments, cartel party spokespersons and the monopoly-owned media.

Speaking at a news conference BC Premier Eby said he is "profoundly worried about the potential impact of a strike at our ports." Similar to big business he raised the biased anti-worker assertion that the demands and actions of the working class are causes of price inflation and "disruptive to the supply chain."

Premier Eby's words bemoaning the damage to the economy and his government's lack of support for the port workers seek to isolate the workers and activate public opinion against the strike and the just demands of the port workers but the support the workers have already received from port, maritime and transportation workers around the world shows where the cause of justice lies. Should the federal government use its police powers to end the strike in favour of the employers, it will not go well for the future of the supply chains. Organized labour is the most stable there is anywhere in the world. To turn it into disorganized labour with poor working conditions, poor safety standards

and poor pay is not good for the stability of supply chains. Opportunism to make a quick buck is not good for the stability of the economy and supply chains.

Defend the striking port workers! What is good for them is good for the rest of us.

Uphold the Dignity of Labour!



Vancouver, July 3, 2023



Neptune Terminals, (left), Delta Port water picket



Dispatch office, July 3, 2023

(Photos: ILWU Canada)



For Your Information BC Port Workers' Strike



Squamish, July 4, 2023

The strike involves 7,400 terminal cargo loaders at more than 30 BC coastal ports including Canada's busiest in Vancouver. The 49 separate waterfront employers are represented by the BC Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA).

The port workers' union is called the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Canada. The union says contracting out, port automation and the rising cost of living are the key issues in the dispute with the employers. The port workers earlier voted 99.24 per cent in favour of a strike to pressure the employer to come to a suitable contract agreement. The contract with the BCMEA employer association expired this year on March 30. The ILWU Canada issued a statement at the time accusing the employers' association of demanding "major concessions" from the union despite "record profits during the COVID-19 pandemic."

BC port workers handle almost \$225 billion worth of cargo a year. Economists estimate that the work-time of BC port workers contributes \$2.7 billion of new value to Canada's annual Gross Domestic Product.

Approximately 15 per cent of container trade moving through the Port of Vancouver is destined to or originates from the U.S. with most items arriving or departing the ports by rail and smaller amounts by truck. The commodities include raw material, vehicles and their parts, apparel, electronics and home goods. Approximately two per cent of U.S. international laden imports arriving at West Coast ports each year move through the Port of Vancouver. In the north, approximately two-thirds of containerized import volumes coming into the Port of Prince Rupert are destined for the U.S. market by rail. Three Class 1 railways operate at BC ports, CN, Canadian Pacific, and BNSF, a subsidiary of the Berkshire Hathaway cartel.

The Canadian labour code forces port workers to handle grain vessels without disruption on penalty

of fines and imprisonment. The union and employer confirmed an agreement that the current strike would not affect cruise ships docked in Vancouver, Prince Rupert or Vancouver Island.

Peak shipping season is said to start at this time encompassing back-to-school and winter holiday orders among other commodities. Ships are having trouble moving through the Panama Canal because of severe drought conditions. This has increased port activity up and down the west coasts of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. Twenty-two thousand U.S. west coast port workers at 29 ports recently reached a new contract after nearly one year of struggle.

(Photos: ILWU Canada)



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