



Following Dec. 12 West Coast Port Blockade

## Longshore Workers, Truckers: Shut the Ports, Coast to Coast!



Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Occupy protesters blockade the port of Oakland, California, December 12.

### *Class War on the West Coast Docks*

DECEMBER 28 – Following the nationally coordinated police evictions last month of Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Oakland and encampments across the country, on December 12 the Occupiers struck back. Ports up and down the West Coast were blockaded, from Seattle to San Diego and the port of Houston on the Gulf of Mexico. In Oakland, California, where 30,000-40,000 marchers shut down the port on the evening of November 2, this time hundreds blocked port entrances in the early morning and several thousand demonstrators occupied the dock area in the evening, shutting down shipping for the entire day. Key terminals were blockaded in Seattle and Portland. Solidarity rallies were held from New York to Honolulu and Tokyo, Japan. Despite a barrage of hostile propaganda in the media, opposition from union bureaucrats and heavy police repression in some places, overall the blockade was successful – this time.

The port shutdown targeted “Wall Street on the Water-

front.” It was called in solidarity with longshore workers fighting a union-busting assault in Longview, Washington and port truckers seeking union recognition in the ports of Los Angeles/Long Beach. In Longview, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) is facing a scab grain terminal operation by EGT, a consortium of agro-export giant Bunge with Japanese and Korean shipping companies. It is a make-or-break struggle for the ILWU: if EGT is successful, it would break the longshore union’s jurisdiction on the coast. The other grain shippers would immediately try to follow suit, jeopardizing health, welfare and pension benefits for the entire ILWU membership, 30 percent of which comes from the grain contracts.<sup>1</sup> In L.A., Occupiers took aim at SSA Marine (formerly Stevedoring Services of America), where port truckers have been killed and nearly crushed to death

<sup>1</sup> See “Showdown on West Coast Docks: The Battle of Longview,” on page 24.

due to unsafe operations. SSA Marine, 51 percent owned by the Wall Street investment giant Goldman Sachs, is the largest privately held cargo handler in the world.

Class-conscious workers and defenders of democratic rights stand four-square with Occupy activists against police repression. Long before middle-class youth began camping out in city squares, working people have been fighting against the masters of Wall Street who have shamelessly looted the economy, raking in billions in stratospheric salaries and obscene bonuses even as tens of millions are jobless in the worst capitalist economic crisis in three quarters of a century. The fact that Occupy protesters, however contradictory their politics, are taking up the cause of labor should be greeted. Many who have never before been on a demonstration are experiencing, “up close and personal,” the hard realities of American capitalism. Although coming from the outside, and despite the yelps from the bosses and their kept media, from the Democrats and sellout labor bureaucrats, the December 12 West Coast port blockade aided the workers’ class struggle against the exploiters.

D-Day for the ILWU is when a ship comes in to move the grain stored in the EGT silos in Longview, likely in January or February (the projected date keeps getting moved back as protests multiply). ILWU Local 10 in San Francisco/Oakland has called for a caravan of longshore workers and supporters to come to the aid of their Longview sisters and brothers, a call now taken up by Occupy groups. The goal should be a real *occupation of the terminal by the workers to prevent the loading of the scab cargo*. And that is only the beginning. Longshore militants have called on the ILWU ranks to *shut down every port on the West Coast*, and for the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) to *shut down the East and Gulf Coasts*, in support of the Longview struggle. In addition, longshoremen around the globe should *refuse to handle (“hot cargo”) any ship of the union-busting consortium*.

December 12 was a demonstration of sympathy and support, which can be tremendously helpful. But now the *class war on the West Coast docks* is coming to a head, and the real struggle can’t be waged from the outside. “Ready to Fight? Damn right!” chants ILWU Local 10, historically a hotbed of waterfront labor militancy. Can it be done? ILWU longshoremen from throughout the Pacific Northwest showed they were ready, willing and able last September when hundreds braved police repression and “stormed” the scab terminal, dumping ten thousand tons of grain on the tracks. Security guards cowered in their shacks and the cops beat a hasty retreat. There is a world of difference between symbolically “occupying” a plaza or intersection and *seizing the means of production*, as the sit-down strikes (plant occupations) of the 1930s did. That’s what built the unions in this country and elsewhere, and it will take that much and more to *defeat the war on the workers* being waged by both capitalist parties.

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## The Internationalist

A Journal of Revolutionary Marxism  
for the Reforging of the Fourth International

Publication of the Internationalist Group,  
section of the League for the Fourth International

EDITORIAL BOARD: Jan Norden (editor), Mark Lazarus, Abram Negrete,  
Marjorie Salzburg

The Internationalist (ISSN 1091-2843) is published bimonthly, skipping July-August, by Mundial Publications, P.O. Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A. Telephone: (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711 E-mail: [internationalistgroup@msn.com](mailto:internationalistgroup@msn.com) Subscriptions: US\$10 for five issues.

Special Supplement



1162-M

January 2012



### Occupy and the December 12 Port Blockade

The initiative for a port shutdown originated with Occupy Los Angeles, in support of organizing efforts by the mainly immigrant, largely Latino port truckers. December 12 was picked because it was the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a religious festival widely celebrated by Mexicans. The importance of the effort to unionize truckers was underscored by the firing of 27 drivers by the Toll Group trucking company for wearing Teamster T-shirts. Thirty years ago, 90% of port truckers were unionized, mostly by the Teamsters, but as a result of deregulation of the industry now less than 10% are. Today, port truckers are classified as “independent contractors” and in many cases “owner-operators,” even though they are totally dependent on and exploited by the big shipping and trucking companies. Working an average of ten hours a day, six days a week, *troqueros* typically earn around \$100 a day after deducting the cost of fuel, maintenance and insurance. Many



D. Ross Cameron/Oakland Tribune

### Thousands marched from downtown Oakland to shut down the port on the afternoon of December 12.

of their diesel rigs are old rattle-traps because drivers can't afford anything better. And, of course, they have no rights and no benefits.<sup>2</sup>

Then, after Occupy Oakland called a “general strike” that shut down the port there on November 2<sup>3</sup> and a second police eviction of Oscar Grant Plaza on November 14, Occupy Oakland issued a call for a “coordinated West Coast port blockade” in response to the police raids on Occupy camps and in “solidarity with the longshoremen in Longview, Washington in their ongoing struggle against the EGT” as well as the port truckers. Occupy Seattle and Occupy Portland soon signed on. Over the next three and a half weeks, Occupy activists leafleted ports, campuses and union meetings up and down the coast.

The connection with dock workers was key. Iraq war veteran activist Scott Olsen, who was nearly killed by a projectile fired by cops during protests over the first (October 26) eviction of Occupy Oakland, issued an appeal to longshore workers to honor Occupy picket lines. He recalled, “I was on my second pump to Iraq when ILWU – when you – led by your Vietnam vets, shut down the West Coast ports on May Day 2008 to stop

the war.” The Oakland Education Association (OEA) endorsed the shutdown in support of the embattled port workers. It noted that even a minimal tax on a single shipping line in the Port of Oakland would be enough to wipe out school debt, lower class size, restore city worker layoffs and keep all local medical facilities open. But the OEA was the only official union body to endorse the December 12 blockade.

Instead, union officialdom refused to back the shutdown, and even attacked it. This was the case notably of the ILWU International, which issued a November 21 memo stating in elaborate lawyerese that the union was “not coordinating independently or in conjunction with any self-proclaimed organization or group to shut down any port or terminal.” This was followed up the next day with a “clarification” stating ILWU officials’ “rejection of third-party calls for job actions.” Then on December 5 came a personal statement by ILWU International president Bob McEllrath warning against the “danger that forces outside of the ILWU will attempt to adopt our struggle [with EGT] as their own”! If the union leadership has any intention of standing up to EGT, this shameful go-it-alone stance is incredibly shortsighted. In any real struggle, the union will sorely need “forces outside the ILWU” to make its struggle their own. But these statements strongly suggest the union tops are backing away from an all-out fight.

Following the ILWU bureaucrats’ attack, there was a full-scale ruling-class assault on the planned West Coast

<sup>2</sup> For further information on the situation of port truckers, see the report of the National Employment Law Project, *Big Rig: Poverty, Pollution, and the Misclassification of Truck Drivers at America's Ports* (December 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See “Tens of Thousands March to Defend Occupy Oakland,” *The Internationalist*, 9 November 2011.



Rick Bowmer/AP

### Occupy protesters in Portland picket Terminal 6 on December 12.

port shutdown. Port commissioners issued a cynical “open letter to our community” calling to “Keep Our Port Open” and playing on the Occupy slogan by claiming “the Port of Oakland is where the 99% work.” The Commission also set up a web site and spent tens of thousands of dollars for full page ads with the same message in Sunday editions of the *Oakland Tribune* and other Bay Area papers, and several days running in the local edition of the *New York Times*. Discredited Oakland mayor Jean Quan, who is now facing two recall drives, issued her own open letter accusing Occupy Oakland of “economic violence.” *Forbes* magazine weighed in with a piece crying that “occupying the port means ordinary blue-collar workers can’t show up to work” and “risks making enemies out of organized labor”! What touching concern for labor unity from the magazine that branded itself the “Capitalist Tool”!

With all this negative publicity, as local officials gathered at their command posts in the pre-dawn hours of December 12, some may have thought that the port shutdown would fizzle. If so, they were quickly disabused.

- First up was **Oakland**, where demonstrators gathered at a BART station at 5:30 a.m. and headed to the port. Numbering upwards of 1,000, they blocked entrance roads and picketed four terminals. Police were there in numbers but did not intervene. Port truckers parked their rigs, and some declared their support for the shutdown. No longshoremen went in. At 10 a.m., an arbitrator ruled that there was a health and safety issue and the morning shift was shut down. That afternoon, even before the crowd of 5,000-8,000 arrived at the port, the arbitrator had ruled and the evening shift was shut down as well. Several hundred protesters continued to picket until a

special 3 a.m. shift was also canceled. The *Oakland Tribune* (13 December) headlined: “Blockade Draws Thousands to Disrupt Port of Oakland.”

- To the north in **Portland, Oregon**, Occupy demonstrators also succeeded in shutting down the port. ILWU Local 8 (Portland) president Jeff Smith had been particularly aggressive in opposing a shutdown. “If I wanted to shut down the port, I could do it without Occupy. I don’t need ’em,” he told the *Willamette Weekly* (7 December). But the membership didn’t go for Smith’s Occupy-bashing and instead respected the pickets. By 7 a.m. on the 12th, about 500 protesters were blocking the entrances to terminals 5 and 6, and by 8 a.m. they were declared shut down for the day. Riot police were present (with their badge numbers taped over), but did not intervene. Later in the afternoon, terminal 4 (the grain dock) was shut down as well and then a steel company terminal. Earlier, a train and truck were diverted as protesters risked their lives by laying down on rail tracks. A front loader operator came within a few feet of crushing them (including a young mother) before he was stopped.

- In nearby **Longview, Washington** some 125 Occupy protesters (including a number who came by bus from Portland) shut down the port on the morning shift. No longshore workers even tried to cross the picket line as demonstrators denounced EGT union-busting and chanted, “Occupy, shut it down, Longview is a union town.” After the arbitrator ruled that a health and safety hazard existed, a couple dozen port workers and family members returned to sympathetically watch the protest.

- Also early in the morning, activists blocked an entrance to the port of **Vancouver, British Columbia**, Canada’s busiest

Don Ryan/AP



### About 125 Occupy protesters shut down port of Longview, Washington on Dec. 12.

port, declaring “Solidarity with Longview ILWU, Port Truckers, Oakland Commune.” With a noon march and a smaller afternoon blockade, the protesters hit all three Metro Vancouver ports. The impact was limited by opposition from the B.C. Federation of Labour, although some rank-and-file longshoremen told Occupy Vancouver they were “in support of us and that we should go ahead with this action” (*Vancouver Sun*, 13 December). Around noon in **Bellingham, Washington** a dozen protesters were arrested for chaining themselves together and laying on the tracks to block a Burlington Northern Santa Fe train.

- In **Seattle**, a thousand Occupy blockaders were able to shut down the 4 p.m. shift at terminal 18 (operated by SSA Marine, majority owned by Goldman Sachs) and then terminal 5. Hundreds marched for three miles from downtown to the port, including numbers of high school students. Lots of support was reported from port workers and truckers waving and honking. At terminal 18, a barricade was built out of construction material, blocking the main intersection and three entrances, while the port itself shut down the fourth. After the bulk of the demo moved on to terminal 5, cops attacked the barricade with tear gas, pepper spray, flash-bang grenades and mounted police. But in contrast to many Occupy marches marked by passive “civil disobedience” and even support for the police, this time Occupiers fought back, flinging “road flares and a bag of paint” against the marauding cops. A longshoreman said it was reminiscent of battle scenes from Cairo, Egypt.

To the south, blockades were less successful.

- In **Los Angeles-Long Beach**, several hundred Occupy protesters blocked the road in front of the SSA terminal for about a half hour before dawn until police pushed them back to an intersection. In addition to Long Beach and Port Authority police, LAPD riot cops and the California Highway

Patrol were called in as backup while police Zodiac boats patrolled in the harbor. Driving rain kept numbers down. According to an activist who has spent years trying to organize port *troqueros*, most drivers waited at their base for the first three hours, until the longshoremen from ILWU Local 13 drove in a back gate.

- In **San Diego**, Occupy protesters managed to shut down two entrances to the port for an hour and a half, and blocked one of the entrances the whole day. However, the port did not shut down and longshoremen reportedly crossed the lines. Over 100 cops – SDPD, Port Authority and Department of Homeland Security – attacked the demonstrators, arresting several.
- At the small port of **Hueneme**, in Ventura County, where Dole brings in fruit and produce, the gate was reportedly picketed by about 150 protesters, some of whom drove from the Central Valley to get there.

Elsewhere, cops in **Houston** used police horses to attack Occupy protesters. Police there used an inflatable tent to cover demonstrators so the media couldn’t see blowtorches being used to cut through PVC tubes and chains used by blockaders to shackle their arms together. Seven Occupiers face up to two years in prison for this “use of a criminal instrument”! In **Denver** and **Salt Lake City**, Occupy protesters targeted Wal-Mart distribution centers. Across the country the authorities have come up with new “legal” devices to prevent peaceful protest. In **New York**, Occupy Wall Street was evicted supposedly in order to keep the “public-private” Zuccotti Park open for casual strollers, but ever since it has been blocked by a double line of metal barriers. Almost everywhere it is now illegal to camp out in public parks. And in Alaska, where Occupy **Anchorage** marched to the port on December 12, newly passed Ordinance 2011-112 banned sitting or lying on the sidewalk, and a permit is required to build an igloo!!



**Occupy Seattle protesters fought back on Dec. 12 when police attacked with tear gas, pepper spray and flash-bang grenades.**

### The Left and the Port Blockade

Objections to the December 12 port blockade came not only from the spokesmen for capital, from the Democrats and labor bureaucrats, but also from sections of the petty-bourgeois left allied with them. A lightning rod was an article covering for the bureaucracy by labor historian Cal Winslow, “The Case of Occupy and the Longshoremen’s Union” (*CounterPunch*, 5 December). Winslow argued that November 2 in Oakland was not a general strike, and in fact not a strike at all. We pointed this out in our 9 November article, cited above, which had the superhead, “Not a General Strike, But 30,000 Occupied the Port.” Of course, Winslow leaves out the fact that some Local 10 militants tried to turn it into a real strike, but were thwarted by the actions of the ILWU International (with the connivance of some putative leftist would-be bureaucrats in the Local). But that in no way justifies Winslow’s condemnation of the December 12 port shutdown.

For starters, Occupy Oakland never called for an “American general strike” or even “a West Coast wide waterfront strike,” as Winslow falsely claimed. The initiators said from the outset that it was a blockade. Winslow “confess[es] to knowing little about the officers of the ILWU, the same for the rank and file,” which is obviously true, but this didn’t stop him from spouting off either. The reason is simple: he is a straight-out defender of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, despite some leftist rhetorical window-dressing. So when the ILWU tops told “outside groups” to stop meddling in the fight over the union-busting at EGT, Winslow declares the port blockade to be “a challenge to the basic principles of workers’ democracy” and decrees, “It must be abandoned.” The bottom line is that he – like the bureaucrats, the maritime bosses, the bourgeois media, and various anarcho-liberal “leftists” – identifies the

union with the leadership. But *the union is the membership*, not the misleaders who speak in its name.

Far from asking the members if they supported the call for a port shutdown, the ILWU tops tried to slap a gag order on the Longview longshoremen. Yet Local 21 president Dan Coffman, at a November 19 Occupy Oakland march, said that “when November 2nd happened, and it was against EGT in respect to the ILWU Longview Local 21, you cannot believe what you people did for the inspiration of my union members that have been on the picket line for six months.” All the claims that rank-and-file longshoremen opposed shutting down the port are belied by the positive reception Occupy pickets received in Longview on December 12, and by the fact that

almost everywhere, except Los Angeles/Long Beach Local 13, dock workers willingly respected the Occupy pickets, as they have done on numerous occasions in the past, particularly (but not only) in the San Francisco/Oakland Bay Area.

The ILWU International leadership opposed the December 12 West Coast port blockade not because it supposedly violated the democratic rights of the ranks, but because *the labor fakers don’t want to shut down the coast over EGT*. Instead, they are angling to cut a deal that would be disastrous for the ILWU membership. On the other hand, what’s needed to scuttle the employers’ union-busting attack is precisely action *by the longshore workers to mobilize union power to occupy the scab facility and stop the loading of scab grain, to “hot cargo” all ships of the EGT consortium around the globe, to unionize the port truckers and to shut down the Pacific Coast – and the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts to boot* – so that nothing moves on the docks. And that cannot be achieved by a one-day blockade by sympathizers on the outside. It requires hard struggle on the inside to *defend the union by ousting the sellout pro-capitalist bureaucracy* that is presiding over the destruction of the unions.

Various arguments have been put forward by defenders of the Occupy “movement” against the attacks on December 12. The International Socialist Organization’s *Socialist Worker* published a couple of articles of the “Gidget goes to the port shutdown” variety, denying there was any problem. The first (8 December) argued that “there’s no sharp divide between Occupy activists and ILWU members and other workers who are also organizing to build awareness of the community picket,” and “the December 12 call to action is a grassroots effort to deepen the links between Occupy and longshore labor.” A wrap-up article (13 December) claimed that “rank-and-file members of both the ILWU and Teamsters were part of the

Laura A. Oda/Oakland Tribune



**Trucker Mohammed Khan supported port shutdown in Oakland. Unions must mobilize their power to organize port truckers and warehouse workers.**

organizing for December 12 and well represented on the picket lines.” The reality is that while a few dock worker militants joined in, participation by the ranks was minimal, and the Occupy Oakland call for a West Coast port shutdown was *not* consulted beforehand with longshore activists.

### **An Effective Strike Is Not a “Flash Mob” But a Collective Action by the Workers**

Many of those active in the “Occupy movement,” particularly in the Bay Area where it has had a more leftist flavor, see it as giving a kick in the pants to a labor movement that has for too long sat on its duff. Some may be so deluded they think they can call for labor action and it will miraculously appear. So far they have lucked out, the next time ... who knows? But the basic problem with the December 12 port blockade is not that super-radical adventurist-substitutionist Occupiers ran roughshod over the unions, but rather that with their liberal/reformist/populist outlook, Occupy non-leaders are *too soft* on the union bureaucracy. They sought to *go around* this obstacle to sharp class struggle, when what is needed is a fight to *defeat and drive out* these “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,” as American socialist Daniel De Leon accurately described them over a century ago.

Boots Riley, of the Bay Area hip hop group The Coup, who was the lead spokesman for the port shutdown and proudly describes himself as a communist, stood up to the bad-mouthing by the ILWU tops, saying “No one has a copyright on working-class struggles” (*New York Times*, 13 December). However, commenting on a report in the *Portland Tribune* (29 November) he said, “National leadership is trying to avoid a lawsuit. That is all.” Actually, that’s not all. Certainly that has happened in the past. But in this case the ILWU International’s repeated disavowals were not a wink and a nod, but outright opposi-

tion. Not only did it talk of sinister “outside groups” with “their own agendas,” it went out of its way to specify that if longshoremen did stand by, they must wait in areas under “the Employers control” until the arbitrator rules. ILWU flack Craig Merrilees denounced Occupy protesters as “disrespectful, arrogant and misguided,” and led by “extremists that are driving away allies and marginalizing the movement” (London *Guardian*, 9 December). And in L.A., the Local leadership worked with the police and bosses to undermine the blockade.

Why don’t Occupy leaders recognize this? Because at bottom they are no more prepared to fight the capitalist system than are the union bureaucrats. Kari Koch, a spokeswoman for Occupy Port-

land, told the *Willamette Weekly*, “The legal reality for ILWU is they would open themselves up to being sued” if it endorsed the port shutdown. “We totally understand that they are not allowed to do that.” Same refrain from the ISO’s *Socialist Worker*: “even ILWU members who sympathize with Occupy’s call for a December 12 action must operate under the constraint of a union contract that bans strikes.” *This legalistic crap alibis the pro-capitalist union misleaders.* Sure, if the unions shut down the ports they could be hit with lawsuits, union officials could be jailed, Homeland Security would scream “terrorism,” the Pentagon might even militarize the docks, as it threatened to do in 2002 as the U.S. prepared to invade Iraq. ***If you are not prepared to stand up to such threats you cannot defend workers in the U.S. today.***

The fact, as any serious trade-unionist knows, is that virtually *every effective labor action has been outlawed by the bosses’ government.* “Hot cargoing,” “secondary strikes,” flying pickets, mass pickets, plant occupations – the tactics that built the industrial unions in the 1930s were declared illegal under the 1947 “slave labor” Taft-Hartley Act. When Jimmy Hoffa negotiated the first Master Freight Agreement organizing over-the-road truckers, the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act was passed to go after the Teamsters – for “corruption.” When Transport Workers Union Local 100 struck the New York City subways in 2005, the union was hit with million-dollar-a-day fines, the members with \$1,000-a-day fines, the dues checkoff was canceled and the union president was jailed under the state’s Taylor Law. This is not new. When the IWW was active in the Pacific Northwest in the early 20th century, unions themselves were proscribed under state “criminal syndicalism” laws. The answer is not to cower before the legal machinery of the class enemy, but to organize mass labor action with the power to bring the bosses to their knees.

An effective strike is not a “flash mob,” a spur of the moment thing. A strike is a *collective action by the workers themselves*, and it requires serious preparation. In 2008, the ILWU struck against the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, a first-ever strike by U.S. workers against a U.S. imperialist war. ILWU Local 10 had passed repeated resolutions calling for strike action against the war ever since its members were victims of a cop assault on antiwar demonstrators in April 2003. The Internationalist Group, which had been calling for workers strikes against the war since the U.S.’ 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, worked for several years with longshore militants in this effort. But after the Democrats took control of Congress in 2006 and the war continued unabated, opinion shifted and the ILWU as a whole signed on. Even then, the 2008 May Day strike was the result of months of preparation, including a November 2007 national labor conference to stop the war, held in the Local 10 union hall, so that the ILWU would not be isolated. And when the inevitable counterattack came, as the PMA accused the union of violating Taft-Hartley with this overtly political strike, the union pointed out that maritime bosses could face mounting strike action as a new contract was negotiated.

What about organizing the port truckers? There have been sporadic attempts to unionize this horribly exploited workforce for years, to no avail. Treated as individual “contractors,” they are atomized, unable to resist the trucking and shipping companies’ dictates, many living in fear of *la migra*, the ICE immigration cops. To win requires mobilizing the power of that sector of the industry that can really shut it down. Let the ILWU declare that it is shutting down the cranes and occupying the ports until the *troqueros* get a union contract and a union hiring hall. That, of course, would be declared illegal, a “secondary strike.” But a class-struggle union leadership would know how to get the rest of labor behind it, how to mobilize the black, Latino and Asian population. It would demand *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, and make it clear to the capitalists and their government that *you can’t run the docks with bayonets*. It would be quite a battle, for sure, but one that a resolute workers movement can win – *because we have the power*. That’s what it will take to put an end to what truckers bitterly call “sharecropping on wheels.”

### **Oust the Bureaucrats, Break with Democrats, We Need a Class-Struggle Workers Party!**

To prepare and carry out such powerful workers action means overcoming the resistance and outright sabotage by the union tops, and to replace these sellouts with a leadership with the program and guts to wage real class struggle. The Occupy movement has no intention of doing that. Barucha Peller, an anarchist in Occupy Oakland who was active in organizing the port shutdown, was quoted in a posting on Salon.com (Emily Loftis, “Occupy vs. Big Labor,” 9 December), saying: “It’s not our job to rail against union leadership.... We don’t have to come out and criticize union leadership, because we’re leading by example. The occupation movement being able to provide a better framework of getting the rank-and-file working class’s needs met.” A better framework? The places where the ports

were shut down on December 12 were mainly where the cops were under orders not to attack. With some halfway serious police repression, and contrary decisions by the arbitrators, the outcome would have been very different.

In fact, the *key* to organizing the working class as a force for revolutionary class struggle is the fight against labor bureaucracy, whose job is to keep the union ranks down. While many Occupiers consider the fights waged by Lenin and Trotsky “so last century,” the lessons they drew are highly relevant today. V.I. Lenin, in his pamphlet on *Imperialism* (1916), wrote that a “labor aristocracy” was behind the social democrats’ shameful support to “their own” bourgeois rulers in the World War I: “out of such enormous *superprofits* ... it is possible to bribe the labor leaders and the upper stratum of the labor aristocracy.” This *petty-bourgeois* layer which represents “the principal *social* (not military) *prop of the bourgeoisie*,” are the real “*agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement*.” The ILWU leadership today represents the elite steady crane operators not hired through the union hiring hall like the rest of the longshoremen, and who with their six-figure salaries represent a genuine “labor aristocracy.”

Leon Trotsky, in his essay “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (which lay unfinished on his desk when he was murdered by a Stalinist assassin in 1940), noted that the common feature in the degeneration of trade unions the world over is “their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power.” We see this dramatically in the longshore struggle. On December 5, a motion was presented to the Alameda Labor Council by Victor Uno, business manager for International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 595, calling *not to endorse* a port shutdown on December 12. The motion had been approved by the ALC executive committee. Yet note that Uno is also a commissioner of the Port of Oakland – a representative of *management* – and ALC executive secretary-treasurer Josefina Camacho, who pushed hard for the motion, is his wife! Here we see the growing together of the state, the employer and the labor aristocracy *en famille*.

For that matter, the ILWU Coast Committeeman in charge of negotiations with EGT, Leal Sundet, was formerly a top manager in the Columbia River region for the bosses’ Pacific Maritime Association. And in the L.A./Long Beach area, in the days leading up to the blockade, David Aryan, the former president of Local 13 and former ILWU International president, went to an Occupy San Pedro meeting and warned that if they try to shut the port down, Homeland Security would be deployed. So this former Maoist, who was recently appointed to the L.A. Port Commission, in his first act as commissioner sought to intimidate Occupy activists on behalf of the maritime bosses and the local, state and federal police. Such treachery has consequences. Now the bourgeoisie is using the wretched role of the ILWU leadership in an effort to outlaw *any* port shutdown, which would clearly include workers’ strikes. While the Oakland City Council turned down a resolution to that effect on December 20, they will certainly try again, perhaps at the federal level. Only solid union action can deter them.

There were some in the ILWU who supported the call for



Internationalist photo

### ILWU May Day 2008 West Coast port strike to stop war overcame bureaucratic sabotage, bosses' threats.

a December 12 port blockade. A November 26 leaflet put out by the Transport Workers Solidarity Committee said that "The call by the populist Occupy movement to blockade ports should be welcomed as supplementary support for labor's struggle." It took the ILWU leadership to task for ignoring the 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." The TWSC statement ended with the call: "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!!" The December 12 blockade was a help in this effort, by keeping the heat on. But to actually carry out such an audacious workers action will require sharp struggle by the longshore workers themselves. And that is a *political* battle that must be waged against all wings of the capitalist class, and their "labor lieutenants."

The enemy is not just right-wing Republican reactionaries. The banks were bailed out by liberal Democrats as well. Democratic president Barack Obama, whom many Occupiers and longshore workers voted for, got his start with hundreds of thousands of dollars of seed money from Goldman Sachs and other Wall Street bankers. The West Coast occupations were dismantled by "progressive" Democratic mayors Mike McGinn (Seattle), Sam Adams (Portland), Jean Quan (Oakland) and Antonio Villaraigosa (Los Angeles), according to a plan orchestrated by Obama's Homeland Security Department. The deregulation of freight transportation, which destroyed the port truckers unions, was championed by liberal Democrat Ted Kennedy and populist Ralph Nader. And the drive for increased port "security," like the TWIC (Transport Worker Identification Credential), which has victimized longshoremen and port truckers alike, was led by Democrat Charles Schumer, the "Senator from Wall Street." While meekly criticizing the TWIC, the ILWU tops

*opposed* and blocked Local 10 motions to *stop* implementation of TWIC through union action by all of maritime labor.

For its part, Occupy Wall Street talks of capitalism and even revolution, but has proposed at most some minimal reforms. Although the media portrayed them as wild-eyed leftist radicals, politically the common denominator of the diverse forces involved, ranging from anarchists to liberals and conservative "libertarians," is bourgeois populism (see our analysis of OWS, "Expropriate Wall Street Through Socialist Revolution," *The Internationalist*, 14 November). As Marxists we insist that the fundamental dividing line in bourgeois society is not between the "1%" of super rich and the "99%" of everyone else, as OWS portrays it, but the *class* division between the capitalists and the workers, along with other sectors oppressed by the ruling class. To go beyond protest and resistance to *defeat* the bosses and their state, the working class must use its power at the point of production: if the repressive forces crack down, the workers can "throw the switch" and really shut it down. But that is something the bureaucracy will never do.

Occupy activists chant, "The people united will never be defeated." History teaches that as long as working people are "united" with their exploiters and oppressors, they will be defeated time and again. Another favorite slogan is "We are unstoppable, another world is possible." That depends on program. As long they are wedded to the illusion that they are part of a 99% together with cops and port commissioners, they will be stopped. Ultimately, the contradictory Occupy "movement" will either fritter away, be absorbed into the "reelect Obama" campaign, or polarize and split, hopefully along class lines. Tactical militancy cannot substitute for the necessary struggle to cohere a revolutionary leadership, based on the program of Lenin and Trotsky. The Internationalist Group fights for a workers party that can spearhead the *class* struggle for a *socialist revolution* which is the only way to break the stranglehold of Wall Street. ■

**Not a General Strike, But 30,000 Occupied the Port...  
And Then the Cops Struck Again**

# Tens of Thousands March to Defend Occupy Oakland



Robert Galbraith / Reuters

**Protesters stream into Port of Oakland, November 2, in response to Occupy Oakland call for “general strike” over brutal police attack last week. Union bureaucrats declared “support,” refused to strike.**

NOVEMBER 9 – When an army of hundreds of cops roused the campers of Occupy Oakland in a pre-dawn raid on October 25, arresting nearly 100, a wave of anger swept the northern California city. And when police brutally attacked the several thousand protesters who gathered that evening to protest the eviction, repeatedly using tear gas and firing “less lethal” munitions at the crowd, it set off a firestorm of outrage. This turned into fury when it became known the next day that the police nearly killed a demonstrator, Scott Olsen, an Iraq War veteran, with a canister fired at point-blank range. On the evening of October 26, well over 2,000 people jammed into the square in front of Oakland City Hall, now renamed Oscar Grant Plaza, in honor of the young black man executed by a Bay Area Rapid Transit cop on New Year’s Day 2009. The General Assembly of Occupy Oakland voted, by a margin of 1,484 to 77, to call a general strike for November 2.

The call electrified the city and the whole Bay Area. It reverberated around the country. Poor and working people saw a way to express frustration over the massive unemployment and escalating inequality that has continued to grow

while bankers and other corporate chiefs rake in billions amid a world capitalist economic crisis. For the black and Latino population of Oakland, who together are the majority of this, the most ethnically diverse city in California, it was an opening to fight back against the racist police repression that is pervasive in Oakland. This was where in the 1960s the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense arose, in response to rampant cop attacks. Even many white middle class residents wanted to express their disgust at Mayor Jean Quan, who was elected as a “progressive” Democrat, only to order the brutal attack on Occupy Oakland, and then pretend she had nothing to do with it.

From the outset, it was clear to all that there would be a massive outpouring of anger on November 2 as thousands would take to the streets to denounce the cop assault on the occupation. But would it succeed in shutting down the city with a massive work stoppage? That depended above all on the response of organized labor. One after another, Bay Area unions announced their “support” for the action, *but the labor bureaucrats were virtually unanimous in refusing to call on their members to stop work*, citing “no strike” clauses in their

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labor contracts. Taking a personal leave for a day, joining in a late-afternoon march on the port and otherwise showing solidarity is well and good, but it's a long way from a strike. For there to be work stoppages that would be a challenge to capital and its marauding racist police, it would depend on the rank-and-file. And that poses the central question of class-struggle leadership.

As November 2nd dawned, all eyes turned to the waterfront, which was key. Even though ILWU International and Local officials vowed they would keep the port open, some younger longshoremen thought differently. One of them, Anthony Leviege, took the mike at the union hall to urge fellow port workers to not take jobs. Richard Washington, one of those who refused work, emphasized that "the rank and file workers decided not to work today in support of Occupy Oakland." Long-time longshore militant Jack Heyman reported that this "effectively shut down the port this morning," and a huge line of trucks waiting to be unloaded stretched from the port into the city of Oakland (see "Oakland Port Shutdown: Workers Refuse to Work the Docks," *The Internationalist*, 2 November). The *Oakland Tribune* (3 November) quoted the chief wharfinger of the port of Oakland saying that there was work in some terminals, "but it's really slow." Stung by the reports, port authorities and union officials insisted the port was open, and scrambled to fill jobs. By noon the port was "limping along" at under half its normal pace.

Meanwhile, in downtown Oakland, several thousand demonstrators were making the rounds of the banks to shut them down, first Wells Fargo, then Comerica, Chase, Citibank, Bank of America and others. (So many banks litter the area that a local anarchist reportedly quipped, "Around here you can't throw a rock without hitting one.") Some were already closed for the day, others shut their doors as marchers approached. Protesters taped over ATMs and chanted, "Banks got bailed out, we got sold out!" In the afternoon, there was an "anti-capitalist

march" during which some "black bloc" types broke a window at a Bank of America branch and heaved chairs through a window at a Whole Foods store that was rumored to have threatened to fire anyone absent from work that day. Such acts of frustration and rage can hardly bring down capitalism, yet these antics were enough to send various labor and "socialist" reformists into conniptions, echoing the media with howls of "vandalism."

Altogether, while some downtown businesses closed, in the rest of Oakland industry and commerce weren't greatly affected. The city government, which had said its civilian employees could take the day off, reported 5

percent out, which is undoubtedly undercounted, but even so, the large majority went to work. The Oakland School District reported around 300 teachers took a personal leave, about 15 percent of the total, but they were replaced by subs and other teachers held teach-ins. There were few union banners or contingents until late in the day, after work. But the crowds kept growing. What stood out was the composition: significant numbers of African Americans and Latinos, including many youth, reflecting the population of this heavily working-class city. And the sheer numbers: while Oakland police absurdly claimed only 7,000 marched to the port, and Occupy Oakland is saying 100,000, a more likely count would be something over 30,000, plus those who stayed at Oscar Grant Plaza.

As the sea of people streamed over the overpass onto Middle Harbor Road, the police abandoned any attempt to stop them. The few trucks there were swarmed, and some blasted their air horns in support. Agile youth clambered atop the trailers. People split into four groups, sitting down outside the gates of the different stevedoring companies while the entrance was blocked off by a flat-bed truck. The atmosphere was of a giant street party, with people playing music, dancing, a fair number of kids who came with their parents in the children's contingent. A second march went to the north entrance to the port and set up a checkpoint at Seventh Street and Maritime, letting workers past but blocking TV vans. The crowd blocked the port and port authorities now admitted it had been shut down from 5 p.m. on. No longshoremen went to work. Around 8:30 an arbitrator ruled that there was a legitimate health and safety issue as longshore workers refused to cross the many thousands-strong "picket line."

The police kept a low profile during the day. But soon after most demonstrators had gone home, some 400 police who had been mobilized from 15 jurisdictions around the region retaliated by attacking a building occupation near the Oscar Grant Plaza where Occupy Oakland is camped. The building was the empty

former offices of the Traveler's Aid Society, which had served the homeless, but was forced to vacate when the city couldn't or wouldn't pay the loan costs for the building. Several hundred people reportedly took part in the effort, seeking to turn it into a community center, but they were met with waves of riot police firing flash-bang grenades, beanbags and rubber bullets. More than 80 were arrested. The media the next day denounced "violence" – by the occupiers, for allegedly throwing rocks in response to this potentially murderous police assault. Once again, an Iraq war veteran, Kayvan Sabeghi, was badly injured, his spleen ruptured by police who beat him viciously and then held him in jail for 18 hours before allowing an ambulance to take him to the hospital.

So tens of thousands of people march against police brutality and in defense of Occupy Oakland, and as soon as they leave the cops are on a rampage once more. The Oakland Police are an increasingly bonapartist force that chafes at civilian authority, even by the double-talking liberal Democratic mayor Quan, a former Maoist who has become a figurehead for cop terror. The OPD acts as an occupation force in African American and Latino neighborhoods of West and East Oakland. It is already under a federal monitor for police corruption and racism in a case going back to 2000. Last August the monitor reported that 28 percent of the time Oakland cops drew their weapons it was without cause, and in 95 percent of those cases the guns were pointed at African American or Latino "suspects." In September a federal judge declared that the OPD and Oakland City officials still "don't get it." Soon after, the police chief resigned. But whether with federal monitors or receivers, or any other "reform," the bottom line is that the Oakland police are a threat to the population, and they are incorrigible.

This underscores the fact that what's needed here is not a demonstration of public opinion, but the mobilization of working-class *power* against capitalism and its repressive forces. That begins, but doesn't end, with real strike action. Ultimately, since police are the backbone of capitalist state power, it will take nothing less than a socialist revolution to get rid of cop brutality, which is endemic to capitalist rule.

### The Betrayal of the Labor Bureaucracy

There hasn't been a general strike in the United States since 1946, also in Oakland, which is no accident. Oakland is the home of the fifth busiest port in the United States. and of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), historically one of the most militant unions in the country, a



**Only hours after protesters left the port, police in Oakland were rampaging again, brutally attacking the occupation of an empty building.**

Kimhito Oshino/AFP

tradition it continues to this day. The ILWU itself grew out of the San Francisco General Strike of 1934. On May Day 2008, Bay Area longshore militants spearheaded the ILWU strike that shut down all 29 ports on the West Coast against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though a one-day action, this was the first-ever strike by American workers against a U.S. imperialist war. If anywhere in the U.S. a general strike is possible after more than three decades of unrelenting attacks on labor, the San Francisco Bay Area is a prime candidate.

So was November 2 in Oakland a general strike? The short answer for any Marxist is "no." It was certainly a massive outpouring of popular discontent, and the port was eventually blockaded. But it was not a generalized work stoppage that hits at the heart of capitalist rule by bringing production and distribution to a grinding halt. Thus it could be and was ignored by the forces of bourgeois "law and order" who don't give a damn what "the people" think, as they made clear by that night staging another bloody military assault on Occupy Oakland. Their purpose was to show who's boss. In answer to this naked display of *police power*, we have to show that the working people are far stronger. How? By striking at the cops' capitalist masters where it hurts: the source of their profits. As the Internationalist Group called in a leaflet issued October 26, the day after the bloody cop attacks on Oakland protesters, what was needed is to "Mobilize Labor's Power Against Racist Police Repression! Workers and Students, Shut the City Down!"

That most definitely did not happen in Oakland on November 2. Why not? First of all, because *an amorphous group like Occupy Oakland*, which is a collection of individuals on the basis of a shared sense of grievance, *cannot carry out a general strike*, even when it enjoys wide public support. An outside group like students can provide a spark, as in the

## The General Strike and the “Occupy Movement”

When there is talk of a “general strike,” there are very different conceptions of what this means. For *anarchists*, the general strike *is* the social revolution. Moreover, for the followers of Mikhail Bakunin, the call does not have a class character: one fine day “the people” suddenly stop work and capitalist society grinds to a halt. For them, there is nothing problematical about a body like Occupy Oakland calling a “general strike,” it could just as well be called by students or shop owners. The *anarcho-syndicalists* seek to root it in the workers, but the basic conception is the same. Even for the latter-day Industrial Workers of the World, it means “deliverance from wage slavery”: “The General Strike, and the General Strike alone, can save Humanity from the torture and degradation of the continuation of capitalism” (Ralph Chaplin, *The General Strike* [1933]). Such a miraculous day has never happened and never will. The idea of a general strike doing away with exploitation is what syndicalist “theoretician” George Sorel called a “mobilizing myth.” A strike alone will not end capitalism, the working class has to seize power.

For some *labor/socialist reformists*, the “general strike” as practiced in Europe in recent decades has replaced socialist revolution as their maximum program. Yet such “general strikes” are nothing but one- or two-day demonstrations with work stoppages in the most organized sectors. Greece had a dozen in 2010, and *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* to the contrary, Greek workers didn’t win any concessions by these “general strikes.” They certainly are no answer to the global capitalist economic depression, but basically a means by which the labor bureaucrats let the workers blow off steam without threatening the system. Finally, when some *liberals and bourgeois “progressives”* talk of a “general strike,” what they mean is something akin to a *paro cívico* which is quite common in Latin America, a “civic work stoppage” which involves all sectors of society. But this is just another form of bourgeois pressure politics, along with popular-front street demonstrations, lobbying and the like. It is not a means of exerting *workers power*.

In contrast to the reformist/liberal pressure politics version and the anarchist/syndicalist millenarian vision, for Marxists, a general strike is a sharp *class* confrontation between the forces of capital and labor, a face-off between the bourgeois ruling class and the exploited working class, which inevitably raises the question of state power. At the national level, as Leon Trotsky wrote of France in the mid-1930s:

“Whatever may be the slogans and the motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation the question: *Who will be the master?*”

—L.D. Trotsky, “Once Again, Whither France?” (March 1935)

There can be defensive general strikes and local general strikes in the context of hard-fought struggles. But there as well, a

general strike ultimately poses the question of power. If a strike is aimed at ousting Mayor Quan and stopping the systematic, racist brutality of the OPD, what is to replace them? Another bourgeois politician, and yet another police “reform” (firing the chief, civilian review board, “community control” or other palliatives)? That will resolve nothing.

Serious revolutionaries do not bandy about the call for a general strike as a panacea for every situation, as some on the left do. An effective general strike requires preparation. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have intervened in several situations where the need for a general strike was posed. In France last autumn, we raised from mid-October 2010 on the need for “a nationwide *general strike until the anti-worker pension ‘reform’ is dropped*” (“France: May in October? The Spectre of a New ’68,” *The Internationalist* No. 32, January-February 2011). In a discussion at a general assembly of labor activists in the Paris region, we stressed that it is necessary to call on the unions, the mass organizations of the working class, to call a general strike and at the same time to agitate for it among the ranks and among non-unionized workers. In fighting against the stranglehold of the bureaucracy, we noted that local inter-union coordinating committees can be transformed into elected strike committees.

In Wisconsin this past February and March, as a huge mobilization of labor broke out over a union-busting bill, we argued from the outset (February 18) that beyond a statewide public workers strike, “It will take nothing less than a statewide general strike” to defeat the labor-hating governor. As this call began to catch on, in a second leaflet (20 February) we called to “Prepare to *Strike Wisconsin!*” When a local labor body called to approve a general strike, we emphasized (22 February) that what was posed was “*a contest between labor and capital over which class shall rule,*” and while in Europe one-day general strikes are often a way of diverting labor militancy, in the U.S. today, “even a one-day statewide strike could be a step in the right direction.” And when the rump legislature voted the law, we called “*For a General Strike Now!*” and for workers defense guards (13 March). Throughout, we underscored the need for revolutionary leadership and a class-struggle workers party.

Instead of a general strike, the labor officialdom backtracked and called to channel the outrage into a drive to recall Republican legislators (and elect Democrats), which ultimately failed. Even if it had succeeded, the Democrats *supported* to Republican governor’s budget including huge cuts in public workers’ benefits. In this betrayal, the union tops got a little help from their friends on the left. Just at the moment when a general strike was actually possible, the International Socialist Organization published an editorial (11 March) declaring that “calling for a general strike – no matter how enthusiastically it is received – is unlikely to get very far,” and calling instead for pickets before work or noontime marches. The ISO neglected to mention that its own members were among those who had been calling for the general strike.

French general strike of May 1968, but *the actual strike can only be a collective action by the working class*. That doesn't mean by the union bureaucrats, who almost always resist any challenge to the capitalist system they are part of, and then try to sabotage it if forced by pressure from the workers' ranks to carry it out. That's the main reason why there are plenty of failed general strikes in labor history. A general strike can also be carried out by a militant opposition force within the workers movement. But in any case, to be successful it requires a leadership with a program and determination to wage class struggle through to victory.

A leaflet put out by a number of activists in ILWU Local 10 in response to the Occupy Oakland call for a general strike November 2 stated: "Whether this actually means real strike action by workers depends in large part on union participation." What actually happened, and this is the second reason why there was no general strike in Oakland, is that *East Bay union leaders emphatically opposed strike action*. The SEIU spelled it out: "SEIU 1021 is not asking any members to 'go on strike' – that would be a violation of many SEIU 1021 contracts." Ditto from the Berkeley Federation of Teachers: "We have a no strike clause in our contract," so they were asking for personal leaves "as long as there is sub coverage" – i.e., the school system wouldn't be affected. And the Oakland Education Association: "OEA is not calling a strike action against OUSD." Only Carpenters Local 713 straightforwardly called to "support the call of the 2,000 Oaklanders at Occupy Oakland for a one-day strike in Oakland."

The ILWU activists' October 28 leaflet, titled "Defend Occupy Oakland With the Muscle of Organized Labor," concluded: "Shut it down." The ILWU shut down the ports coast-wide in 1999 demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, and again in 2008 calling to stop the war on Iraq and Afghanistan. Local 10 has carried out numerous stop-work actions, most recently over the Oscar Grant murder and in solidarity with Wisconsin workers. But on November 2 ILWU spokesman Craig Merrilees told the press: "It's virtually impossible for any union to endorse a work-stoppage because all contracts have no-strike clauses, which unions are bound to honor." And when longshore militants on the morning of November 2 called on workers not to take jobs, the union tops worked hand-in-glove with Port management to find takers. In the face of a vicious attack by the Oakland Police, *the pie cards worked overtime to keep the port running*. So ILWU president Bob McEllrath's statement of "support" for Occupation Wall Street is just hot air.

The union tops' insistence that the port was up and running was so emphatic, one might think a deal had been cut. Or are the ILWU's lawyers so worried about court-ordered fines against the union over the resistance in Longview Washington that they are desperate to show that the ILWU has a law-abiding "responsible" union leadership? In truth, it was par for the course from the union bureaucrats, who in the memorable phrase of American socialist Daniel DeLeon are the "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class." Yet some ILWU activists took the same line. Speaking on the liberal radio program Democracy Now!

carried by KPFA in the Bay Area, Local 10 executive board member Clarence Thomas praised the calls for support to Occupy Wall Street by McEllrath and Teamster president James Hoffa and called this a "turning point," a "new beginning," a "watershed moment" because "unions are acknowledging the call for a general strike" even though "many of them cannot call for a general strike themselves."

This *apology for a betrayal* by the union tops, not only by the ILWU but of all East Bay unions, reflects the program of supposed labor "militants" who share the fundamental outlook of the bureaucracy. It is nonsense that the unions can't call for a general strike. Certainly the bosses' courts may declare it illegal. Some union leaders might actually have to go to jail and the unions may be hit with huge fines. But the way to fight that is with even more powerful labor action, shutting down the whole of the Bay Area, bridges and all, with a real general strike. But that is inconceivable for the parasitic layer of labor fakers and for the reformist dissidents who would replace them. In the present period, where union gains are being systematically destroyed and virtually every effective tactic of labor struggle (mass pickets, flying squads, sympathy strikes) has been outlawed, trade unionism that plays by the bosses' rules is doomed to fail. The only effective way to fight back is militant class struggle against capital *and the capitalist state*.

### **Against Police Repression: Mobilize Labor's Power to Shut the City Down!**

So 40,000 people or thereabouts came out on November 2. The Port of Oakland was shut down for several hours, though not by the action of the workers. A great time was had by all ... and a couple of hours later the OPD struck again in order to show that it still ruled the streets. Not exactly a victory. A call for a general strike received wide support – except where it counted. The opposition of the union tops to striking qualitatively weakened the action. Still, the size of the mobilization gave working people a sense of their potential power, and the fact that the high point was a march on the Port of Oakland showed general awareness of the centrality of labor. The provisional balance sheet is mixed, but the key is what lessons are drawn from this experience. The first must be the need to oust the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats, and break with the Democrats to build a revolutionary workers party that fights for a workers government.

Early on, Occupy Oakland activist Cat Brooks spelled out for Reuters news agency the meaning of the call for a general strike: "We mean nobody goes to work, nobody goes to school, we shut the city down," The union tops prevented this from happening, yet despite this stab in the back, you don't hear any complaints from the organizers of Occupy Oakland. Why not? For starters, because they are working with the labor bureaucracy: the Alameda Central Labor Council didn't walk out, but they did put on a great barbecue; the OEA didn't strike, but they provided portable toilets. Nothing against cookouts and porta-johns, but they don't stop rampaging cops. More fundamentally, the reality is that politics of the "Occupy

movement,” however vague, are no more radical than those of the misleaders of labor. The occupiers may mouth some “anti-capitalist” rhetoric and even talk of “revolution” from time to time, but in practice they like the union bureaucrats accept the confines of the capitalist state.

In the wake of the October 25 police assault on Occupy Oakland, we called for a massive mobilization of workers power against police brutality that would *shut the city down*. How this should be accomplished depended on the response of the unions. When a general assembly of 2,000 at Occupy Oakland called for a general strike on November 2, although this was not a workers organization, it responded to an urgent felt need for powerful labor action against the cops. From a distance, we encouraged militants in the key longshore union to *shut down the port* on the day of the “general strike.” Although there was little time to prepare, the formation of *elected strike committees* in key unions would have been appropriate, particularly as the bureaucrats’ refusal to call strike action became clear; and *mass pickets led and defended by squads of union workers* could have been organized at the port entrances.

Today, mobilizing workers power against the rampaging police is still on the order of the day. In response to new threats of police action to evict the occupiers, there should be *union-backed workers defense guards together with Occupy Oakland at Oscar Grant Plaza* around the clock. An organized defense can help avoid unnecessary clashes with cops looking for an excuse to attack, and ensure that if they do attempt to dislodge or assault the occupiers, they will have to go through lines of union members, so that next time it really could provoke a citywide strike to shut the city down. As part of such an effort, occupiers and their defenders could study the Oakland general strike of 1946 and the history of mass political strikes, including the San Francisco general strike of 1934, and the Minneapolis Teamster strike the same year, led by the Trotskyists, which managed to prevail in the face of occupation by the National Guard.

A general strike does not fall from the skies. Like any strike it is a collective action, not an individual choice. And after it is collectively decided, it must be prepared and enforced. *Picket lines mean don’t cross*, and effective strike lines are ones that no one dares cross. There must be systematic work in key sectors in order to give it the power to stop production and distribution. But above all, beyond organization, what is needed is a revolutionary program and leadership. The union bureaucracy will inevitably betray, and the bourgeois liberals will try to prevent any struggle against capitalism, private property or the police. This is already beginning to happen as members of Mayor Quan’s Block by Block Organizing Network are calling for Occupy Oakland to sanction “those who launch physical attacks on people or property.” Meanwhile, two business groups, Downtown Oakland and the Lake Merritt/Uptown District Association are calling on the mayor to exercise “bold leadership and forceful action” to stop the “unending social experimentation” of Occupy Oakland.

In some respects, Occupy Oakland has been slightly to

the left or at least Occupy Wall Street. A banner proclaims the “Oakland Commune” and some of the non-leaders describe themselves communists, while at Wall Street many of the OWS “facilitators” are viscerally hostile to leftists. Early on, Occupy Oakland declared Oscar Grant Plaza a “police-free zone,” whereas Liberty Plaza (Zuccotti Square) in New York is crawling with undercover cops and the uniformed ones do periodic walkthroughs while everything is observed and recorded from a NYPD watch tower. But despite a few rhetorical touches, Occupy Oakland is politically the same anarcho-liberal-populist mixture to be found elsewhere in the “Occupy movement.” Not only does this leave the door open to right-wing Tea Party elements (notably Ron Paul supporters), but also to the law-and-order liberal “moderates” are now reportedly seeking to police the movement against Black Bloc anarchists, building occupiers and anyone else who would lay a finger on sacrosanct private property or resist cop attacks.

“Occupy Wall Street” and the other occupations have captured public imagination by giving voice to the widespread anger over the obscene spectacle of capitalist money men looting of the economy while the working people who produce the wealth pay the horrendous cost. OWS reflects a mood and is fed by grievances that are not addressed by either of the partner parties of American capitalism, yet even taking into account the contradictory tendencies, the lowest-common-denominator politics of this amorphous movement do not go beyond bourgeois populism. Thus it cannot provide an answer to any of the issues that gave rise to it, all of which are rooted in the capitalist system itself, not a particular policy. 25 million unemployed, 19 million homes standing empty while homelessness increases, rampant police brutality against the oppressed, endless U.S. wars of imperialist domination – none of these can be resolved so long as capital rules. Ultimately the “Occupy movement” will polarize, with most participants drawn back into the Democratic Party, others perhaps migrating to a bourgeois “third party.”

The Occupy movement’s pretense of being leaderless and its anti-democratic “consensus” model of decision-making reflect its lack of political definition. This will eventually change or the “movement” will sink into oblivion. To turn vague sentiments of ending capitalism into a powerful force requires Marxist political clarity, speaking plainly instead of capitulating to the present confused and contradictory consciousness of the occupiers. For an effective general strike, it’s necessary to build a class-struggle opposition in the unions to sweep away the pro-capitalist bureaucracy that has crippled labor it since the red purge after World War II. More broadly, what’s needed, both to defend Occupy Oakland and to fight the social ills the occupiers decry, is to undertake the difficult task of forging a revolutionary vanguard of the working class and all the oppressed. We need a workers party to fight for a workers government that can undertake the socialist revolution in which those who toil rule and genuine social emancipation will become possible in a communist society. ■

# Hands Off Occupy Oakland!

## Mobilize Labor's Power Against Racist Police Repression! Workers and Students, Shut the City Down!

*The following leaflet was put out by the Internationalist Group in New York City on October 26.*

Yesterday morning, October 25, Oakland police along with cops from 16 other jurisdictions evicted Occupy Oakland from the Oscar Grant Plaza in front of City Hall, and another satellite camp in a park a few blocks away. There were close to 100 arrests. Later on Tuesday, a demonstration protesting this attack swelled from 500 to some 3,000, marching all over the city of Oakland. The protest was repeatedly attacked by the police, who clubbed demonstrators, fired tear gas on at least four different occasions, as well as concussion grenades, bean bag canisters and wooden slugs and possibly rubber bullets.

One of the protesters, Scott Olsen from Wisconsin, an Iraqi war veteran and member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, was hit in the head by a canister during the protests yesterday. He was initially reported earlier this afternoon to be in serious but stable condition. Now the London *Guardian* is reporting that the hospital says he is in critical condition with swelling of the brain. In addition, a comrade reports from downtown Oakland this afternoon that people are saying a second demonstrator who was hit in the back by a bean bag projectile yesterday is paralyzed.

It is urgent that the workers movement mobilize its power now against this rampant police brutality, and not just in press conferences and after the fact demos weeks or months later. The Oakland police are the same force that attacked an antiwar demonstration at the Port of Oakland on April 7, 2003, firing the same sort of potentially lethal munitions and injuring at least six longshoremen.<sup>1</sup> This is also the city where Oscar Grant was murdered by BART police on New Year's Day 2009, and where hundreds were subsequently arrested by Oakland cops in protests against that racist lynching.

In addition, there have been reports this morning that Occupy San Francisco is in danger of being evicted today or soon. Yesterday, the San Francisco Labor Council issued a statement in which it called on Department of Public Works employees not to



**Oakland police surround Occupy Oakland before dawn on October 25, firing off tear gas grenades as they expel protesters from Oscar Grant Plaza.**

participate in any raid (supposedly to “clean up” the protest site), declared OSF and OWS to be “Sanctioned Union Strike Lines,” said it stood with the protest movement, did not recognize any curfews and encouraged union members to participate in the movement. In the East Bay, a banner at the protest last night read, “Oakland Teachers Say No Police Violence.”

These statements and calls must be translated into concrete action, in the form of a union presence at the protest site and a vow by labor to shut the SF down in the case of an attempted eviction. The workers movement in the Bay Area, with the powerful International Longshore and Warehouse Union in the lead, should use its muscle to enable Occupy Oakland to reestablish its prominent presence. Labor must not allow voices of protest to be silenced. The ILWU motto “An injury to one is an injury to all” is as urgent today as it was when the syndicalist “Wobblies” first raised it over a century ago.

In New York City, the fact that several thousand union members and supporters came out at 6 a.m. on October 15 was key in preventing an eviction here. While criticizing the predominantly bourgeois populist/liberal politics fostered by the initiators of Occupy Wall Street, the Internationalist Group has participated in marches and actions to defend OWS against police attack as well as participating in debate at the plaza calling for working-class mobilization against capitalism.

*Mobilize labor's Power against racist police repression!  
Workers and students, shut the city down! ■*

<sup>1</sup> See “Oakland Cops Shoot at Longshore Workers and Antiwar Protesters,” *The Internationalist* No. 16, May-June 2003. Available online at: <http://www.internationalist.org/oaklandcopsshoot0403.html>

**Redouble the Fight to Free Mumia Now!**

# Death Sentence Dropped Against Mumia Abu-Jamal

**Mobilize Workers' Power to Smash the Racist Death Penalty**

DECEMBER 8 – The Philadelphia district attorney yesterday announced that he was giving up on the decades-long crusade by the state to carry out a death sentence against Mumia Abu-Jamal. The D.A. threw in the towel on the eve of the anniversary of the jailing and near-fatal police shooting of the renowned black radical journalist, which took place 30 years ago tomorrow. But the racist rulers are still dead-set on silencing this courageous defender of the oppressed who became known as the “voice of the voiceless.”

Appeals courts had ruled that the judge’s misleading instructions to the jury in the 1982 trial stacked the deck in favor of execution. Even so, Philly prosecutor Seth Williams expressed confidence that he could get another death sentence from a legal system that is rigged in favor of the police and against those they oppress. But he abandoned the effort fearing that it “would only mean decades more of appeals,” and particularly “a new public forum for the former Black Panther,” today’s *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported. Instead, Mumia is sentenced to life without parole.

Millions around the world have come out in support of Mumia, who has become the symbol of the struggle against the racist death penalty in the U.S. The determined international protest certainly played a key role in saving him from the state executioner. But while the legal lynchers were set back, we cannot proclaim victory until Jamal walks free. He is an innocent man, framed by the cops. He was convicted and condemned to die by a racist *injustice* system for the “crime” of being a black revolutionary. We must redouble our efforts to *free Mumia now!*

Nor is Mumia free of the threat of death. Every day that he is in jail, his life is in danger. Maureen Faulkner, the wife of policeman Daniel Faulker whom Mumia was falsely accused of shooting, said she was “heartened by the thought that he will finally be taken from the protected cloister he has been living in all these years and begin living among his own kind



© Lou Jones

**Mumia Abu-Jamal**

— the thugs and common criminals that infest our prisons.” This is a barely disguised call for Jamal to be murdered in prison, whether by some snitch or by guards who would then blame inmates.

On stage as the D.A. announced he would not pursue a new death sentence for Mumia, Faulkner launched into a tirade against lily livered federal judges who supposedly secretly oppose the death penalty. Faulkner has been shepherded by right-wingers like Philly radio ranter Michael Smerconish, but those pushing for the state to murder Jamal included the likes of liberal Democrat Ed Rendell, who as Philly district attorney oversaw the prosecution of Mumia, and as Pennsylvania governor vowed to sign a death warrant ordering his execution.

Over the years, many groups defending Mumia have called for a “new trial”. In doing so, they undercut the struggle for Jamal’s freedom by pitching their appeals to liberals who flinch at asserting Mumia’s innocence. They focus instead on the egregious violations of judicial conduct and procedures in the 1982 trial and 1995 appeal, both before the notorious “hanging judge,” Albert Sabo, who sentenced more people to death than any sitting judge in the U.S. Sabo, a lifetime member of the Fraternal Order of Police, said he would help

prosecutors “fry the n---r.”

That appeal reflected and fed into illusions that Mumia’s conviction and death sentence were an “aberration,” and that a “fair trial” is possible in the U.S. today. More recently, the same liberals and reformist self-proclaimed socialists called on Barack Obama’s top cop, Attorney General Eric Holder, to launch a civil rights investigation of the case. Again, this expresses and fosters illusions in this bourgeois politician, simply because he is black. When queried about Mumia’s case, Obama said he was in favor of the death penalty for convicted “cop killers.”

The fact is that the kind of judicial frame-up dealt to Mumia Abu-Jamal is regularly carried out against blacks, Latinos, Asians, immigrants and others. The death penalty is a legacy of the chattel slavery on which the U.S. was founded, and of the Jim Crow segregation that followed. This system of racial oppression is continued today by cops and courts that routinely criminalize black youth. Thousands sit on death row while tens of thousands of immigrants are jailed in concentration camps, hundreds of thousands are deported every year and millions are held in prisons that lock up a far higher percentage of the population than anywhere else on the planet.

The fundamental fact is, *there is no justice for the oppressed in the racist, capitalist courts.*

The Trotskyists of the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International have fought for the last quarter century for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. We first learned of his case following the Philadelphia police bombing of the radical MOVE commune on Mothers’ Day 1985, which killed eleven people (including five children) and destroyed an entire black neighborhood of 62 homes. That bombing



Internationalist photo

**ILWU longshore union shut down all West Coast ports on April 24, 1999 demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal.**

was authorized by black Democratic mayor Wilson Goode presiding over a racist police force just as Democrat Michael Nutter does today.

Rather than looking to the capitalist state, which is a machine for the suppression of working people and the oppressed, we in the IG and LFI have called to *mobilize the power of the working class to free Mumia Abu-Jamal*. For us, these are not empty words, as our comrades in the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil in April 1999 sparked the first ever strike action for Mumia’s freedom, by teachers in the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro. This was done in close conjunction with dock workers in the U.S. who the next day shut down every port on the West Coast declaring, “An injury to one is an injury to all, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!”

We also point out that Mumia has been victimized not only by Republicans, such as the racist police chief and later mayor Frank Rizzo, but also by Democratic district attorneys, mayors and Pennsylvania governors. Democratic presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama avidly courted the Fraternal Order of Police, which has made a crusade of trying to kill Jamal. And if the racist rulers finally gave up on the death penalty for Mumia, they just executed another innocent black man, Troy Davis.

Following the state murder of Troy Davis, hundreds of angry young people marched from Union Square in New York City to the site of Occupy Wall Street, facing police attack all the way. IG supporters carried signs including “Troy Davis, Legal Lynching – Smash the Racist Death Penalty!” and “Workers Revolution Will Avenge Troy Davis.” Today the fight for Mumia’s freedom is an integral part of the struggle for a revolutionary workers party to break with the Democratic and Republican capitalist parties of death. ■



Internationalist photo

**Internationalist Group protested on Sept. 19 against looming execution of Troy Davis, demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal.**

## Battle of Longview...

*continued from page 24*

in recent years. It gave a taste of workers' power that needs to be mobilized in sharp class struggle today.

This wasn't the first time the ILWU ranks mobilized massively in this struggle. The protesters who poured into Longview in the early morning hours were incensed over police attacks on unionists the day before. When EGT tried to bring in a mile-long train of corn from Minnesota to its scab facility on September 7, over 200 ILWUers initially held it off by occupying train tracks in nearby Vancouver, Washington just across the Columbia River from Portland. When later in the day the 107-car Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) train got through to Longview, it was met by 400 unionists, some with picket signs mounted on baseball bats. At the request of port officials, the local sheriff sent 50 or so riot cops, who arrested 19 picketers, tackling them and roughly throwing them onto the gravel track bed while clubbing and pepper-spraying others. The police picked ILWU International president Bob McEllrath out of the crowd and wrestled him to the ground, intending to arrest him. But the cops let him go as hundreds of outraged longshoremen surged forward. "I felt like they were going to overrun us," said one deputy.

Beginning in May of this year, ILWU Local 21 held mass pickets in Longview. On **June 3**, some 1,000 longshoremen rallied outside EGT headquarters in Portland. On **July 11**, 100 union protesters were arrested after tearing down a chain link fence around the terminal. In response to the arrests, on **July 14**, hundreds of workers blocked an attempt to bring in a grain train, leading BNSF to stop all rail shipments to EGT. When the company announced it was hiring members of the Operating Engineers local to staff the terminal, 100 ILWU pickets blocked the gates on **July 22**, forcing EGT to shut down. The company finally managed to unload the first grain train on September 21, but only after roughly arresting a dozen union supporters, mostly women who were sitting on the tracks along with Local 21 president Dan Coffman. A 57-year-old grandmother suffered a torn rotor cuff when police manhandled her, and two other union leaders were thrown down, handcuffed *and then maced*. An army of police from around the region occupied the area. This time the black-uniformed Robocops, looking like a squad of Nazi stormtroopers, arrived with a black armored car marked "Sheriff" with a gun turret mounted on top.

Since the September 8 "storming," Longview police and sheriff's deputies have been on a rampage. Beginning in July there have been more than 200 arrests of ILWU members and supporters, more than 50 were jailed and later released, while ten face felony charges. Local 21 members have been arrested at night in their homes as their families watched. A number, including several women, have been arrested more than once.



Roger Werth/The Daily News [Longview]

**ILWU longshoremen protest scab labor during occupation of EGT terminal, July 11.**

Denouncing these "made for TV arrests," the 200 members of Local 21 and 40 "Women of the Waterfront" showed up at the Cowlitz county courthouse on September 16 with picket signs to turn themselves in. Although a riot squad was hiding inside the building, no arrests were made. Later that day, however, Local vice president Jake Whiteside was arrested in a church parking lot in front of his children. In contrast, the district attorney did nothing to prosecute a scab who drove a truck straight into a picket line in August, sending a picketer to the hospital, and then drove off: a clear hit-and-run, all of it caught on video seen by thousands on the Internet.

Meanwhile, EGT has hired a professional strikebreaking company, SRC (Special Response Corporation), which supplies ex-military and ex-cops to deal with labor conflicts. An ad on the SRC web site offers "A Private Army When You Need It Most." It features a uniformed agent with riot shield and gas mask, boasting that it can provide up to "200 specially trained professionals, equipped with the latest in security technology," including "specially designed vehicles that enable employees to cross picket lines...." In addition to this private army of union-busting mercenaries, federal agents showed up threatening to up the ante on arrests, with rumors that longshoremen could lose their Transport Workers Identification Credential (TWIC) if arrested, buying the EGT claim that picketing grain trains is "blocking interstate commerce." To top it off, Fox TV is calling to prosecute the ILWU for "ter-

rorism.” But while the company, government authorities and right-wing reactionaries are on the warpath against the union, workers nationally were energized by the Longview workers’ militant defense of their rights.

To win this battle will require an all-out mobilization of union power, and not just by one small ILWU local. The shipping bosses will think again if the whole coast is shut down to support Longview workers, even more so if faced with a first-ever national port strike. Facing a vicious, union-busting attack, workers must hit the bosses where it hurts. But the struggle must also be fought politically. The escalation of repression came as a result of a federal injunction issued by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Since Obama appointees took the reins last year, pro-Democratic Party union bureaucrats have hailed the Labor Board as pro-labor for the first time in decades, while conservatives have denounced it as “Marxism on the march.” *Yet it is Obama’s NLRB that requested an injunction against the ILWU for “aggressive” picketing.* On September 7 and 8, union supporters courageously defied the federal injunction. They will have to do so again, even more powerfully. And to defeat the “bipartisan” war on the working class, labor must *break with the capitalist parties to build a class-struggle workers party.*

Longview longshore workers have braved arrest in order to defend their jobs and those of union workers everywhere. Their example has already inspired other workers, including the Tacoma, Washington teachers fighting against a school district demand to do away with seniority, who walked out September 12 shortly after the ILWU action. They stayed out for two weeks, with solid popular support and in defiance of a court injunction, until they won a contract that at least for now left the seniority system intact. *The labor movement must mobilize to defend the ILWU, demanding all charges be dropped, and to win this all-important class battle.*

### A Must-Win Battle Against Union-Busting

Although only a few dozen jobs are involved at the EGT terminal, the showdown here is over the future of waterfront unions in this country. In Philadelphia last year, Del Monte broke its contract with the East Coast International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) and set up a new port staffed with workers from a company union. In Longview, the ILWU has held the contract for bulk grain loading for over three-quarters of a century, going back to 1934 when the union was founded. EGT’s lease agreement to set up the facility specifically referenced the port’s Working Agreement giving the ILWU jurisdiction. If EGT is able to rip up that contract, other grain handlers will certainly try to follow suit. Last month, the employers negotiated a one-year contract, instead of the previous six-year deals. Stevedoring companies, terminal operators and ship owners on the Pacific, Atlantic and Gulf Coasts are watching the outcome of the battle of Longview like sharks. This is a must-win battle for all of labor.

And we can win this battle. The ILWU is a powerhouse of labor, but now is the moment it must use its tremendous industrial power ... or lose it. The struggle in Longview comes



**Cowley County sheriff’s riot squad protects grain train (above), with armored car guarding EGT scab terminal in background (below).**

in the context of growing resentment against capitalist titans of commerce, industry and finance who have been making out like bandits, giving themselves billions in bonuses while upwards of 25 million working people are jobless. More than 19 million homes are empty due to foreclosures and lack of buyers, while the numbers of homeless are escalating month by month. Meanwhile, workers’ rights, wages and “benefits” are under full-scale attack. The anger over this war on working people finally boiled over in Wisconsin earlier this year, as union supporters occupied the state capitol for weeks to protest the governor’s union-busting bill. Over 100,000 marched repeatedly, a general strike was posed. But the end result was a defeat for workers: the labor bureaucracy, fearing that real class struggle could “get out of hand,” diverted the unprecedented mobilization into a campaign to recall Republican legislators (and elect Democrats). Yet both Democrats and Republicans were for cutting workers benefits.

In Longview, one of the most popular T-shirts worn by ILWU supporters read, “No Wisconsin Here” – and they mean it. An article in the *Journal of Commerce* (19 September), titled “Labor’s Long View,” recalled the ILWU’s history and noted that in this battle, “the union took militancy to a higher level because its members were literally fighting to protect their jobs and to prevent the erosion of the ILWU’s exclusive bargaining authority at all West Coast ports.” This is what “makes the

Don Ryan/AP



**Longview longshoremens during standoff over grain train, September 7. In Wisconsin, union tops sold out workers' struggle to back Democratic Party. Oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats, build a class-struggle workers party.**

ILWU one of the most powerful unions in the United States," it stressed. The fight is not limited to the ILWU. Two weeks later, the paper reported that with the East Coast International Longshoremens's Association (ILA) contract with the USMX shippers cartel coming up next year, "some shippers already are starting to explore contingency plans," adding: "But any talk of breaking the longshore unions' hold on containerized cargo at major U.S. ports is wishful thinking" ("ILA, ILWU Not Going Away," *Journal of Commerce*, 3 October).

EGT is a recently formed consortium of Bunge North America, based in St. Louis, the Japan-based Itochu International and South Korea-based STX Pan Ocean. The huge (36 silo) \$200 million Longview facility is the first new grain terminal built in the U.S. in almost three decades. It is run by Bunge Limited, an international food conglomerate headquartered in White Plains, NY, which is one of the Big Five monopolies that control the grain trade worldwide. In addition to shipping grain, it is the world's largest soy processor and supplier of bottled oils to consumers, earning \$2.4 billion in profits in 2010. Bunge has made a high stakes gamble, seeking control of Pacific grain shipping while taking on the ILWU. "EGT would like to be the Walmart of the grain business," said the president of the Tacoma ILWU local. But unlike so many unions in recent decades who half-heartedly fought crucial battles, or simply folded, the historically militant longshore union has stepped up to the plate. Facing a ruthless employer out for blood, it has to play hardball to win.

From the outset, EGT made clear it sought to operate a scab terminal, importing low-wage non-union construction workers to build it and suing the Port of Longview to be exempted from the contractual agreement with the ILWU. As the battle heated up, however, it tried to pull a fast one in mid-July by turning to General Construction, a subsidiary

of Kiewit, one of the largest contractors in the world, to operate the terminal with workers from International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 701. This way EGT could cynically pretend it was just a squabble between two unions. The fiction didn't fool Pacific Northwest labor. Washington and Oregon state labor councils denounced EGT's attempt to set one union against another, and the Oregon Building Trades Council condemned Local 701 for working in collusion with the union-busting employer against the ILWU on the Longview docks. But shamefully, *national AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka sided with EGT, saying it was a "jurisdictional dispute"*! This is the same faker who posed as a labor militant in Wisconsin, calling on unions to take solidarity action, and who now hails Occupy Wall Street.

ILWU Local 10 was the only union in the country to respond to the AFL-CIO's call for real solidarity action, shutting

down Bay Area ports on April 4. But Trumka never came to its defense when it was sued by the employers for that action. To win the battle of Longview, it will be vital to mobilize a solid front of labor in defense of the ILWU. Trumka must be confronted and sharply denounced for aiding and abetting union-busting. There should be an effort to reach rank-and-file members of Local 701 to overturn this disgusting scabbing. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (part of the Teamsters) issued a statement in support of ILWU Local 21 against EGT and offering "any help we can provide." It would certainly help if the BLET would *stop the grain trains to EGT*. If those trains are manned by union railroad workers, that is outright *scabbing*. If, as some in Longview believe, they are driven by management, one way or another, members of BLET Division 758 in Vancouver, Washington can and should stop them. And if EGT attempts to load a grain ship, *union supporters in the area should come out in the thousands to stop the scab operation, and the ILA and ILWU should shut down every port in the U.S.*

From that moment on, waterfront unions everywhere should refuse to touch any Itochu or STX Pan-Ocean ship or any Bunge cargo. After noting the ILA's pledge of support to the West Coast dock workers after the attempted arrest of ILWU president McEllrath, the *Journal of Commerce* (19 September) warned: "The bigger concern for EGT, however, could be the close connections the ILWU maintains with dockworker unions in Asia, where most of its grain will be exported. The ILWU and its Asian counterparts in the past have coordinated job actions on both sides of the Pacific against vessels involved in labor disputes at U.S. and Asian ports." Already on October 14, the Doro-Chiba rail workers union held a protest outside the headquarters of the Japanese shipping company Itochu demanding "Hands Off ILWU!"

In March 2003, Doro-Chiba struck for three days against the war on Iraq and against emergency legislation preparing for imperialist war on North Korea. On October 21, Australian dock workers in the port of Newcastle rallied and delivered a message to the Korean ship STX Jasmine vowing “retaliation around the world” over the attack on the ILWU.

### The Fight for a Class-Struggle Leadership

The stakes couldn't be higher in the battle for Longview. It is clear to everyone – to the workers, the bosses and the bosses' government – that the outcome will vitally affect the future of waterfront and maritime unions and all labor in the United States, and around the world. It could take on the importance of the PATCO air controllers strike in 1981, a fight by a relatively small, conservative union whose defeat set the stage for a decade of lost strikes and the sorry state American labor is in today. Yet the official AFL-CIO leadership knifed those strikers in the back, calling for the empty gesture of a consumer boycott while airline maintenance workers (Machinists), fuel truck drivers (Teamsters) and others *scabbed*, daily crossing PATCO picket lines. Like the ILWU today, the air controllers faced a bi-partisan capitalist attack: the government of Republican Ronald Reagan (who was endorsed by PATCO) carried out a union-busting plan drawn up under the administration of Democrat Jimmy Carter. This underscores the need to forge a class-struggle leadership prepared to take on *and defeat* both capitalist parties.

The shipping companies are no doubt hoping that EGT can do to the ILWU what maritime bosses did to dock workers unions in England in the mid-1990s. In 1995, a hard-nosed port company in Liverpool fired the entire workforce of 500 dockers for refusing to cross a picket line. This touched off a fight for the workers' reinstatement in which maritime unions around the world staged boycotts in solidarity with their British comrades. In 1997, ILWU Local 10 in the San Francisco Bay Area refused to unload the *Neptune Jade*, a ship carrying scab cargo loaded by a subsidiary of the Liverpool harbor company. When the ship tried again to offload its cargo in Vancouver, Canada, dock workers there boycotted it. So did Japanese longshoremen in Yokohama and Kobe. The attempt by the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) to saddle the unions and union members with crippling fines over the *Neptune Jade* action was defeated. But the Liverpool union was smashed, as were dock unions in the other British ports, because the workers movement as a whole did not mobilize its industrial power early on.

Even so, the Liverpool workers and the struggle over the *Neptune Jade* reignited workers solidarity worldwide, seriously shaking the maritime bosses. If EGT owners are dreaming of another Liverpool, they could instead face the nightmare of another Charleston. In January 2000, a Danish shipper, Nordana, hired a scab stevedoring outfit in the port of Charleston, South Carolina. When union pickets showed up, they were met by 600 heavily armed riot cops with armored cars, helicopters, police boats, snipers and attack dogs. Five members of the overwhelmingly black ILA Local 1422 were hit with federal “felonious riot” charges (see “Defend the Charleston Five,”

*The Internationalist* No. 10, June 2001). In response, ILWU Local 10 in the Bay Area called a one-day work stoppage in solidarity. Meanwhile, the International Dockworkers Council (IDC) through its Spanish affiliate delivered a message when the ship with scab cargo arrived in Barcelona that “they are ready to stop any of Nordana's vessels at any port in Europe anytime,” as the port agent warned his home office. Nordana signed with Local 1422, although the unionists were under house arrest for months. (See Suzan Erem and E. Paul Durrenberger, *On the Global Waterfront: The Fight to Free the Charleston 5* [Monthly Review Press, 2008].)

Jack Heyman, who recently retired after three decades as a militant in the ILWU (and before that in the now-defunct National Maritime Union), published a recent op-ed article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (27 September), titled “Longshore Workers Make a Stand for All of Labor,” writing: “A line has been drawn on the waterfront of this country.” Heyman has been in the forefront of numerous solidarity actions on the West Coast docks, including “hot cargoing” (refusing to handle) ships bound for Pinochet's Chile and carrying munitions to the death squad junta in El Salvador in the late 1970s and early '80s, the 1984 boycott of the *Nedlloyd Kimberly* from South Africa in solidarity with the anti-apartheid struggle, as well as the '97 *Neptune Jade* boycott and the 2000 port shutdown for the Charleston dock workers. After two trips to Longview in recent weeks, speaking at an October 20 forum in New York sponsored by the Internationalist Clubs of the City University and Class Struggle Education Workers, Heyman noted that “it's a make or break situation for the ILWU,” that in resisting the employers and the capitalist state, “the biggest obstacle is the trade-union bureaucracy,” which has been applying the brakes on militant mobilization since September 7.

ILWU president McEllrath certainly got support for standing with the ranks on the railroad tracks that day. ILA president Harold Daggett fired off a letter pledging the East Coast dock union's “full support of our ILWU brethren.” In San Francisco, ILWU Local 10 voted a motion sending \$10,000 to Local 21 and calling for a coastwide port shutdown over the union-busting in Longview. Shutting down West Coast shipping would put the screws to EGT, and even more so taking Daggett at his word and carrying out a serious, first-ever shutdown on all three coasts. This would make it clear to all that the maritime unions intend will use their power to *bust the union-busters*. But the ILWU tops are clearly dragging their feet, as McEllrath tells locals to “take no action without specific authorization from me.” Instead, the labor bureaucracy is looking to the capitalist courts, particularly since the federal judge handling the case ruled that EGT was “acutely aware” of the Port of Longview Working Agreement with the longshore union. But at the same time, the judge fined the union over \$300,000 for “illegal picketing.”

Its defeatist strategy is nothing new on the part of the ILWU International:

- Last year, Boron miners in the Warehouse Division were locked out and replaced by scabs. Hundreds of scab containers were sent through the port of Los Angeles/Long

Don Ryan/AP



**Labor's gotta play hardball to win. ILWUers held off police Sept. 7.**

Beach, but none were stopped. The ILWU International leadership directed Boron miners not to picket the port, then three months later claimed a victory in the pages of *The Dispatcher*. Yet scabs continue to work the mine and seniority was ripped apart in the new contract. Some “victory”!

- This devastating loss was followed by the strike of the ILWU’s Office and Clerical Unit (OCU) in L.A. Longshoremen and clerks respected the OCU picket lines until an arbitrator ruled against them. The Coast Committee then told ILWU workers to cross the ILWU picket line!! The OCU clerks still have no contract, and now the employers are hitting the L.A./Long Beach Local 13, the largest in the union, with a robotics clause in the last contract, in order to sharply cut jobs.
- When Local 10 shut down Bay Area ports on April 4 in solidarity with Wisconsin workers, making it the only union in the country to take real job action, there was no mention of this in *The Dispatcher*. Nor has the union paper defended the Local against the PMA’s suit over this. On the contrary, the International told Local 10 to agree to a PMA arbitrator’s decision that this was an illegal job action.

The union tops try to put a clamp on the ranks because they fear militant class struggle “like the plague.” The labor bureaucracy does not represent the ranks, its job is to control them. In order to defend the unions, we need to sweep away this privileged layer, beholden to the capitalist system, which chains the workers to the bosses, centrally through support to the Democratic Party. And to do so we must militantly resist every attack, going from resistance to a struggle for power.

The ruling class as a whole is “acutely aware” of the “threat” posed by the ILWU’s refund militancy. The *Wall Street Journal* (9 September) published an ominous editorial titled “A Union Goes Too Far.” “So what’s too far?” Jack Heyman asked at the October 20 forum. “‘Too far’ is ensuring that picket lines mean

don’t cross. That’s how unions were built in this country.” Federal judge Ronald Leighton said “he felt like a paper tiger” because the unions were ignoring his injunction. Heyman noted, “The last time I remember defiance of an injunction by a federal judge was in 1978 when [Democrat Jimmy] Carter was president and he issued a Taft-Hartley injunction against the miners, and they defied it.” Today the ILWU has organized mass pickets, roving pickets, blocked train tracks, even temporarily occupied the scab grain facility. Many union leaders say you can’t go up against the government. Yet when the ILWU shut down West Coast ports on May Day 2008 to stop the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, the PMA sued the union for violating Taft-Hartley, and the ILWU won, making the contract depend on dropping the suit.

In his New York talk, Heyman pointed to the observation by Leon Trotsky in his 1940 essay “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” that a common feature of “the degeneration of modern trade union organizations in the entire world... is their drawing closely to and growing together with the state” (see the Internationalist Group Class Readings bulletin, *Trotskyism and Trade-Union Struggle* [December 2005], for the complete text). In recent years, while militants opposed the Maritime Security Act and the imposition of the TWIC card, the ILWU leadership took the position that you can’t fight it. Now the police are trying to intimidate Local 21 workers by photocopying their TWIC cards, suggesting they could lose them (and lose their jobs) if they get arrested again. But at the height of the McCarthyite witchhunt in the early 1950s, ILWU Local 10 fought the clauses of the Taft-Hartley Act banning communists from union leadership positions, taking it to the Supreme Court and winning. And it fought the waterfront screening that mainly affected blacks and reds.

As the dramatic struggle in Longview shows, the ranks of labor are ready and willing to fight – they know their livelihoods and their whole future are at stake. They will “take care of business” if they know we’ve got their backs. The proud ILWU men and women of Longview are on the front lines, but this fight affects all labor and everyone suffering the effects of the world economic crisis. Workers and all defenders of workers’ rights must stand with the ILWU and demand that all charges against it and its supporters be dropped, from President McEllrath to the dozens of Local 21 members facing the threat of jail. The way to defend them, and to win the battle against the EGT union busters, is to mobilize union power. At the same time, the key to defeating the concerted attack on the maritime unions is to build a leadership with the political program and guts to take on not only the government but the capitalist system, which is relentlessly destroying union gains won through hard struggle in the past. We need to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and forge a class-struggle workers party, and we need to get started now. *Show the maritime bosses who controls the hook!* ■

**Militant Class Struggle Like You Haven't Seen in Years:  
ILWUers Defy Federal Injunction, Block Train, "Storm" Scab Terminal**

# Showdown on the West Coast Docks The Battle of Longview



Dawn Des Brisay/Flickr

**Police attack ILWU pickets in Longview, Washington, September 7 as they block grain train to scab facility: 19 arrested. Despite federal injunction, the next day 800 union supporters returned to seize the terminal. Ten thousand tons of grain were dumped, judge said he felt like a “paper tiger.”**

NOVEMBER 4 – Since early this year a bitter struggle has been waged in the small West Coast port of Longview, Washington. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) is fighting a vicious union-busting attack by a new grain shipping conglomerate, EGT Development. The battle got national attention when before sunrise on September 8, some 800 union supporters “stormed” the new Export Grain Terminal, as an AP dispatch and every subsequent article in the big business press put it. Media accounts said workers carry-

ing baseball bats broke down gates, “overpowering” security guards, who cowered as 10,000 tons of grain were dumped on the tracks and railroad cars disabled. In short: the workers were taking care of business. That morning more than 1,000 longshoremen refused to show up for work, shutting down the ports of Seattle, Tacoma and Vancouver, Washington as well as Portland, Oregon. It all harked back to the militant union action that built the labor movement and which has seldom been seen

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**Bust the Union-Busters – Shut Down the Ports on All 3 Coasts!**