

For Independent Working Class Action!

Why Workers Should Support the December 12 West Coast Port Shutdown, and What We Need To Do Next

The Occupy movement's decision to shut down the ports on the West Coast on December 12 has been criticized by mainstream media, union officials, and even some labor activists who consider themselves progressive. They complain that Occupy does not represent union workers; that the port shutdown action has not been officially endorsed even by the ILWU, much less by the labor councils in the port cities; and that the action will hurt the people who work at the ports, who are part of the "99%." They argue that if Occupy wants to support the labor movement, it should follow the instructions of the labor bureaucrats rather than acting on its own.

To this we respond: **BULLSHIT!** These criticisms ignore the fact that the present labor bureaucracy, hog-tied by its links to the Democratic Party and its craven fear of violating the oppressive Taft-Hartley anti-strike law, has demonstrated time and time again that it is incapable of fighting effectively for the interests of even those few workers who belong to a union, much less the interests of the working class as a whole.

That is why, having run out of patience waiting for the union leadership to take action in the face of the current economic crisis, the working class of Oakland took action on its own on November 2, and kicked Wall Street where it counts by shutting down the Port of Oakland! **The union tops refuse to demonstrate our power through mass direct action, but the workers of Oakland showed that as a class, we can, and we will!**

Workers Must Break with the Democrats

Yes, there is a class war going on, and the 99% did not start it. The corporate plutocracy has been waging an all-out war against organized labor for decades, to the point where 89% of workers no longer belong to a union. Their latest ploy is to blame public workers and their unions for the current structural crisis of capitalism—as if the demands of teachers, firefighters, and public health workers for a fair wage and a threadbare pension were responsible for crashing the biggest economy in the world.

As a result, over the past decades the situation of working people and the poor in the United States has gone from bad to worse. While this was happening, the "leadership" of the union movement did nothing to fight back directly, instead contributing money, volunteers, and votes to the Democratic Party. They have continued in this vein even while Democratic politicians have cut budgets, slashed social services, and imposed takebacks on public workers. When Obama promised "hope" and "change," the union tops cheered, and they will back him again in 2012.

But by now it is crystal clear that channeling our discontent into electoral campaigns brings working people nothing but false hope, and change for the worse. The Democrats have promised us health care reform; jobs; the Employee Free Choice Act to boost union organizing; and environmental protection. They have delivered precisely NOTHING. We are still faced with a shrinking job market, a lower standard of living, home foreclosures, budget cuts, tax cuts for the rich, and bailouts for the banks. And **still** the union leadership backs the Democrats, refusing to

assert labor's political independence and fight back with mass working class actions.

Today's Labor "Leadership" Is Unsupportable

The core focus of today's port shutdown is the fight to defend the ILWU 21 dock workers in Longview, Washington, and to promote organizing of the truck drivers at all the ports. The situation of the truck drivers is shameful; they cannot organize for better wages and working conditions because the law has falsely labeled them "independent contractors" who cannot bargain collectively under the antitrust laws. But their situation is only the tip of the iceberg of attacks on workers, both union and non-union, by the corporate fat cats. All of us must organize to fight back against the ongoing attacks on our standard of living and our civil and human rights.

Unions led this struggle in the distant past, but under today's leadership, we cannot rely on them to do so again. On November 2, unions responded to Occupy Oakland's call for a port shutdown with letters of support for what they called a "Day of Action," but not one dared to defy Taft-Hartley by calling their members to walk out in unison and create a **real general strike**. Instead, they told workers to take vacation time if they wanted to participate.

In the run up to December 12th, the labor leadership's role has gotten worse. The ILWU leadership has taken a stand against their own rank and file and against the community that supports them. Under pressure from the Port Management Association and the Democratic Party, the Alameda County Labor Council even went so far as to consider a resolution *opposing* the port shutdown. The resolution was tabled, and some labor activists are trying

to give the Labor Council left cover by calling the resulting “neutrality” a mini-victory. As the late historian Howard Zinn put it, however, “You can’t be neutral on a moving train.”

We Need an Independent, Militant Leadership

The Occupy movement should be commended for firing a warning shot in the class war fight-back. But as the often brutal police crackdowns on the Occupy encampments have demonstrated, tents and consensus-based general assemblies are not a sustainable or effective way to defeat the bodies of armed men that the corporate-controlled state has at its command. In order to fight back and win, what we need is a General Strike Movement. Union militants dedicated to the advancement of our class cannot place faith in the populist, cross-class Occupy movement.

Occupy cannot accomplish the necessary task of galvanizing rank-and-file workers to defeat business and corporate unionism and turn our organizations into a weapon that can and will wage a militant struggle for the interests of the entire working class. We must reinvigorate and democratize organized labor, and raise up a new cadre of class struggle driven leaders who will work with the rank and file to smash Taft-Hartley and mount united mass strike actions. Such a movement, combined with the fight for working class political independence, must be put front and center on labor’s agenda today!

To achieve genuine working class political independence, rank-and-filers must organize to create representative bodies composed of democratically elected workers’ deputies who are subject to immediate recall. We must form factory committees, neighborhood councils, and inter-factory and inter-district workers’ councils.

We must also lend our support to the unemployed and marginalized elements of the population in their self-organization efforts. When workers join with the oppressed communities to oppose their common enemy,

we all benefit. This was shown by the ILWU Local 10 strike in October 2010, in protest of racist police brutality and the murder of Oscar Grant, which forged the ties between labor and the oppressed that contributed so greatly to the success of the November 2 port shutdown. Together, we can work jointly on the tasks of seizing control of the economy, reorganizing it to serve human needs instead of private profit, and defending ourselves against counterattacks by the agents of corporate capital.

Our Struggle Must Be Internationalist

The Occupy movement was inspired in part by the struggles of the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and the Middle East during the Arab Spring. Those struggles relied on support from working class strikes and the defection of rank-and-file members of the armed services to the side of the protesting masses. Workers in the United States need to learn many of the same lessons in working class independence, rank and file organizing, and workers’ democracy.

The Arab Spring also offers us another, equally important lesson. Despite the sacrifice and struggle of the Egyptian and Libyan masses, their lack of an alternative leadership left a vacuum into which the repressive forces of the bourgeoisie and the top army leadership have stepped, only to renew the repression of the people. This development exposes the limitations of pacifism and leaderlessness.

In addition, the globalization of capital makes it more important than ever for those who wage the struggle against capital to form ties with our counterparts around the globe. The workers’ movement cannot succeed unless it develops an internationalist consciousness, in solidarity with our brother and sister workers overseas. It is in all of our common interest to defeat the imperialist wars and interventions waged by the United States, NATO, and their allies.

- Confront and smash Taft-Hartley and all anti-labor laws through political and general strikes!
- Break with the Democrats and all capitalist parties! There is no lesser evil! There is no legislative solution!
- Build a fighting workers’ party that can wage a militant direct action struggle for a workers’ government!
- Jobs for all! Share the work: 30 hours work for 40 hours pay! Implement a sliding scale of wages and prices!
- Full citizenship rights for all immigrant workers! Defend immigrants against La Migra and ICE!
- Organize workers’ defense guards based on labor and the oppressed Black and Brown communities!
- No foreclosures! Open foreclosed homes to workers and the unemployed! Forgive all student loan debt!
- Open the books of the major finance houses and corporations! Seize the stolen wealth hoarded by the 1%!
- Nationalize finance capital, the big banks, and the major corporations, without indemnification and under workers’ control!
- Form democratic workers’ assemblies to prepare and organize for the seizure and operation of the economy!

HUMANIST WORKERS FOR REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

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