

Longshore union demands protection for members and community

written by Lallan Schoenstein
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President Trent Willis of ILWU Local 10 tells Stevedores Services of America: "We

want health and safety from Covid-19 for our members and our community now!" ILWU Local 34 President Keith Shanklin, ILWU Local 10 President Trent Willis and Local 10 business agent John Hughes.

Leaders and members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Locals 10, 34, 75 and 91 protested outside the office of the Stevedores Services of America (SSA) terminal at the Port of Oakland, Calif., on March 20 to demand that the company provide proper health and safety for longshore workers loading and unloading the ships.

Trent Willis, president of ILWU Local 10, and Keith Shanklin, president of ILWU Local 34, talked about the fight to protect Bay Area longshore workers and their communities from Covid-19.

An issue that poses a grave danger to all port workers and the surrounding community is the disposition of the Grand Princess cruise ship. Over 300 crew members are being held on the ship. Most are Filipino seafarers who have lost their labor and human rights.



ILWU 34 President Keith Shanklin: Brothers and sisters, we are requesting members of all our locals to stand with us in solidarity during this crisis and beyond due to the ongoing changes that happen every day with the coronavirus.

We are standing in solidarity with Locals 10, 34, 75 and 91 to demand the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), SSA and all Bay Area terminals honor the collective bargaining agreement and the safety code book — our contractual rights.

We requested that the PMA clean and sanitize all the equipment that is vital to our ability to provide safe labor to the port without interruptions. It is imperative for us as workers as well as to the public that the equipment we work with every day be sanitized to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The employers are obligated under Contract Section 3 of the Pacific Coast Safety Code Book to provide a safe workplace for all operations.

The threat of longshore workers contracting coronavirus and the threat of spreading it to our families and the surrounding community is too great for the employer not to take proactive measures.

The port is a main area for food, medical supplies and basic products for the community to maintain a decent quality of life. Your immediate response is requested. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Now, just to say: All the other terminals have complied with the Pacific Coast Safety Code except for the Stevedore Services of America Terminal. We want you to understand that we are not trying to target you. It is SSA that is targeting us by not following safety procedures.

ILWU Local 10 President Trent Willis: First, I'd like to send solidarity to our sister ILWU locals in this area and to all port workers who are not members of our union, as well as workers in general.

Today, we are here to demand that Stevedoring Services of America as well as Pacific Maritime Association adhere to previously agreed language in our Pacific Coast Safety Code which requires them to make sure that the longshore workers'

equipment and facilities are safe for everyday operation.

Now a longshoreman contracting the coronavirus can have a lot of different effects:

- First, we don't want to be responsible for spreading the coronavirus to each other.
- Second, we don't want to be responsible for spreading the coronavirus among port workers.
- Third, we don't want to be responsible for spreading the coronavirus to the community.

If the longshore workers contract the coronavirus because the equipment and the facilities are not being disinfected, we stand the possibility of the Port of Oakland being shut down.

The Port of Oakland is a vital artery to supplying the community in this area. Also, communities that are not in this area. For example the rail system here is directly connected to the main hub of the U.S. rail system in Chicago. There are goods and services that leave this port and get shipped to different communities all across this country.

If this port is shut down because of the coronavirus, it will bring about a health and safety risk to the public and to this entire country. This is a main hub for shipping out agricultural products. This port is responsible for feeding communities all across this nation. We want to be in a proactive position where we are making sure that the equipment and the machines that we operate are sanitized so that longshore workers are protected from contracting this virus.

Disposition of the infected cruise ship Grand Princess

We are also here today to talk about the Grand Princess, which docked at Birth 22. First off, we have not been informed of the condition of the crew members who

remain on the Grand Princess. As we speak, there are approximately 300 crew members still aboard. We have no idea if they are receiving the proper medical care. We have absolutely no information whether the terminal in Oakland where the ship was docked for a number of days has been disinfected after they left. That is a risk to the port workers as well as the vitality and the continuation of operations at this port.

We are here standing with our sister locals, the ILWU port workers, together with the community, to demand that these items be addressed: That our port be sanitized and that we learn the condition of the crew members aboard the Grand Princess.

We hope that the community will stand with us. The ILWU has always been a vanguard for workers all over the world. We stand as the first line of defense here in the Port of Oakland and ports up and down the entire coast.

Bishop Bob Jackson, Acts Full Gospel Church in East Oakland: I'm here to stand with the ILWU to advocate for cleanliness in the terminal so these women and men can work. They're doing essential work. We can't afford to see the ports shut down. We can't afford to see their families and the other people that they have to work with being impacted.

Without them working, without this port being open, without these terminals being able to do what they do, we will be in dire straits in Oakland. I'm here to say: Please do all you can to make sure their environment is cleaned and that they get the things that they request, because we need them to continue to work. We need them to continue to be healthy and for their families to be safe.

We thank you for this opportunity to support the ILWU.

ILWU Local 10 Business Agent John Hughes: I wanted to touch a little bit about the cruise ship sitting in Bayview-Hunters Point and piggyback on what President

Willis has said. It has become a pattern when it comes to a disenfranchised group of people in West Oakland and to another disenfranchised group of people out in Bayview-Hunters Point.

We've already touched on the lack of sanitation. To be perfectly honest, this company has blatantly ignored the fact that if coronavirus is contracted by us it spreads to our families, and not just our families, but our communities and adjacent communities.

Then you have a worst-case. They take a ship that has not yet been disinfected and they sail it in the Bayview-Hunters Point Naval Shipyard to dump the toxic waste out there. We know that a ship has to get rid of the toxins. They want to dump it there simply because it's already an area that's been infected in the past by the stuff that the Navy was doing.

We're here to stand up to that. We're here to stand up to big corporations and make sure that not only our jobs but our community, our families and our people are safe and protected from this virus.

Brothers and sisters, as you can see behind me, we are represented by the unions and also the community. Those two entities go hand in hand. We plan to continue to fight. We are asking the public to please join our fight because not only are we fighting for ourselves, we are also fighting for the rights of the community to be safe and our families to be safe.

Pres. Trent Willis: We have to recognize one point: We're not just addressing you as longshore workers and ILWU union members, we are also members of the community. The biggest threat to longshore workers and ILWU members is the possibility of infecting the community because we work with ships that are coming from all over the country, from all of these different countries where the coronavirus is spreading. We want to make sure that while we're doing this vital work in the Port

of Oakland that all of our members are safe.

Now you hear a lot of talk from the governor and from local elected officials about how essential the Port of Oakland is. Well, the ILWU's position is that the health and safety of the workers and the community are essential. The port being essential is second to that.

We appreciate your supporting us in this time of need. Once again, ILWU Local 10 promises to stand strong with the community and to be the first line of defense at the port.

Steve Zeltzer, "WorkWeek" on KPFA Pacifica Radio: One of the things that I want to bring up is that of the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health. We pay for Cal/OSHA to protect 19 million workers in California. The question we have for Gov. Newsom is: Where is Cal/OSHA when the SSA is not properly protecting the workplace? Cal/OSHA should shut the job down. We have learned that Cal/OSHA has only one doctor and one nurse, with less than 200 inspectors. What kind of protection is that in this dire emergency?

We're calling on Gov. Newsom to staff up Cal/OSHA, to make sure inspectors are down here demanding that the company clean the equipment for the workers or shut this facility down. Cal/OSHA's job is to protect the health and safety of working people who are doing critical work like shipping. They are getting supplies out in this dire emergency and the workers need to be protected.

Pres. Keith Shanklin: If you can put any pressure on, do it for the community, do it for yourself. We have to understand one thing: if this dock continues to go unsanitized and our members get this virus, the dock would shut down immediately. You would not have the goods, the way of life that you enjoy right now. It would not be the same. I guarantee it.

