

Supply chain crisis? There's more to that story

written by Gary Wilson
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ILWU Local 10 President Trent Willis at a rally in Oakland, Calif., for protective equipment for essential workers, April 20, 2020.

Fears of empty shelves and online shortages seem to dominate the daily TV news

shows. The reports are completely overblown, as Barron's admits in a report that's blocked for common reading by a paywall. (Barron's is a Dow Jones & Company news magazine; they also publish the Wall Street Journal.)

Barron's notes that year-end shortages in the supply chain are nothing new. "Our conversations with retailers, manufacturers, shippers, and Wall Street forecasters indicate that businesses are learning to cope with bottlenecks," Barron's says.

Moreover, with the reports filling the news shows, toy sales have taken off. The toy industry is reporting that [sales have increased](#) by 15% over last year— to \$22.45 billion — and 28% over 2019. And, you may have noticed, toy prices are going up — allegedly because of "short supply."

Supply chain bottlenecks don't originate from COVID-19. The bottlenecks were introduced back in the 1970s by what is called "just in time" manufacturing. Manufacturers no longer have big inventories of parts. For global manufacturers, everything is now "off-shored." Everything from parts to completed products are made globally and then shipped to where they are needed.

With the anarchy of capitalist production, it's never known what will be needed or when — not overall for the whole economy. Of course, Ford Motor Co. knows what computer chips it wants and when it wants them for F-150 pickup production. But does that matter if more of Chrysler's Ram pickups are being sold and use the parts that are most needed? That's the anarchy of capitalism.

Attack on longshore workers

Besides a chance to raise prices, there's another game hidden in the shipping bottleneck on the West Coast that's been the highlighted image on the TV news.

International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 President Trent Willis says that there is no backlog of ships at the Port of Oakland, the third-busiest

port on the West Coast. Local 10 is an African American-led labor union that is world-renowned for its militant and just struggles, including stopping the loading and unloading of ships from apartheid South Africa and Israel.

“I want to make something absolutely clear: The supply chain backup on the West



Coast has been inaccurately reported,” Willis said in a Labor Video interview.

“It’s being inaccurately reported that this backup is all up and down the whole coast. Why are ocean carriers refusing to use the Port of Oakland to unload container ships with 70 to 80 ships backing up in the ports of LA?” Willis asks.

“They could be playing some kind of game, you know. We have our contract negotiations starting up in 2022.”

And they want to gentrify the Port of Oakland. John Fisher, the multibillionaire, right-wing, racist capitalist who owns the Oakland A’s, the Gap and other enterprises, wants to build a baseball stadium, a condominium, a hotel, retail and commercial space there. This gentrification would compromise the Port of Oakland and the jobs of the dockworkers.

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles and Long Beach, the shipping backup is being used to force the dockworkers to go 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The big shipping operators have been demanding a 24/7 work schedule for years. The ILWU has resisted this, in part, because it creates a more hazardous work environment. Now

they are being forced to accept it.

Even though the union has agreed to the 24/7 schedule, the shipping companies are still boycotting the Port of Oakland.

