

Tens of thousands of dockworkers strike on East and Gulf Coasts

written by Sharon Black
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Community activists from the People's Power Assembly joined strikers at the Baltimore Locust Point port. SLL photo: Andrew Matatag

Oct. 1 — A striking force of almost 50,000 dockworkers from Maine to Texas has halted operations at 36 U.S. ports. Community activists from the People's Power Assembly joined workers at the Baltimore Locust Point port today in solidarity.

Workers at this site were eager to share their experiences, challenging media narratives portraying them as overpaid and greedy — lies perpetuated by the U.S. Maritime Alliance (USMX). The truth is that union members are constantly on call with no guarantee of work or wages if there are no ships. Their benefits are tied to hours worked in previous years, and they must work at least six years to advance to the top tier. Additionally, the contract spans six years, with automation looming as a threat to their future.

One worker remarked, “They [the shipping companies] can afford to send their kids to Harvard; we are lucky if our kids can go to community college.”

The work environment is grueling and dangerous. ILA workers at Locust Point described horrific incidents involving fellow workers who fell to their deaths or were decapitated. “And if you survive, you are likely to see your pension eroded by unfair rules and manipulations.”

Additionally, shipping companies have stolen funds meant as wage supplements, known as Container Royalties. The union is demanding that these funds be paid in full to the workers.

Strikers expressed anger over how companies have repeatedly broken the previous contract.

The primary source of anger among workers centers around the rise of automation, especially as shipping companies raked in millions in profit during the COVID-19 pandemic while longshore workers, considered essential, operated with minimal protection for themselves and their families. The mood among the picketing workers is determined; workers see this as a life-and-death struggle for their future.

For more details from the International Longshoremen’s Association go to: <https://ilaunion.org/letter-of-opposition-to-usmxs-misleading-statement/>

