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ILWU Slowdowns Now Extend to Bargaining Table

Union refuses to hold “big table” talks during 12-day break

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (Nov. 20, 2014) – Three weeks after initiating a coordinated series of slowdowns that have plagued the major West Coast ports of Tacoma, Seattle, Oakland, Los Angeles and Long Beach, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) has now taken its slowdown tactics to the bargaining table. Despite a request from the Pacific Maritime Association to continue bargaining, the ILWU has decided to curtail “big table” negotiations starting today through the end of the Thanksgiving weekend – a 12-day break.

As a result of the Union’s decision, the only bargaining through December 1 will be limited to sub-committees discussing limited issues, with most members of the ILWU’s negotiating committee taking an extended break. Making matters worse, the ILWU is refusing to agree to a temporary contract extension – similar to one it signed over the summer – despite multiple requests by the PMA. A contract extension would give both parties access to the well-established waterfront grievance process, and most notably would give employers recourse for the ILWU slowdowns that are continuing.

“We have made it abundantly clear that we believe these negotiations are of the utmost importance and should continue at full strength until the Thanksgiving holiday,” said PMA spokesman Wade Gates. “We are disappointed the Union is not showing the same urgency to resolve the issues between us.”

This slowdown in negotiations and the Union’s refusal to extend the contract are taking place amid continuing worker slowdowns, which began on Halloween in Tacoma and soon spread to Seattle, Oakland, Los Angeles and Long Beach. In some ports, productivity remains 30 percent or more below normal, as a result of orchestrated ILWU maneuvers.

These slowdowns are impacting retailers, farmers, manufacturers, consumers and others during the holiday season and at a critical time for the U.S. economy. The union slowdowns in Seattle and Tacoma particularly have crippled the agricultural industries in the Pacific Northwest right at harvest export season, meaning that millions of dollars’ worth of Washington State apples, Idaho potatoes, hay, Christmas trees and other perishables are rotting in containers sitting on the docks. Agriculture voices are concerned that small farmers and growers will lose not only this year’s crop values, but also future contracts as overseas customers look elsewhere for dependable supplies.

This productivity loss is distinct from the congestion that has caused operational challenges at the Southern California ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. In fact, those two ports were the only major West Coast ports that experienced congestion prior to ILWU slowdowns, and the ILWU has knowingly made the situation in Southern California worse by failing to dispatch qualified crane operators per longstanding practice – the same skilled workers who can help to alleviate yard congestion. Union

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leaders have made clear that they will continue this unilateral change in practice until a new coast-wide agreement is reached.

The PMA expressed disappointment at the ILWU's decision to slow bargaining at this critical juncture. "The best holiday gift we can give the nation is a contract agreement," Gates said. "And we can't reach agreement unless both parties are at the table."

Negotiations began in May; the previous contract expired on July 1.

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