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Waterfront Employer SSA Disrupts ILWU-PMA Negotiations with Threatened Contract Violation, Triggering NLRB Process

The stevedoring company, a longtime member of the Pacific Maritime Association, wants everyone to believe it's the innocent victim instead of a serial contract violator threatening West Coast negotiations

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (September 27, 2022) – Stevedoring company SSA is once again using a federal agency to circumvent the assignment of work to International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) dockworkers under the ILWU-PMA collective bargaining agreement. SSA has been a member of the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) and a party to the ILWU-PMA agreement for more than four decades.

Last week, SSA colluded with another union in Seattle to set the stage for National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) intervention during a critical time in negotiations. SSA's move is designed to trigger an NLRB hearing, at which SSA will pick another workforce to perform cold ironing, a process that allows ships to use shore power while docked. Cold ironing is work that the employers expressly agreed to assign to the ILWU in Section 1.75 of the ILWU-PMA contract over a decade ago and that the ILWU exclusively performs in the Pacific Northwest.

Employers using the NLRB to circumvent the assignment of work to ILWU represented employees is an important issue that the ILWU and the PMA addressed in 2008 bargaining. For the past six weeks, the parties have been discussing multiple employer past contract violations in this context and now another instance of this is taking place.

This action by SSA, which it will pretend is necessitated by another workforce's threat of job action, forces the ILWU to focus its attention, otherwise spent in bargaining, on defending the preservation of ILWU work in Seattle. "We are shocked that SSA is taking such an action, and we are currently regrouping to determine how to proceed in negotiations while we watch an employer violate the very provision of the contract over which the parties were bargaining," said Coast Committeeman Cameron Williams.

"This really is the heart of the matter," said Willie Adams, ILWU International President. "Since our groundbreaking 2008 agreement, our employers have been using the NLRB as an escape hatch to avoid their obligations under our collective bargaining agreement. What we need right now is for the employers to figure out how to police the multi-employer group so that they will honor the agreements we make at the bargaining table. We also need federal agencies like the NLRB to honor the ILWU-PMA agreement and to recognize the instability it creates in this vital industry when it allows itself to be used as a way for the employers to escape their collectively bargained commitments to the ILWU. As alarming as this moment is, a violation occurring while we try to fix this exact type of violation in bargaining, it is also confirmation that the parties at the bargaining table have an obligation to the industry to fix this problem."