

Longshore union blasts Trump tariffs, warns of massive job losses

ILWU says policy is 'America First' 'in name only'

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A container ship berthed at the Port of Los Angeles. (Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)

Calling President Donald Trump's trade policies "reckless" and "shortsighted," the West Coast dockworkers union is warning that U.S. tariffs will lead to massive job losses and higher prices for working-class Americans.

"The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) unequivocally condemns the recent tariffs that the Trump administration has imposed," the union said in a statement. "Tariffs are taxes. These and other reckless, shortsighted policies have begun to devastate American workers, harm critical sectors of the economy, and line the pockets of the ultra-wealthy at the expense of hardworking families. The tariffs have also sown distrust among our allies and inflamed geopolitical tensions. These tariffs are nothing more than a direct attack on the working class and should be opposed outright."

West Coast ports are seeing a sharp decline in containerized imports from China, where reciprocal tariffs have all but stopped commerce between the former trading partners.

"Hundreds of thousands of jobs are dependent on or connected to global trade. Constricted trade between the world's two largest economies could lead to devastating job losses for workers employed in the global supply chain," the union said. It pointed to a recent move by Ocean Network Express further delaying resumption of its PS5 trans-Pacific West Coast service scheduled for May, and said "[i]ndirect effects of these tariffs, like rising fuel costs and increased costs of construction materials, have already led to layoffs as American businesses struggle to adapt."

The ILWU counts 42,000 members in the U.S. and Canada.

“Despite claims to the contrary, recent history indicates that the cost of these tariffs will be passed on to the American worker. In 2018 and 2019, when the U.S. imposed tariffs on Chinese imports, those tariffs did not meaningfully change the balance of U.S.-China trade. Instead, the import prices were passed onto U.S. consumers. It is clear that corporations and foreign countries will pass on costs to consumers while they continue to rake in record profits. Meanwhile, families struggling to get by are being hit with higher grocery bills, unaffordable car payments, and soaring costs for everyday necessities.

“These tariffs are nothing less than an economic war on working people.”

The union criticized the Trump administration’s “America First” approach as “haphazard” and “destructive,” and “a trade policy in name only.”

“The reality is clear: these tariffs don’t put ‘America First’ — they put American working people last. They will kill jobs, raise costs, and fuel economic instability that will ripple through every community in this country.

“We demand fair trade policies that put working class Americans first, protect jobs, and reduce taxes on the American people, not trade policies dictated by a president’s whims.

“We call on every worker, every union, and every person who believes in economic justice to stand with us against these Trump tariffs.”

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