

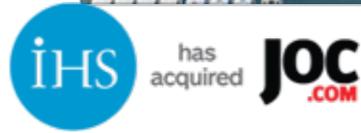
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## Pyrrhic war

Chris Brooks | Feb 11, 2015 3:54PM EST

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Has the ILWU been tamed? We asked that question in an October 2003 commentary, a year after the 10-day lockout that cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars and in the aftermath of a series of slowdowns and vandalism that summer over new technology at the TraPac terminal in Los Angeles, actions that prompted then ILWU-President James Spinosa and other union leaders to publicly condemn their own rank-and file.

In a July 2003 letter entitled “Go to Work,” Joseph Donato, president of Local 13 in Los Angeles-Long Beach, wrote to his members: “Everyone has to be aware of the hit our credibility has taken over the past year. It is time to rebuild our reputation; we start by simply going to work and doing the best we possibly can. Many Americans have now heard of us, have no sympathy for us, and probably wouldn’t mind seeing us taken down a notch.”

Twelve years later, those words couldn’t be more appropriate — or ring more hollow — because this ILWU is again going to the mat in contract negotiations that are about to enter their 10th month. But it’s going to the mat for ... what — and at what cost?

As Senior Editor Bill Mongelluzzo reports on JOC.com, employers represented by the Pacific Maritime Association have a five-year contract offer that includes “no takeaways,” in the words of PMA President James McKenna, while continuing 100 percent coverage of medical costs; raising annual pension payments to nearly \$90,000 a year; and continuing jurisdiction over chassis management and repair, itself a controversial concession, considering most chassis are now owned by leasing companies and trucking companies that fall outside the PMA’s purview.

What it doesn’t contain — and likely never will — is a late ILWU demand that the union gain the right to fire any arbitrator who adjudicates in disputes such as the one that led Spinosa and Donato to rebuke their own members in 2003.

Lost in all the saber-rattling are the true victims in this dispute — those that don’t necessarily include the ports of Los Angeles-Long Beach, where imports plummeted 25 percent in January because of delays and diversion. No, the true victims are those whose very existence is threatened every day this dispute, and the slowdowns that accompany it, drag on.

“We are about to shut down our business and file for bankruptcy due to this delay,” one reader commented on JOC.com this month. “We have nothing left at our warehouse to sell. Our container was delayed by 20 days. We lost the entire holiday season. Customers are canceling orders as we are unable to fulfill.”

“I am on the brink of financial ruin,” another reader wrote.

And the response from the ILWU rank-and-file? In response to a Feb. 9 article by Mongelluzzo, who has been



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covering West Coast longshore issues for three decades, that questioned whether ILWU leadership was even presenting the PMA offer to its members, one reader identifying himself as a longshore worker wrote: "That's not true. My understanding is there were copies of the PMA proposal all over the local hall last week — and people were using them for toilet paper. True story!"

With another lockout looking more likely, the victims in this unnecessary debacle — which more than a few JOC readers have classified as "pure greed" — will only grow, and that includes the union itself.

Has the ILWU been tamed? Not on your life — or your company's.

Contact Chris Brooks at [cbrooks@joc.com](mailto:cbrooks@joc.com) (<mailto:cbrooks@joc.com>) and follow him on Twitter: [@cbrooks\\_joc](https://twitter.com/cbrooks_joc)

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