

**INTERNATIONAL
LONGSHORE &
WAREHOUSE UNION**
AFL-CIO



1188 FRANKLIN STREET
SAN FRANCISCO
CALIFORNIA 94109
(415) 775-0533
(415) 775-1302 FAX
www.ILWU.org

ROBERT McELLRATH
President

JOSEPH R. RADISICH
Vice President

WESLEY FURTADO
Vice President

WILLIAM E. ADAMS
Secretary-Treasurer

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Contact: Brian Whatley
619-477-4593/310-528-6633(cell)

Longshore workers launch fight for harbor jobs:

Dole banana boats appear to be breaking federal laws by using foreign crews on San Diego docks

SAN DIEGO – When ships from Central America carrying bananas and pineapple for Dole Foods arrive at San Diego’s 10th Avenue Marine Terminal, federal law and labor agreements require the fruit to be unloaded by U.S. workers.

But Dole Foods and their contractor, Stevedoring Services of America (SSA), appear to be violating the law and labor agreements by hiring low-wage foreign crewmembers to help unload the 500 or so containers on each ship.

“This fight is about more than a few more jobs; it’s about standing up to corporations that are always cutting corners and looking for a ways to get rid of local jobs that we desperately need in this community,” said Mike McColley, a dockworker who volunteered his own time to investigate the problem at San Diego’s 10th Avenue Marine Terminal.

McColley says his union, ILWU Local 29, notified Dole Foods and SSA last spring about the labor violations, but both companies ignored the complaint and continued employing foreign labor.

Local 29 then filed a formal complaint or “grievance,” which was heard by a panel of company and union officials. At the hearing, SSA officials agreed to pay a settlement to compensate U.S. workers for the lost jobs.

But Dole and SSA are continuing to hire low-wage foreign crews to do the loading and unloading work in violation of federal law and labor agreements.

On Tuesday, October 20th, Coast Guard officials were called to investigate a Dole ship that was trying to secure containers without using U.S. workers. Coast Guard officials confirmed that the ship had not properly secured some of the containers, but a loophole allowed the Captain to leave port, and Coast Guard officials believed they lacked authority to enforce federal maritime labor laws.

On Thursday, October 29th, Mike McColley and other concerned dockworkers met with officials from Customs Border Patrol (CBP) and Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) who are responsible for enforcing maritime labor laws.

In the meeting, photographs documenting the violations were presented, but officials in the room were reluctant to enforce the law. Dockworkers are now planning to meet with local elected officials, to help ensure that laws are enforced and more good-paying jobs are available to San Diego residents.

“Dole Foods has a website that says they respect workers, but this is a good example of how claims by a big corporation don’t mean squat when it conflicts with their profit motive. They’re arrogant enough to keep violating the law and put local people out of work if it means they can save a few bucks.” said ILWU Local 30 President Brian Whatley.

“My buddies and I have decided that we’ll keep pushing until they do the right thing and start respecting the law and providing a more jobs to people here in San Diego that really need the work, said Mike McColley.”

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