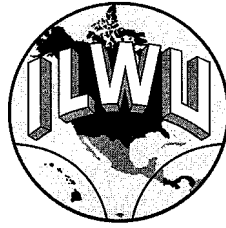


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Senators criticize foreign grain companies for attacking American workers

WASHINGTON, DC - Two U.S. Senators directed harsh words today at foreign-owned grain company officials during the Agriculture Committee's markup of the Grain Standards Reauthorization Act.

Ranking Democrat Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) said, "I have heard troubling reports that certain foreign-owned grain companies may be failing to make good-faith efforts to reach an agreement with their workers. It's concerning to hear they are threatening workers' pensions and access to health care. These protracted and contentious negotiations ultimately harm the workers, the American farmers who want certainty, and the American company that has already put in the work to come to an agreement. I would urge all parties to engage in the process in good faith. If left unresolved, these negotiations will undermine certainty for everyone involved in the grain trade, which is the purpose of our meeting today," said Senator Stabenow.

Her statement was followed by critical comments from Ohio's Sherrod Brown, who said, "I am deeply concerned by what is happening to the workers at some of our nation's largest grain export terminals in the Pacific Northwest. It is my understanding that six terminals, owned either by Louis Dreyfus, a Dutch firm, and two Japanese conglomerates, have refused to negotiate in good faith with the men and women who have worked at these ports for 70 years. These companies, with annual revenue in the tens of billions, are asking skilled workers to give up their pensions and their healthcare. Meanwhile, the U.S. owned terminals reached an agreement with the union more than two years ago. As this Committee knows, the value of the Grain Standards Act is that our trading partners can count on the quality and integrity of U.S. grains. If we allow this Act to be undermined, whether by future privatization of inspectors or by the undermining of the skilled workforce at these terminals, we will ultimately hurt the very farmers that count on us. These workers have been on the job without a contract for the past two years. It's past time for these terminal operators to come back to the negotiating table and hash out a fair and amicable agreement with workers. It is my hope that my colleagues will join me in prioritizing these workers over the profits of these foreign owned corporations," said Senator Brown.

Thousands of West Coast dock workers are covered by contracts with Marubeni, Mitsui and Louis-Dreyfus that expired over two years ago on May 31st, 2018. All three companies began the bargaining process by demanding workers forfeit long-standing benefits and work rules. Company officials have refused to compromise on their take-away demands for more than two years, while remaining profitable.

The concessionary demands from grain conglomerates include:

- Removing ILWU members from a healthy “green zone” pension plan with over 100% funding. The trio of foreign grain companies are trying to force workers into an inferior retirement plan.
- Cutting health benefits and shifting cost onto workers and family members.

“Our families cannot and will not give up living standards that American workers have fought so hard to win,” said Jared Smith, a grain worker at the United Grain terminal owned by Mitsui in Vancouver, WA. “Our families deserve a secure future from these foreign-owned companies that are healthy, profitable and control much of the world’s grain supply,” he said. “They’re supposed to negotiate, not dictate.”

The company’s “take-it-or-leave-it” approach has effectively ended meaningful negotiations since the spring of 2019.

Japanese-based Marubeni tried and failed to use heavy-handed legal tactics last year against over one hundred grain workers by filing a specious lawsuit the week of Christmas in 2018 and serving legal papers at employees’ homes that demanded up to \$250,000 in damages from each family. The court subsequently dismissed this harassment lawsuit, but Marubeni has appealed in an apparent attempt to make the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) waste money on legal fees. Such suits have long been considered illegal “unfair labor practices” by the National Labor Relations Board.

Workers remain committed to reaching a fair agreement with the companies, noting that they were able to reach a settlement in May 2018 with the only remaining U.S.-owned grain export terminal operator, Cargill-CHS (TEMCO). The TEMCO agreement protects working families, assures no disruptions in grain exports, and maintains a highly skilled workforce in export terminals that benefit farmers, workers and the U.S. economy.

“We won’t allow big foreign corporations to bully workers into giving-away long established pension and healthcare benefits that help 3,000 American workers in Oregon and Washington,” said ILWU President William Adams.

“We’re committed to working with America’s farmers to ensure that grain exports get the government inspections needed by overseas customers, but can’t allow foreign corporations to attack the health, welfare and pensions of American workers – then receive a government seal of approval for their exports,” said Adams. “It’s time for these ‘big three’ conglomerates to bargain in good faith for the benefit of American workers and farmers.”

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