

## Lend Lease Episode 12 Notes and Links - Latter Day Syndicalist Action in the First World

- Sara Nelson and the Flight Attendants Union force Congress to re-start government funding

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/02/flight-attendants-union-sara-nelson-shutdown>

*On Sunday, January 20, speaking at an AFL-CIO dinner honoring Martin Luther King, Jr, Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA-CWA), called for a general strike to end Trump's government shutdown.*

*The following Friday, Nelson, a United Airlines flight attendant since 1996, [told](#) the media that flight attendants were "mobilizing immediately" for a strike of their own. [A couple hours later](#), President Trump agreed to provisionally reopen the government for three weeks.*

*In the 1980s and 1990s, airline deregulation brought vicious assaults on labor. After Carl Icahn fired all the TWA strikers in 1986, he showed that flight attendants could be replaced within a few days. "We had to be able to fight back," Nelson emphasizes.*

*In response, AFA created a [strike tactic called Create Havoc Around Our System \(CHAOS\)](#), whose guiding principle is that "the strike is going to take any form and we are not going to give you any warning," Nelson explains. CHAOS is deeply destabilizing to corporate management. "It could be a single flight, where there is no replacement. It could be shutting down an entire airport, or it could be everyone walking off the job for an hour," says Nelson. "You don't know where or when. And the effective result is that we control the schedule." Alaskan Airlines' executives were once driven to such confused desperation by CHAOS that they inadvertently gave many employees a 60 percent raise overnight.*

*Nelson's call for a general strike last month was moved by solidarity with [government workers](#) who were going without pay. But the flight attendants' strike preparations had an equally urgent motive: fear for their own safety. Air traffic controllers — unpaid but facing felony charges if they were to strike — were working but, Nelson says, "driving Ubers and Lyft's outside their shifts to try to provide for their families when they should have been getting rest. We said, 'There's going to be a breaking point here.'" Nelson insists, "We just could not continue to fly and ask the members to be put in harm's way. It was increasingly clear that we were open to accident or attack."*

*Nelson's strike mobilization was real, and industry and government alike knew it. "The airline industry knows me," she says. "I think they know they had to take that threat seriously. It was very clear to the airline industry, to everyone on the Hill, that we were prepared to take action."*

*These antics by Trump represent, to Nelson, "an attempt to fundamentally unravel our government." When people can't get the goods and services they need, she explains, "there will be a tremendous outcry to just stop the bleeding, and if we allow it to get to*

*that point, the White House and anyone else who has wanted to privatize all of our government functions will try to use [the crisis] to do exactly that. And that will lower standards.”*

*This should terrify everyone. Nelson gives the example of air traffic controllers, who now train for three to five years to do their jobs. Private industry would have every incentive to ease such requirements. “It opens us up to tremendous risk,” Nelson warns. “Air traffic controllers have to get it right 100 percent of the time when they’re on the job. In any other workplace, if you have an efficiency of 99.5 percent, that is stellar. It’s unheard of. It’s unbelievable. If air traffic controllers got it 99.5 percent right, you’d have fifty aircraft accidents a day. This is what’s at stake.”*

*Capitalists, in short, would be happy to privatize air traffic control, and let many of us die. “Unions are the last check against that kind of greed,” Nelson says. “And we are also there for the public good, because we are the public.”*

*“We need to understand our power and never allow this to happen again,” she continues. “We need to encourage women to understand that they have power in their workplace, by joining unions and running unions. We will end the wage gap that way because everyone is equal in a union contract.”*

*Nelson also sees such organizing as the best way to change our political system. “When labor has that power and density, politics will reflect working people. It changes everything.” Start in the workplace, she says, and “the politics will follow.”*

- [https://www.afacwa.org/afa\\_cathay\\_pacific\\_ratify\\_first\\_contract](https://www.afacwa.org/afa_cathay_pacific_ratify_first_contract)

*U.S.-based Cathay Pacific Airlines flight attendants, represented by the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO (AFA), today voted by 99 percent to ratify a first contract. The three-year agreement provides immediate pay increases, backpay, schedule flexibility, and retirement security for flight attendants based in SFO, LAX and JFK.*

*“We are so excited that on our union’s 74th birthday hundreds of flight attendants are gaining the rights and benefits of a union contract for the first time,” **said Sara Nelson, AFA International President.** “Cathay Pacific flight attendants based in the U.S. voted by 97% to join AFA and used that overwhelming solidarity to win the improvements that drove their organizing campaign. These flight attendants inspire all of us with their commitment to each other, to our union, and to our work as aviation’s first responders. We congratulate the Cathay Pacific flight attendants’ leaders, activists and members.”*

- <https://www.thenation.com/article/sara-nelson-labor-afa-drinks/>

*Rumors abound that she’s being [pushed to run for AFL-CIO leadership](#), where she would be the first woman and first service worker to head the federation of 55 unions and*

more than 12 million members. “The people who have been marginalized their whole lives have had to figure out how to make it work. You are bound to be more creative. You are bound to have less ego, because egos often get in the way of solutions. We are ripe for that leadership,” she told me.

- Belfast shipyard workers seize control and demand re-nationalization and a Green New Deal:

[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/8xwanz/workers-seize-the-shipyard-that-built-the-titanic-to-make-renewable-energy](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8xwanz/workers-seize-the-shipyard-that-built-the-titanic-to-make-renewable-energy)

*Late last month, 130 ship builders, steel workers, welders, and riveters seized control of the storied Belfast shipyard that built the Titanic in 1909. More than two weeks later, they're still there, and say they won't be leaving until the docks are nationalized and are used to produce renewable energy infrastructure.*

*The docks had moved to shut down after their troubled Norwegian parent company, Dolphin Drilling, failed to find a buyer, but militant workers have refused to relinquish the site.*

*The closure of the shipyard, once an emblem of Britain's industrial power with over 30,000 workers, would mark the end of centuries of shipbuilding in the city. But workers from Harland & Wolff are demanding that British Prime Minister Boris Johnson nationalize the shipyards and create new jobs in renewable energy there.*

*“There's massive potential in wind turbines and tidal energy. They're saying they could create thousands of jobs, and that we need a just transition to renewable energy.”*

*In recent years, the workers at Harland & Wolff have built parts for wind turbines. They argue that renewable energy jobs would serve not only as a sustainable solution, but also a practical one because of their skill set.*

*This week, the Scottish government announced that it “ready and willing” to nationalize a shipyard near Glasgow where 350 jobs are at risk. This could bode well for the Harland & Wolff workers in Belfast. Dolphin Drilling did not respond to a request for comment.*

- European dockworkers refuse to load munitions shipments bound for the war in Yemen <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-italy-arms/italy-unions-refuse-to-load-saudi-ship-in-protest-over-yemen-war-idUSKCN1SQ17W> [May 2019]  
Italian unions refused on Monday to load electricity generators onto a Saudi Arabian ship with weapons on board in a protest against the war in Yemen.

The Bahri-Yanbu vessel loaded arms in the Belgian city of Antwerp earlier this month, but was prevented from picking up another consignment of weapons in the French port of Le Havre following protests by humanitarian groups.

Unions in Genoa had tried to have the boat banned from Italy, but the ship docked just after dawn, met by a handful of protesters who gathered on the quay.

Union workers refused to load two generators aboard the boat, saying that although they were registered for civilian use, they could be instead directed to the Yemen war effort.

“We will not be complicit in what is happening in Yemen,” union leaders said in a statement. Port officials confirmed the generators were blocked on the quay, but said non-critical goods would be loaded.

- Belgian unions order workers not to scab on Ryanair flights normally staffed by striking workers in Portugal etc  
[https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ryanair-strikes-idUSKCN1VA1CE?utm\\_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm\\_content=5d5cb04d37ca340001cf8064&utm\\_medium=trueAnthem&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ryanair-strikes-idUSKCN1VA1CE?utm_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm_content=5d5cb04d37ca340001cf8064&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter)

*Belgium’s CNE and ACV PULS trade unions have told members not to comply with a Ryanair (RYA.I) request to staff flights affected by a planned strike by Portuguese crew from Wednesday, a letter sent to the airline seen by Reuters showed.*

*In the letter to Ryanair, the two Belgian unions said cabin crew and pilots stationed in Belgium had been asked to staff some affected flights.*

*“Unfortunately we had to conclude that Ryanair decided to import the conflict that is going on in Portugal to Belgium... We cannot agree with this state of affairs and will therefore call on our members not to staff these flights,” they said.*

*A spokesman for Portugal’s SNPVAC union [National Union of Civil Aviation Flight Personnel] said it had received information that flights will be operated by crews from other bases and that this was a “violation of the right to strike.”*

*Unions representing cabin crew in Spain said their plans for 10 days of strikes next month still stood after more than seven hours of mediated talks with the airline ended on Tuesday without agreement.*

*The SITCPLA [El sindicato de tripulantes de cabina de pasajeros de líneas aéreas] and USO workers’ unions’ threat of strike action is aimed at preventing closure of bases at Girona, Gran Canaria, and Tenerife South airports. The unions said on Tuesday that it had still not received any information on the base closures.*

*Ryanair’s chief people officer told Reuters last week that the Gran Canaria and Tenerife South would likely close as part of plans to cut its presence on the ground in airports due to delays in the delivery of the grounded Boeing 737 MAX.*

- Bernie Sanders' plan for Sectoral Collective Bargaining and trade-union power:  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-21/sanders-unveils-sweeping-labor-plan-with-sectorwide-bargaining>

*Sanders's labor platform includes ending "at-will" employment, so companies could no longer fire workers without showing they had "just cause"; extending collective bargaining rights to state and local government employees; and allowing federal employees to strike.*

*The plan would create a European-style [sectoral](#) collective bargaining system in which labor and management would negotiate minimum standards for entire industries, rather than only company by company. It would also halt, via executive order, pension benefit cuts that were made possible by a 2014 compromise signed into law by President Barack Obama, whose vice president, Joe Biden, is now the Democratic frontrunner. Sanders called the compromise a "middle of the night deal" and "an outrage." Sanders's proposal includes the sweeping labor law reform bill he [proposed](#) in 2018, which would require companies to recognize unions once the majority of workers sign cards; abolish state "[right-to-work](#)" laws that prohibit mandatory union fees; ban [mandatory](#) workplace anti-union meetings; make it harder for companies to [claim](#) their workers are independent contractors rather than employees; and protect workers' jobs during work stoppages.*

*His bill, which was co-sponsored in the Senate by rival presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Cory Booker and Kirsten Gillibrand, would reverse key provisions of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act [considered by some](#) scholars and union activists to have played a major role in organized labor's decline.*

*The new labor platform promises a "fair transition" to Sanders's signature Medicare for All policy, which has become a major flashpoint in the Democratic presidential race. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka [told](#) reporters last month that "while we would like to see universal health care, we want to make sure that there is a role for employer-bargained plans in that plan, whatever it happens to be."*

*Sanders's proposal, according to his campaign, would require that savings from the transition to Medicare for All "result in wage increases and additional benefits for workers."*

*Sanders said in the interview there were "very very few, if any" union-negotiated plans that offer benefits as comprehensive as would Medicare for All.*

*"I think workers are getting sick and tired of the decimation of the working class," he said. "I think the momentum is with us."*

*Sanders' plan got a warm welcome Wednesday from the Service Employees International Union, one of the biggest labor groups.*

*"It's great to see a strong plan from Bernie Sanders to overhaul our defective and outdated labor laws," SEIU President Mary Kay Henry said in an emailed statement. "This proposal is the latest sign that 2020 candidates can't ignore the millions of workers demanding leaders rewrite the rules so everyone can join a union, no matter where we work."*

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/us/kentucky-coal-miners.html>

*A protest that began with five men blocking a train full of coal has grown into a small 24-hour tent city along some railroad tracks next to the highway. It has become a pilgrimage site for labor activists, a rallying point for the community — "a tailgate party on steroids," as one local official approvingly put it. And it is the first organized miners' protest that anyone can remember for decades in Harlan County, Ky., a place once virtually synonymous with [bloody labor wars](#).*

*The railroad blockade began in late July, about a month after Blackjewel, the two-year-old company where the miners worked, suddenly declared bankruptcy. Blackjewel owned mines in four states, and employed over a thousand miners in central Appalachia.*

*Miners learned in the middle of an afternoon shift that Blackjewel was shutting down immediately and putting everyone out of work. It did so without filing a mandatory 60-day advance warning and without posting a bond, required by Kentucky law, to cover payroll.*

*In Harlan County, hundreds of miners found themselves with negative bank balances, staring down mortgages, car payments and medication costs. Some were alerted to the news by ex-spouses who had not gotten automatic child-support payments. Lawyers representing the miners in the bankruptcy proceeding estimated that Blackjewel's employees in central Appalachia were each owed \$4,202.91 on average, for wages and benefits earned.*

*But the employees are just one party, fighting alongside Blackjewel's other creditors over pieces of the company in federal bankruptcy court.*

*One of the company's assets was a trainload of coal, over a million dollars' worth, at the Cloverlick No. 3 mine in Harlan County. The coal, dug up by the unpaid workers, had been sold, but had not yet been transported to the buyer. On the afternoon of July 29, the train rolled slowly out of the mine. It did not go unnoticed.*

*They was doing it as quiet as could be," said Dalton Lewis, 20.*

*A fellow miner called him with the plan: “Come on down here, we’re going to stop this train.”*

*This instinct runs deep in Harlan County. In the 1930s, efforts to organize miners led to “Bloody Harlan” — currently a hashtag printed on protest signs — a deadly conflict pitting thousands of union miners against coal companies, law enforcement officials and strikebreakers. Blood was spilled again in the early 1970s during a bitter 13-month strike by workers at the Brookside mine, the subject of the Oscar-winning documentary “[Harlan County, U.S.A.](#)”*

*But there had been little in the way of organized labor protest in Harlan for years before that July afternoon, when Mr. Lewis joined Mr. Willig and three other miners on the railroad tracks.*

*Alerted by news of the Harlan standoff, the Department of Labor intervened, asking the bankruptcy judge to block shipment of the coal and deeming it “hot goods.” Blackjewel soon said it would earmark proceeds from the sale of the coal for its former employees, and would leave the coal where it was until there was an agreement on the amount. But the protesters say they will keep up their blockade until they have payment in hand.*

*“I’ve got some pizzas here from Bernie Sanders,” said a perplexed Pizza Hut delivery woman who pulled up on Friday afternoon. Someone involved with the protest had apparently gotten word about it to someone with the Sanders presidential campaign.*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-972848621-463073718/bonus-episode-voices-of-the-harlan-county-coal-blockade>