

ILA says strike ‘more likely’ as contract deadline looms with no progress



The union representing 45,000 longshore workers said it still has no resolution with Maersk over the automation it has installed at the Port of Mobile. Photo credit: ILA

Michael Angell, Senior Editor | Jul 12, 2024, 5:45 PM EDT

The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) said Friday it's still far from reaching an agreement with maritime employers along the East and Gulf coasts over a new master contract, citing ongoing complaints against Maersk's terminal arm. The union's latest salvo – saying a strike “is becoming more likely” – adds pressure to ocean carriers and marine terminals set to meet soon on labor talks.

ILA President Harold Daggett issued a blistering statement about the lack of progress in talks with the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) over a new six-year master contract for the union's 45,000 members working along both coasts. Daggett, who is leading the union's negotiations, said USMX members “are running out of time” to sign a new contract before the current deal's expiration on Sept. 30.

Daggett emphasized that his members would not work past the current contract's expiration, and he rebuffed calls from US shipper advocates asking for federal intervention in the contract talks.

“We will not entertain any discussions about extending the current contract, nor are we interested in any help from outside agencies to interfere in our negotiations with USMX,” Daggett said. “This includes the Biden administration and the Department of Labor.”

The ILA broke off master contract talks in early June due to claims by the union that Maersk has violated the current deal because of technology projects at the Port of Mobile.

Daggett added that ILA rank-and-file members are 100% behind him and are willing to “hit the streets” once the current contract expires.

The ILA's statement comes as members of the USMX are expected to convene next week, according to people familiar with the matter. The USMX did not respond to a request for comment.

In its most recent update about contract negotiations posted June 11, the USMX said “as is typical in our discussions, some issues will require further conversation between the local parties.”

“USMX looks forward to re-engaging with the ILA's bargaining committee to jointly move local and master contract negotiations forward,” it added.

However, contract talks appear to be taking longer than previously planned. The ILA had set a May 17 deadline for concluding local contract talks, with the hopes of starting master contract talks.

During the prior bargaining round in 2018 for the existing contract, the USMX issued a statement in June saying it had reached a tentative agreement with the ILA, with both sides finalizing an agreement by early September.

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