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Operations at the Port of Oakland have been disrupted twice in the past two weeks by ILWU protests. Photo credit: Sheila Fitzgerald/Shutterstock.com.

Members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down vessel operations at the Oakland International Container Terminal (OICT) Monday in the latest West Coast port disruption to occur amid longshore contract talks that have now dragged on for more than six months.

A source with knowledge of Oakland's operations who asked not to be identified said ILWU workers "red-tagged" equipment inside OICT early Monday, meaning none of the equipment could be used until inspected by a mechanic. The source called the move a "gimmick" that forced the loading and unloading of all vessels at the terminal to come to a halt. As of 2:30 pm West Coast time Monday, operations had not resumed, and it was unclear how long the disruption would last.

OICT is the busiest marine terminal at the Port of Oakland, handling about 70 percent of its container volume.

The latest disruption at Oakland comes just two weeks after three of the port's four terminals were shut down for a morning shift after ILWU marine clerks picketed over a travel pay issue.

The first source and a second source also with knowledge of Oakland's operations called Monday's action by the ILWU an obvious attempt to exert pressure on contract negotiations with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) that show no sign of reaching a resolution anytime soon. Talks began in May but have been stalled for months and all but suspended since October.

The prior contract between the ILWU and PMA, which represents marine terminal operators and ocean carriers, expired on July 1.

OICT is operated by SSA Containers, the same operator that runs Terminal 5 at the Port of Seattle, which has been the site of a work jurisdictional dispute that has forced the broader West Coast contract talks to be put on hold.

While negotiations on a new deal drag, wary shippers seeking to avoid the type of disruption that halted vessel operations at OICT Monday are diverting an increasing amount of cargo from the West Coast to the East and Gulf coasts.

The West Coast's market share of US imports from Asia fell to 57.5 percent through the first nine months of the year, down from 61.2 percent in the same period last year. The share for East Coast ports increased to 35.1 percent from 32.8 percent, while the Gulf Coast's share ticked up to 7.1 percent from 5.7 percent, according to PIERS, a JOC.com sister product within S&P Global.

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