

# BC port foreman contract talks stall as government delays rail strike threat



*The latest delay in longshore labor talks at Canada's West Coast ports comes as railroad workers and Montreal dockworkers are in similar contract standoffs with their respective employers. Photo credit: SherSS / Shutterstock.com.*

**Michael Angell, Associate Editor | May 13, 2024, 5:19 PM EDT**

Negotiations between port employers on the West Coast of Canada and a foremen's union have stalled, raising risk of labor disruption for the ports of Vancouver and Prince Rupert as the federal government tries to head off a separate rail strike threat.

The British Columbia Maritime Employers Association (BCMEA) has filed a complaint with Canada's labor tribunal accusing Local 514 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) of "protracting negotiations" over a new four-year contract covering 730 union foremen, the BCMEA said in a statement Friday.

The announcement comes a day after Canadian Labor Minister Seamus O'Regan Jr. asked the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to review whether a strike would hurt Canadians' health and safety, in effect, preventing a strike until the board releases a decision.

The BCMEA said the complaint follows the 21-day cooling-off period required under the Canadian labor law after talks supervised by federal mediators failed to reach an accord. The end of the cooling-off period allows the union to provide a 72-hour notice to employers that it will strike. So far, the union has not filed such a notice, the BCMEA said, adding the mediated talks are still ongoing.

"Despite the BCMEA's best efforts, ILWU Local 514 has been protracting negotiations, putting Canada's supply chain and our global trade reputation at further risk," the statement said. "Regrettably, given the conduct of the union bargaining committee and their intransigence at the bargaining table, the BCMEA has been left with no choice but to file a complaint with the Canada Industrial Relations Board, which we hope will be resolved expeditiously."

The BCMEA and Local 514 have been in contract talks since last year, just as employers were in the middle of negotiations for a master contract covering 7,300 longshore workers along the West Coast. The BCMEA said that it offered to increase Local 514's wages by 19.2% over the contract's term, similar to the terms it offered to the dockworkers.

During those ILWU Canada master contract talks, Canada's West Coast ports were hit with a two-week strike by longshore workers that disrupted cargo operations.

Should Local 514 decide to file a strike notice, it's not clear whether longshore workers would also walk out, according to people familiar with the matter. But given their supervisory role, a walkout by Local 514 could impact container operations at Vancouver and Prince Rupert.

Following the West Coast strike last year, Canada's labor minister Seamus O'Regan announced an investigation into the "structural issues" behind the West Coast longshore strikes, including why foremen have a separate bargaining unit from other longshore workers. The investigation is expected to be completed by March 2025.

The standoff with longshore foremen also comes amid other potential Canadian labor unrest.

The union representing workers at Canada's two Class I railroads said they plan to strike May 22 if they cannot reach an agreement with Canadian National Railway and

Canadian Pacific Kansas City. However, Minister O'Regan last Thursday asked the labor tribunal to intervene in those talks, forestalling the union's plans for a walkout to an indefinite date.

Dockworkers at the Port of Montreal are also in protracted negotiations with employers there over a new contract.

*Contact Michael Angell at [michael.angell@spglobal.com](mailto:michael.angell@spglobal.com).*

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