

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 is 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 owing 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 the USMX's Board of Directors are scheduled to meet next week. The USMX said in a statement to the *Journal of Commerce* that it "expects to move the bargaining forward in a productive and effective manner that will result in a new contract before Oct. 1."

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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