

ILA, USMX reach tentative deal that avoids another port strike



The deal was reached a week before a Jan. 15 strike deadline that was set in October at the end of the three-day ILA strike that was settled with an agreement on wages. Photo credit: ILA.

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The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) late Wednesday said they have reached a tentative agreement on a new master contract that covers ports from Maine to Texas. While the deal needs approval from ILA locals and USMX members, it avoids another port strike and ensures shippers of labor peace along the US East and Gulf coasts for the next six years.

The ILA and the USMX said in separate statements the agreement includes language that covers the contentious issue of port automation and new technologies. While the draft language of the tentative agreement was not available, one source said that marine terminals will have some leeway in implementing new technologies in return for more longshore jobs.

Talks on a new master contract broke down in November due to the union's concerns about the impact on jobs from the use of semi-automated rail-mounted gantry cranes (RMGs) at marine terminals.

"This agreement protects current ILA jobs and establishes a framework for implementing technologies that will create more jobs while modernizing East and Gulf coast ports – making them safer and more efficient and creating the capacity they need to keep our supply chains strong," the statement said.

Details of the agreement were not publicly disclosed, pending final approval by both sides.

The deal was reached a week before a Jan. 15 strike deadline that was set in October at the end of the three-day ILA strike that was settled with an agreement on wages.

The 45,000 dockworkers at East and Gulf coast ports will work under the current contract until the tentative agreement is ratified by the wage-scale committees of local unions. But sources indicate that the locals are likely to support the contract negotiated by ILA President Harold Daggett and Executive Vice President Dennis Daggett.

The breakthrough came after four days of talks in Teaneck, N.J., on a new master contract. Those talks included side discussions on the impact of new technology on longshore jobs, ahead of broader talks that restarted on Jan. 7 that covered benefits and specific longshore crafts such as checkers and clerks.

In December, the union enlisted President-elect Donald Trump to advocate on behalf of their stance against automation. On Wednesday, the ILA issued its own statement thanking Trump for his "bold stance (that) helped prevent a second coastwide strike."

"President Trump clearly demonstrated his unwavering support for our ILA union and longshore workers with his statement "heard round the world" backing our position to protect American longshore jobs against the ravages of automated terminals," Harold Daggett said in the statement.

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