

# ILA breaks off East Coast port contract talks

Union says port employers want to force automation into new longshore pact

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(Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)

The International Longshoremen's Association has broken off contract negotiations with East and Gulf Coast port employers, accusing them of pushing automation technology into a new coastwise labor pact that would eliminate union jobs.

The ILA and employers represented by the United States Maritime Alliance this week resumed bargaining on a new six-year master contract covering 45,000 union workers involved in container handling at dozens of East and Gulf Coast ports.

In a statement posted to social media and then taken down, the ILA said that in meetings in New Jersey, "USMX introduced language in their proposal for semi-automated equipment to be used at ILA ports, which this union outright rejected. The ILA recognized this as a renewed attempt by USMX to eliminate ILA jobs with automation and broke off talks."

The ILA has been adamant that it will not permit automation technology as part of a new coastwise contract. [A three-day strike](#) by the union in early October brought container handling at 36 port facilities to a halt and threatened the flow of billions of dollars worth of goods. The strike ended when Biden administration officials got the sides to agree to extend the current contract through Jan. 15 while negotiations resumed.

"The ILA's resolve remains strong not to surrender any ILA jobs," the union said. "We are disappointed that USMX would attempt to disregard our ILA's well-known position opposing job-cutting automation and semi-automation. Once again, employers who are raking in billion-dollar

profits annually have exposed their ultimate goal of wanting to eliminate as many ILA jobs as possible, and replace our ILA longshore workers with robotic equipment.”

At the time the strike ended, the union and employers agreed on a 62% pay hike over the life of the new contract.

“While we had positive progress on a number of issues, we were unable to make significant progress on our discussions that focused on a range of technology issues,” USMX said in a release.

“Unfortunately, the ILA is insisting on an agreement that would move our industry backward by restricting future use of technology that has existed in some of our ports for nearly two decades – making it impossible to evolve to meet the nation’s future supply chain demands.

“The USMX has been clear that we are not seeking technology that would eliminate jobs. What we need is continued modernization that is essential to improve worker safety, increase efficiency in a way that protects and grows jobs, keeps supply chains strong, and increases capacity that will financially benefit American businesses and workers alike.

“We look forward to resuming negotiations with the ILA.”