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US east coast port talks set to resume

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Port Authority of New York & New Jersey and CMA CGM Group

Talks are set to resume tomorrow between employers and dockworker unions across the US east and Gulf coasts in a last-ditch bid to avert a strike pencilled in for January 15.

Following a three-day strike last October, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) reached an agreement with the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) on wages, suspending their walkout until January.

Both sides returned to the bargaining table in November to negotiate outstanding issues with their existing contract due to expire on January 15, five days before Donald Trump takes office as the 47th president of the US.

However, negotiations on the master contract broke down in November, with Trump coming out in support of the unions.

The issue causing negotiations to break down surrounds the use of semi-automated cranes.

“Whether we will see an agreement, or a strike, is quite unpredictable at this point, but it appears that ILA in one corner has the backing of both the outgoing and the incoming US presidents, whereas the carriers behind USMX could potentially stand to benefit financially from another bout of disruption-induced congestion,” noted analysts at Sea-Intelligence in their most recent weekly report.

If there are not any signs of a possible deal in the coming days, Lars Jensen, who heads up container advisory Vespucci Maritime, suggested terminals will likely announce extended gate hours for the week leading up to January 15.

“Shippers should stay close to the development and plan accordingly to mitigate the risk of having cargo stuck in the ports in case of a strike,” Jensen advised in a post on LinkedIn.