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ILA automation stance signals tough labor talks

Joseph Bonney, Senior Editor ([/users/joseph-bonney](#)) | Jan 05, 2017 5:43PM EST

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ILA president Harold Daggett has vowed to fight fully automated terminals like this one at Rotterdam.

The president of the International Longshoremen's Association issued a fresh attack on automation Thursday, reminding shippers that the next negotiations on a new US East and Gulf Coast dockworker contract could be contentious.

In a message to members [on the ILA's Facebook site \(https://www.facebook.com/ILAUnion/\)](https://www.facebook.com/ILAUnion/), ILA president Harold Daggett predicted automation "will dominate" the union's next round of bargaining with United States Maritime Alliance on a contract to replace the one that expires Sept. 30, 2018.

Daggett said he will emphasize the union's opposition to fully automated terminals and its renewed emphasis on local contract issues when ILA and USMX representatives [meet informally Feb. 13 to 17 \(http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshoremen-association/ila-employers-plan-informal-meetings-ahead-contract-talks_20161129.html\)](http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshoremen-association/ila-employers-plan-informal-meetings-ahead-contract-talks_20161129.html) in advance of formal bargaining that's expected to start later this year.

The impending ILA-USMX negotiations come as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association also are preparing for open bargaining on a West Coast dockworker contract to replace the one that expires July 1, 2019.

Cargo interests are closely watching developments on both coasts. Coastwide shutdowns were narrowly averted during the negotiations for the [ILA in 2012 to 2013 \(http://www.joc.com/special-topics/ila-labor-negotiations\)](http://www.joc.com/special-topics/ila-labor-negotiations) and the [ILWU in 2014 to 2015 \(http://www.joc.com/special-topics/ilwu-labor-negotiations\)](http://www.joc.com/special-topics/ilwu-labor-negotiations).

The ILA and USMX discussed the idea of an early start to negotiations on a contract that would extend as far as 2025, but that initiative [lost momentum \(http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshoremen-association/ila\)](http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshoremen-association/ila)



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[resolution-current-issues-must-precede-contract-talks_20160810.html](#)) amid disputes over issues including ILA jurisdiction over maintenance and repair of chassis.

The next ILA negotiations promise to be difficult. Container lines say productivity gains promised in the current New York-New Jersey local contract have been slow to materialize. Daggett, meanwhile, remains suspicious of automation and wants to maintain ILA jobs and jurisdiction.

Daggett's Facebook post wasn't the first time he'd raised the issues of automation and local contracts.

Last summer, Daggett delivered a fiery anti-automation speech at an International Dockworkers Council meeting in Miami. He raised the issue again last month when ILWU officials visited his Local 1804-1 in North Bergen, New Jersey.

"Their president Bob McEllrath and I both know that fully automated terminals spell the end of longshoring jobs, no questions asked," Daggett wrote in his Facebook post. "The ILA will not allow automation to rip apart our livelihoods and destroy our jobs and families. Right from the outset, the ILA intends to let management know that we are totally opposed to fully automated terminals."

"The ILA has no problem with semi-automated terminals — we know that we cannot stop progress and many forms of new technology help our workers do their jobs more efficiently, more safely, but without the threat of job elimination. We will continue to press for training and retraining for our ILA members," Daggett wrote.

No fully automated terminals currently exist in East or Gulf Coast ports, although Virginia and GCT Bayonne in New York-New Jersey use remote-controlled, rail-mounted gantry cranes for stacking containers in terminal yards. Last fall, the Virginia port placed a \$217 million order for 86 RMGs as part of a major upgrade of its terminals.

Daggett said the ILA is willing "to work with our management partners keeping our industry strong and vibrant, but will not submit to agreeing on anything that eliminates jobs."

The ILA's increased emphasis on local contracts follows a messy situation that arose in Baltimore after the 2012 to 2013 negotiations.

ILA contracts are negotiated in two levels. The ILA-USMX master contracts covers wages, the medical plan, carrier-paid container royalties, and other coastwide issues. Supplemental local contracts cover work rules, pensions, and other port-specific issues.

It's been common for negotiations on local contracts in some ports to extend months or even years after ratification of the coastwide agreement.

In 2013, after the master contract was ratified, the ILA's largest local in Baltimore went on strike for three days over local issues. In a precedent-setting award, [an arbitrator ruled](#) (http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshoremen%E2%80%99s-association/arbitrator-no-strike-clause-ila-master-contract-trumps-local-disputes_20131021.html) that once the master contract takes effect, its no-strike clause can't be nullified by a dispute over local issues.

Several times since then, including [at the ILA's 2015 convention](#) (http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshoremen%E2%80%99s-association/daggett-ila-ready-talk-no-%E2%80%98backtracking%E2%80%99_20150720.html), Daggett has said he would seek changes to ensure that the union retains leverage in local contract negotiations. He reiterated that position in his Facebook post.

"The last time around, several ILA local ports had failed to reach agreement on their local contracts before the master contract was ratified in April 2013," Daggett wrote. "Major ports like Baltimore, Hampton Roads, and Charleston were without local agreements for months and even years after the master contract took effect. The ILA will make certain that ILA members at all ports are satisfied with their local agreements before we ask them to ratify the entire contract package."

During the 2012 and 2013 coastwide negotiations, the most complicated issue was the local contract covering the Port of New York and New Jersey. Ocean carriers in USMX pushed hard for productivity improvements at the East Coast's largest and highest-cost port.

More than three years later, the ILA and the New York Shipping Association are still trying to implement changes including "relief gangs," or second shifts. The port now uses open-ended shifts that require excess staffing and



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