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ILWU News:

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<http://www.latimes.com/local/cityhall/la-fi-port-politics-20150220-story.html>

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Port Talks Deadlocked Over Fate of Arbitrator

By Peter Jamison and Andrew Khouri | LA Times – February 19, 2015 6:35 PM

California political leaders voiced growing exasperation Thursday with a labor standoff that has clogged West Coast ports, as word spread that the main sticking point in negotiations has been the fate of a single, low-level official who rules on disputes involving Los Angeles and Long Beach dockworkers. Talks between the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union** and shipping companies have stalled recently over a **union** request to change the rules for removing local arbitrators who decide on workplace issues. But sources familiar with the talks say the main obstacle to a settlement has been **union** leaders' desire to fire arbitrator David Miller.

In interviews and statements, several local and state elected leaders expressed frustration that disagreement over Miller's status between the **union** and the Pacific Maritime Assn., which represents shipping companies, has blocked a deal that could avoid dire economic consequences for the entire West Coast.

"It's crazy, and you can quote me," Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said Thursday, after spending the previous day in San Francisco trying to help move the talks forward.

Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein echoed the sentiment in a letter sent to the **union** and shipping industry leaders.

"It is highly disappointing that with so much at stake, you have not been able to come up with a path forward on this one remaining issue," the California Democrats wrote.

Currently, both sides must agree to appoint and fire arbitrators. However, according to the employers, the **union** wants either side to be able to remove local arbitrators at the end of a labor contract.

The president of the **union**, without naming Miller, said in a letter to members that the dispute is over "retaining arbitrators who have openly engaged in conduct that clearly compromises their impartiality." The Pacific Maritime Assn. has objected to allowing either side to unilaterally remove an arbitrator, saying it would give the **union** "veto power" over those judging workplace disputes.

The disclosure of the final snarl in negotiations indirectly affecting a large swath of the economy intensified pressure on both sides of the dispute to come to a quick resolution.

"The whole thing is all internal **union** nonsense, and one **union** guy going after another **union** guy," said Jim Tessier, a labor-relations consultant based in Seattle who has followed the West Coast contract dispute closely.

Tessier once worked for the Pacific Maritime Assn., the group that represents employers in the negotiations.

Later as an independent consultant, he said he has been involved in cases heard by Miller. He said that Miller, who took his job in 2002 with the backing of the ILWU, has shown a fiercely independent streak that earned him the nickname "Judge Roy Bean Miller" – a reference to the 19th century Texas justice of the peace who declared himself "The Law West of the Pecos."

In his view, Tessier said, Miller "was no better or worse than any other arbitrator."

Miller could not be reached for comment. Representatives for the shipping companies and **ILWU** declined to comment, citing a media blackout imposed by the federal mediator trying to help the sides reach a deal.

The exact reasons Miller would be singled out by leaders of the local **ILWU** — which represents dockworkers in Los Angeles and Long Beach — are murky. As key interpreters of the contracts between

shipping companies and their employees, he and other labor arbitrators at West Coast ports enjoy significant power and autonomy, and have no shortage of chances to make enemies.

Rep. Janice Hahn (D-Los Angeles), an outspoken supporter of the **ILWU**, said **union** leaders have told her that Miller is "too close" to employers.

"A lot of my friends who are in the industry have called him personally and asked him to step down," Hahn said. But she said Miller "doesn't think he's done anything wrong."

Fears of a full shutdown and lockout of dockworkers have risen recently, as shipping companies intermittently halted the loading and unloading of ships.

The Pacific Maritime Assn. did so most recently for the three-day Presidents' Day weekend. The association alleges that the **union** is trying to gain bargaining leverage through a work slowdown, and shippers don't want to reward employees with overtime pay.

The local **union** in L.A. and Long Beach denies it is purposely slowing the movement of goods, and counters that shipping companies have failed to train an adequate number of skilled crane operators to safely keep up with the workload.

With dozens of international cargo ships idling off West Coast ports, businesses have become increasingly worried about imports and exports being choked off. President Obama this week sent U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas Perez to California to help the two sides reach an agreement.

Garcetti said Thursday that "the whole contract could be wrapped up in a matter of hours if this last issue is overcome."

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<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2015/02/20/ports-f20.html>

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Obama, Port Owners Line up Against West Coast Dockworkers

By Rafael Azul – World Socialist Web Site | 20 February 2015

Dispatched to San Francisco by President Obama, US Labor Secretary Thomas Perez met Wednesday with representatives of the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)** and the Pacific Maritime Association, days after the employers' association locked out 20,000 dockworkers at 29 ports along the West Coast of the United States.

The purpose of the meeting, held under a media blackout, was to give the **ILWU** its marching orders to squash the resistance of dockworkers and impose another sellout agreement that will attack long-time job protections, living standards and working conditions.

The White House intervention follows calls by a bipartisan group of congressmen and a major retail association—dependent on imports that flow through the docks—for Obama to use the Taft-Hartley Act to break any strike that might erupt. The administration is particularly concerned that dockworkers could link up with the ongoing strike of oil workers and become a catalyst for a broader movement of workers against more than a decade of stagnant wages.

The Los Angeles-Long Beach area has become a cauldron of social opposition. Oil workers are striking at the nearby Carson refinery, and workers at the Torrance ExxonMobil refinery, which was hit by an industrial explosion Wednesday, expressed their determination to join the walkout in defiance of the United Steelworkers selective strike policy.

On Thursday evening, the United Teachers Los Angeles said its 31,000 teachers and other professional employees might strike for higher wages after the UTLA accepted unpaid days off during the 2007-2009 recession and no wage increases for eight years.

On Wednesday, the PMA distributed its "best and final offer" to employees at ports from Los Angeles, California to Seattle, Washington, a move that could lay the groundwork for the declaration of an

impasse and a full lockout at the docks. Over the last two weeks the PMA has locked out employees for six days, costing workers thousands of dollars in lost overtime and holiday pay.

The PMA is using lockouts and the threat of a government intervention to prevent workers from engaging in any kind of job action to resist the ongoing destruction of jobs and casualization of the workforce. The PMA is also offering an insulting three percent annual raise in the five-year contract offer. Fearing that it could not push such a deal through rank-and-file workers, the **ILWU** has extended the contract for nine months, giving the PMA and the government ample time to prepare a strikebreaking operation.

In 2002, the **ILWU** gave employers the right to use computer technology to slash jobs, and in 2008 it allowed automated cargo-handling equipment. In addition, management won the right of bypassing the **union** hiring hall on a case-by-case basis, to employ its own permanent and contingent workers, as new technology was introduced into the ports. This undermined the achievement won in the 1934 San Francisco general strike, which abolished the hated “shape up system,” where management picked which workers would have a job that day.

The 2008 contract went a long way toward eliminating some of the agreements on guaranteed hours and the sharing of work linked to the introduction of labor saving container technology in the 1970s. Disputes were left up to a so-called neutral arbitrator. In practice, the **union** insists that the arbitration has not been neutral and demands the right to replace those arbitrators that have links to the industry and big capital. The PMA has refused.

Six years into the global financial crisis, longshore workers are in no mood for another giveback contract. Three years ago, in a bitter dispute in Longview, Washington against EGT, a grain exporter, and the rank and file showed their determination to fight despite government threats. President Obama mobilized the Coast Guard to escort ships headed to the EGT terminals, openly siding with management against the **ILWU**.

In the agreement that ended the dispute, brokered by former Democratic governor Chris Gregoire, the **ILWU** made concessions that gave the company and the port of Longview the right to utilize non-**ILWU** workers and blacklist militant workers from their facility.

More recently, in 2014 in the port of Los Angeles, dockworkers refused to cross and instead joined picket lines set up by port truck drivers, until they were forced back to work by the **ILWU** itself. In a cynical maneuver, the **ILWU** and port management agreed to temporarily extend the previous labor agreement so an arbitrator could use the no-strike pledge in the contract to order dockers to cross the truckers’ picket lines. This severely undermined the drivers’ fight to formalize their status as employees instead of “independent contractors” who could be hired and fired at will, and forced to pay for the maintenance, fueling and insuring of trucks they leased from the port operators.

Now the PMA is coming for more.

On the weekend of February 7 and 8 and on the following three-day holiday weekend, the PMA locked out **ILWU** personnel. The employers association also sharply reduced night shift work. The move virtually paralyzed the unloading of ships in 29 West Coast and Hawaiian ports that handle one fourth of US trade worth about one trillion dollars annually. The PMA claimed it was responding to an **ILWU**-organized go-slow tactic that has been in effect since October 2014.

The employers claim the **ILWU** in Southern California has unilaterally cut shifts for crane operators from 110 per day to 35, “resulting in tens of thousands of containers sitting on the docks”; of not providing skilled workers through the hiring hall as needed by the PMA; and of not sending out skilled crane operators. The **ILWU**, for its part, insists that changes in port operations and shortages of trailers for the shipping containers have made the work slow.

The dispute takes place as rapid technological changes are transforming the entire industry. The congestion at the Ports in Los Angeles, Oakland and elsewhere is in large part the product of the

development of mega ships, capable of carrying more than 10,000 20-foot containers, which exceed the outmoded capacity of many US ports.

Citing Neil Davidson, ports analyst at London-based Drewry Shipping Consultants, the *Financial Times* wrote: "US container terminals are the least productive in the developed world, largely because operators, worrying about labor unrest, have been reluctant to invest in modern equipment."

The **ILWU** has repeatedly acceded to the demands for labor saving changes while seeking to defend the institutional interests of the **union** apparatus, primarily a minimum number of dues-paying members. The problem is not technology, however, but the control of technology by large corporations and financial institutions, which are only interested in increasing the exploitation of workers and boosting profits.

The contingency of labor that now looms over the West Coast docks is part of global process: workers on tap, subcontracting, zero hour contracts, pay for performance, a modern form of the shape up. To fight, dockworkers must take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the **ILWU** and mount a struggle to mobilize the broadest layers of the working class—truckers, teachers, oil workers and others—against the giant corporations, both big business parties and the capitalist system they defend.

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http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/us-commerce-secretary-joins-ilwu-pma-talks_20150219.html

US Commerce Secretary Joins ILWU-PMA talks

Reynolds Hutchins, Associate Editor | Feb 19, 2015 3:08PM EST

U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker has entered negotiations between the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union** and the Pacific Maritime Association, reflecting a ratcheting up of Obama administration pressure on both sides to reach a deal in order to end crippling West Coast port congestion.

Department of Commerce officials on Thursday confirmed Pritzker had visited with representatives from both the **ILWU** and PMA, which represents employers, on a trip Wednesday. She joined Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and U.S. Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez, who was dispatched by the White House last week to help resolve the contract negotiations.

"She is back in D.C. now, but has been actively making calls to stakeholders with respect to this situation," Commerce Department spokeswoman Marni Goldberg told JOC.com Thursday.

Secretaries Perez and Pritzker Wednesday stressed the importance of reaching an immediate agreement before the dispute causes further economic damage, according to a Labor Department statement.

Before either Perez or Pritzker's arrival on the West Coast in the past week, the White House had balked for months in becoming directly involved publicly in the talks, having said it was confident both sides would be able to work out a deal.

The administration has been involved in the negotiations behind the scenes for weeks, however. The chief executives of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach told a local trade club in December that the mayors of their respective cities each day had a conference call with the President's economic team to update the administration on the negotiations.

In recent weeks, however, pressure on the Obama administration appears to have helped spur the White House to act. More than a dozen lawmakers last week signed a resolution urging the president to "use all tools at his disposal," including the Taft-Hartley Act, if there was a shutdown. Business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Retail Federation, have also urged the president to intervene.

The Taft-Hartley Act would allow the president to respond to an actual or threatened work stoppage of national importance by seeking an injunction requiring an 80-day cooling-off period and a government fact-finding panel. If the dispute remains unresolved after 80 days, the report is made public and workers vote on the employers' last offer.

Since January, federal mediators have been involved in the **ILWU**-PMA negotiations, which began in June last year, but they can only facilitate an agreement, not force the parties to strike a deal.

After months of accusing the **ILWU** of engaging in slowdowns, the PMA earlier this week curtailed loading and unloading on nights, weekends and holidays. Vessel operations were halted coast wide over the Presidents' Day weekend, reducing dockworkers' ability to earn premium pay.

According to the **ILWU**, which denies it's engaging in slowdown tactics, the move is an "effort by the employers to put economic pressure on our members and to gain leverage in contract talks."

The **ILWU** blames port congestion on marine terminals' inability to handle larger vessels, chassis dislocation, strong volume and other factors.

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<http://www.joc.com/port-news/longshoreman-labor/international-longshore-and-warehouse-union/us-labor-secretary-ilwu-pma-reach-deal-or-negotiate-dc-20150220.html>

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US Labor Secretary to ILWU, PMA: Reach deal or negotiate in DC

JOC Staff | Feb 20, 2015 7:53AM EST

The U.S. Labor Secretary on Thursday told the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union** and the Pacific Maritime Association that they have until Friday to reach a contract or they'll have to negotiate in Washington D.C.

The move is the latest sign of how the White House is ratcheting up pressure on both sides, as marine terminals and carriers warn West Coast port congestion is nearing gridlock. The Associated Press first reported Tom Perez's ultimatum to both sides.

The White House has held back for months from getting directly involved in talks between both sides, saying it was confident the **ILWU** and PMA could work out a deal. But in the ninth month of talks and with shippers' frustration with delays caused by alleged **ILWU** slowdowns at a boiling point, President Obama dispatched Perez to negotiations in California on Tuesday.

Wal-Mart became one of latest retailers to warn of the damage of West Coast congestion, telling investors Thursday that shipment delays threaten its spring inventory. Ports' anger with the impasse is also building, with executives becoming increasingly vocal in demanding that both sides reach deals after seeing volumes plunge in January.

The inability of the Labor Secretary to achieve an agreement underscores the depth of animosity that currently exists between the PMA and **ILWU**, not that anyone needed any more evidence to that effect. It showed further the growing political liability the issue presents for President Obama stemming from mounting nationwide losses among businesses across many industries, including retail, agriculture and automotive.

Obama stood resolutely on the sidelines as the negotiations stretched on for months and even after they turned disruptive in late October with slowdowns by the **ILWU** and actions by the PMA to curtail vessel operations up and down the coast. Now with the story in the national headlines Obama is forced to act but such is the depth of the hard feelings at the negotiating table — more so than differences on the issues — that even the dramatic entry of the highest U.S. labor official into the negotiations wasn't enough to immediately break the logjam.

The PMA is likely betting at this point that pressure from Washington plays to its advantage. The **ILWU** resisted and ultimately grudgingly accepted the participation of a federal mediator in early January. The PMA believes it has made the **union** a generous offer and has argued that case publicly, releasing details of its offer. The **union**, used to getting its way over many years, upped the ante early in the year with fresh demands relating to the right to fire an area arbitrator, and the PMA balked.

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<http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/2015/02/19/west-coast-port-conflict-crazy-dispute-over-one-person-sen-murray/>

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U.S. Sen. Patty Murray: Port Dispute Comes Down to one Person, one Issue

Posted on February 19, 2015 | By Joel Connelly

The Port of Seattle employs 1,800 people and has \$6 billion in assets. It is a key center for agricultural exports to Asia. And it is part of a prolonged labor-management showdown between the Pacific Maritime Association and the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union**.

The holdups, work slowdowns and lockouts at West Coast ports have boiled down to “one issue” and “one person,” according to Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

Murray had a conversation late Wednesday with U.S. Labor Secretary Tom Perez, who is seeking to mediate between the Pacific Maritime Association and the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union**, which represents 20,000 West Coast dockworkers.

“It seems crazy,” said Murray. “It’s just one issue, one person, and everybody else looking in thinks this is solvable.”

“This is solvable. This is solvable. And it has to be solved and it’s going to take everybody giving just a tad here as always at the end and hopefully that’ll happen here shortly.”



Sens. Patty Murray describes dispute at West Coast ports as “crazy” and revolving around “one issue” and “one person.”

In the “crazy” situation, a single issue has produced impasse after nine months of negotiations.

The **ILWU** is insisting on immediate removal of David Miller, an arbitrator of waterfront disputes at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, largest in the United States. The Pacific Maritime Association has dug in its heels against a change of rules that would get rid of him.

“I’m bewildered as anybody else on the outside looking in,” Miller told The Associated Press earlier this week.

And California Gov. Jerry Brown said, bluntly: “After nine months of bargaining, to be hung up on what appears to be arcane process issues is unacceptable. Get it done, guys.”

Of Perez’s role, said Murray, “He is in California. He is talking to both sides. It is really down to one issue.”

The dispute saw longshore workers locked out over the long President’s Day weekend: The slowdown in loading and unloading ships came at an estimated cost to the U.S. economy of \$1.9 billion a day.

The ports along the West Coast, including Seattle and Tacoma, handle half of America’s maritime trade. They also take in 70 percent of U.S. imports from Asia. Seattle and Tacoma ship out billions of dollars in agricultural exports each year.

“Everyone has to give,” added Murray. She described Perez, the negotiator in the middle, as a “very good person.”

On Wednesday, after trade round-tables in Tacoma and Portland, U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker joined talks in Los Angeles. In an interview with seattlepi.com, Pritzker described as “enormous” the potential impacts of the port dispute for U.S. trade with Asia.

“This impasse has dragged on way too long and is playing havoc with international trade, an essential component of Washington’s economy,” said Gov. Jay Inslee, who also talked to Perez on Wednesday.

“I understand there are important issues at stake but it is time to settle before any more damage is done.”

California Governor Jerry Brown: “After nine months of bargaining, to be hung up on what appears to be arcane process issues in unacceptable. Get it done, guys.”

The dispute has seen political posturing.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., sent out a news release on the port impasse saying: “I’ve heard from too many farmers in Eastern Washington who are living in fear of bankruptcy as a result.”

The left wing of the Seattle City Council — Mike O'Brien, Nick Licata and Kshama Sawant — sent out a hero letter supporting the **union**, blaming the Pacific Maritime Association and accusing it of “intimidation” tactics.

At least it did not have multiple “whereas” clauses in the manner of most Licata-O'Brien resolutions.

The association sent out a missive late Wednesday calling on dock workers to defy the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union**. And that's something that hasn't happened on the West Coast in 80 years.

<http://www.npr.org/2015/02/20/387685093/learning-more-about-longshoremen-and-their-powerful-union>

Learning More about Longshoremen and Their Powerful Union

FEBRUARY 20, 2015 5:32 AM ET

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The standoff between dock workers and shipping lines at 29 West Coast ports is costing millions each day. Renee Montagne talks Steven Greenhouse, who covered labor issues for *The New York Times*.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/02/19/west-coast-ports-longshoremen-dockworkers-editorials-debates/23708675/>

Longshoremen Hurt Blue-Collar Brethren: Our view

The Editorial Board, USA TODAY, 8:40 p.m. EST February 19, 2015

Slowdown at West Coast ports engineered by the ILWU to gain leverage as it negotiates a new contract.



(Photo: Justin Sullivan, Getty Images)

Honda says it would cut back production at six factories because of a parts shortage. The North American Meat Institute says its industry is losing about \$85 million a week as meat sits in freezers rather than on dinner tables. And numerous producers of flowers, foods, candies and other delicacies missed out on the sales bonanza that is this week's Chinese New Year celebration.

These are just some of the effects of a work slowdown at 29 West Coast ports engineered by the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)** to gain leverage as it negotiates a new contract.

OPPOSING VIEW: The dockworkers deserve plaudits

Barring a complete shutdown or lockout, it does not look as though the slowdown will be enough to derail the economy as a whole. Nonetheless, it is having a considerable impact on workers whose jobs and income rely on imports and exports, and who are wondering what they did to deserve their fates.

These people would be even more distressed if they knew the port workers' income. The Pacific Maritime Association, manager of the ports, says an average full-time worker makes \$147,000 a year, with very generous benefits on top of that.

The **ILWU** says longshoremen aren't always able to work as many hours as they'd like, putting a typical income at \$83,000.

Even if the truth lies somewhere in between, the longshoremen who are causing so much grief to workers and businesses around the country are among the nation's best-paid blue-collar workers.

One-eighth of the U.S. gross domestic product is connected to shipping through these 29 ports. Dock workers have used the considerable chokehold they have to win generous pay packages. And they are continuing to do that now, fighting not just for further wage increases but also for rules that make it easier to collect overtime pay.

Workers have every right to withhold their labor and to bargain collectively. That's what **union**s do. The dockworkers have difficult, demanding jobs. And unlike some **union**s, they have demonstrated a willingness to trade efficiency gains for increases in compensation.

Even so, it is hard to be sympathetic to their position, given how much more they make than others, even unionized workers in other industries. What they are being offered, a 14% increase over five years, seems reasonable in a period of low inflation and looming competition. And in slowing down work, they are causing harm to others while not getting paid any less themselves.

This "strike with pay" does little to advance the broader cause of labor. In fact, it's likely to generate resentment that will undermine the push of the AFL-CIO and others for rules that make it easier to unionize.

This week, Labor Secretary Thomas Perez and other federal officials have joined the talks in an effort to mediate the differences. It's in both sides' interest, and the national interest, to resolve the dispute quickly. If the port workers took the long view, they might conclude it's not worthwhile to rock the boat so much. Things are very good for them. Why draw so much attention to that?

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<http://www.columbian.com/news/2015/feb/19/la-mayor-no-port-agreement-imminent/>

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L.A. mayor: No Port Agreement imminent

Situation 'Now a National Economic Emergency,' he says

By James Nash and Alison Vekshin, Bloomberg News – The Columbian | Published: February 19, 2015, 5:25 PM

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, who met with negotiators in West Coast port labor talks Wednesday, said no breakthrough appears imminent in the dispute between the **union** representing 20,000 dock workers and their employers.

The two sides remain at odds over a **union** demand for the right to dismiss arbitrators in workplace grievances, Garcetti said Thursday at Los Angeles International Airport.

"People have been dug in for months," Garcetti said. "This is now a national economic emergency."

Garcetti joined Labor Secretary Thomas Perez and Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker in meetings in San Francisco to push for a compromise between the **International Longshore and Warehouse Union** and the Pacific Maritime Association, representing shipping lines and terminal operators at 29 ports.

The two sides have been locked in contract negotiations since May, reaching agreement on wages and health care while failing to find common ground on the arbitrator issue.

Garcetti, who presides over the largest U.S. seaport, said that while he had "excellent" conversations with union and employer representatives, a resolution was not at hand. The contract should come together once the question of firing arbitrators is settled, he said.

Pritzker is back in Washington and "has been on the phone making calls to stakeholders with respect to this situation," spokeswoman Marni Goldberg said.

West Coast import volume tumbled 33.4 percent in January, based on Datamyne port data released Wednesday, while the Gulf Coast and Puerto Rico saw a 12.2 percent volume increase and East Coast imports climbed 3.4 percent. Nationwide, import volume fell 16.6 percent, the biggest decline since 2009, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Exports of U.S. goods and services reached a record \$2.35 trillion last year and supported 11.3 million U.S. jobs, according to the Labor Department.

At the Port of Oakland, terminal operations stopped on Thursday as longshore workers took the day off for a union meeting, the port said in a news release. No gate, yard or vessel work will happen during the peak hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. local time. Vessel operations also will be dormant during the evening shift under a month-long suspension of nighttime activity by terminal operators.

Terminal operators at ports from San Diego to Bellingham, which handle about half of all U.S. imports, suspended loading and unloading of vessels from Friday through Monday morning, citing union slowdowns.

"In Oakland, we have produce rotting on our docks because they're still backed up in Southern California so they're not coming up the coast and picking up the exports from the Port of Oakland," Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf said in a telephone interview.

Union spokesman Craig Merrilees declined to comment, citing a media blackout. Pacific Maritime Association spokesmen Wade Gates and Steve Getzug didn't immediately respond to phone calls. Perez arrived in San Francisco this week to help broker a deal at the request of President Barack Obama. He has held daily conference calls with mayors in cities with affected ports, including one Wednesday in which he identified the arbitrator issue as the main sticking point, Schaaf said. Perez and Schaaf met in her Oakland office Wednesday to discuss specific harm to the city and the 2002 port lockout that permanently shifted business from Oakland to other ports, she said.

Containerized imports at the Oakland port tumbled 39 percent last month from January 2014 because of the dispute, according to data released this week. Imports fell 24 percent in the same time period at the Port of Long Beach.

California Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, both Democrats, weighed in Thursday, urging negotiators to reach a compromise on the arbitrator.

"While it is understandable that the parties can disagree, it is highly disappointing that with so much at stake, you have not been able to come up with a path forward on this one remaining issue," they wrote in a letter to both sides in the talks.

In a conference call earlier this month, James McKenna, the maritime association president, said talks broke down over the union's demand that it be able to fire arbitrators who decide workplace grievances. Currently, both the union and management must agree to dismiss an arbitrator. Merrilees has declined to comment on McKenna's claim.

The two sides already reached agreements on health-care costs and whether union members exclusively can maintain and repair truck chassis used to transport cargo containers, they said in statements during the talks.

Gary Toebben, chief executive of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, said slowdowns already have disrupted car dealers, warehouses and stores. A full-scale shutdown would cause serious damage to the region's economy, Toebben said in an interview Tuesday at the chamber building.

"When you get a mediator, like the secretary of labor, that sends the message from the president that we need a solution," Toebben said. "There is finally this understanding nationwide of the importance of this to the economy."
