



The International Longshoremen's Association: The Future of Maritime Labor in the Port of Chicago

The ILA was recognized as the exclusive collective bargaining representative of the longshore workers at QSL's marine terminal facilities in the Port of Chicago (Iroquois Landing, Lake Calumet, and 106th Street) on November 4, 2025, following a showing of majority support verified by a third-party neutral arbitrator. At the time the ILA received voluntary recognition, Operating Engineers Local 150 had publicly informed QSL that it had disclaimed any interest in representing QSL's employees or seeking recognition from QSL.

As their bargaining representative, ILA Local 2070 entered into a landmark collective bargaining agreement with QSL on April 28, 2026 that brought these employees up to the industry standard with respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions. This contract includes a massive wage increase totaling more than an \$11 per hour on average (an average 42% wage increase), employer-funded, top-of-the-line health and pension plans, new work guarantees, and new safety protections, along with a joint Labor Management Committee that allows the employees to participate in addressing workplace concerns. The ILA is proud of this CBA and what it means for working families in the City of Chicago and the surrounding areas.

Local 150 is trying to undo this progress with its all-out, scorched-earth crusade against the ILA and QSL. As part of its public smear campaign, Local 150 is calling for the Port District to terminate QSL's lease—which will mean that these employees who have built careers and raised families working in the Port will be out of a job. It will also damage the City of Chicago economically, requiring the Port to shut down while a new licensed stevedore is located through an often protracted bidding process. This does not serve the people of Chicago; it only serves the interests of Local 150 and its higher-ups.

As explained in further detail below, the ILA represents longshore workers at maritime terminal facilities. Representing the longshore industry is what we do. This expertise allows the ILA to negotiate the best contracts in the country for port workers. It has given the ILA specialized knowledge in the shipping industry and how to help ports attract cargo and stay competitive in global markets. Local 150 does not have this same expertise. That is because Local 150 is a construction union that represents the construction industry and has no business stepping on the ILA's maritime jurisdiction.

A core tenet of the labor movement is that unions should respect other unions' core jurisdiction. Unions should not be fighting among themselves, but should be working together in shared solidarity to benefit working people everywhere. Unfortunately, Local 150 has repeatedly ignored this principle and has instead made a habit of aggressively going after other unions' work. Back



in the early 2010s, Local 150 went after the tugboat operators for Calumet River Fleeting here in the Port of Chicago. Those employees expressed their desire to be represented by ILA Local 2070 on the strength of authorization cards; however, Local 150 refused to accept the employees' majority support for the ILA. When the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois reaffirmed the ILA's majority support, the OE pulled on the levers of the AFL-CIO and its Article XX jurisdictional proceedings in order to interfere with employees' free choice. With the OE's larger membership and paying dues-base, the AFL-CIO ignored the District Court and sided with Local 150 in these proceedings. As a result of this highly political and financially-driven decision, the ILA left the AFL-CIO (including the CFL and all other AFL-CIO related organizations) and has not returned since. Without the AFL-CIO available to do their bidding, Local 150 and the OE are now demanding that local politicians step in and reverse the employees' expressed desires for ILA representation and award the longshore work at QSL to a construction union acting out in retaliation.

Background and Institutional History

The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) is the largest union representing maritime workers in North America, with approximately 85,000 members employed throughout the Atlantic Coast, the Gulf Coast, the Great Lakes region, major inland river systems, Puerto Rico, Eastern Canada, and the Bahamas. The ILA's roots trace back to the City of Chicago and the Great Lakes region through the Association of Lumber Handlers, which was established in 1877. Today, the ILA maintains collective bargaining relationships with maritime employers throughout the Great Lakes District, including Burns Harbor, Cleveland, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Toledo, Buffalo, and Chicago. The ILA also represents the longshore workers at all the largest U.S. ports located on the East and Gulf Coasts, including the Port of New York and New Jersey (3rd largest in the U.S.), the Port of Savannah (4th), the Port of Houston (5th), the Port of Virginia (7th), Port of Charleston (8th), and the Port of Miami (10th).

The ILA's long history reflects the development of the maritime industry itself. From the era of manually loading and unloading vessels, equipped with little more than "strong backs and hooks," the industry has evolved into a highly technical environment characterized by advanced cranes, heavy-lift systems, sophisticated cargo-handling equipment, and integrated logistics networks. Throughout these changes, the ILA has consistently adapted its workforce through training, skill development, and operational modernization, enabling its members to remain productive and competitive in meeting increasingly complex demands.

Maritime Operations and Traditional Jurisdiction

Throughout its nearly 150-year history, the ILA has handled every category of maritime cargo, including bulk cargo, breakbulk cargo, containerized cargo, heavy-lift cargo, project cargo, and military cargo. In performing these functions, the union's members participate in the full range of activities necessary to support efficient port and terminal operations. ILA members' expertise and productivity are recognized throughout the maritime industry. Port authorities across the country



regularly appoint ILA representatives as commissioners in recognition of the ILA's comprehensive expertise in labor relations, port development, and operational management.

The ILA's traditional work jurisdiction includes loading and unloading vessels and barges, moving cargo to a designated place of rest, coordinating final delivery through truck, rail, barge, or vessel transportation, conducting transshipment operations, maintaining cargo inventories and documentation, performing cargo repair work, operating equipment, and maintaining both terminal facilities and cargo-handling equipment. These responsibilities are supplemented by a broad range of ancillary services required to provide comprehensive stevedoring and terminal operations.

As maritime commerce continues to evolve, the ILA maintains that effective waterfront operations depend not only on modern equipment but also on a highly trained workforce capable of operating safely and efficiently within increasingly sophisticated logistics environments.

Safety, Training, and Workforce Development

Safety remains a central priority throughout the ILA's represented ports. The International addresses workplace safety issues on a daily basis through an established committee structure designed to support local operations and promote continuous improvement.

The ILA's safety committee is tasked with incident review procedures, accident investigations, educational initiatives, and ongoing collaboration with employers and industry stakeholders. Through these efforts, the union seeks to ensure that safety standards evolve alongside technological and operational developments within the maritime sector.

The organization views workforce training and safety as complementary objectives. As equipment and cargo-handling practices become more advanced, continuous training is essential to maintaining operational efficiency, reducing workplace risk, and supporting long-term workforce development.

Iroquois Landing Organizing History

For nearly 100 years, until the early 2000s, ILA Local 19 represented the longshore workers at Iroquois Landing. When the employer left the Port of Chicago around 2003, ILA Local 19 disbanded and the ILA has been seeking to reorganize the workers at the facility ever since.

In the mid-2010s, the ILA had open communications with several QSL employees working at Iroquois Landing about joining the ILA. The ILA also held discussions with former 10th Ward Alderman Susan Garza regarding its intention to organize the facility. During that period, workers repeatedly expressed concerns regarding retaliation and job security, prompting the union to conduct outreach in a discreet and professional manner. Recognizing the sensitivity of these concerns, the ILA sought to establish communication channels that could minimize workplace conflict.



At the ILA Great Lakes Convention in March 2024, several high-ranking ILA officials, including the General and Assistant General Organizers, made the strategic decision to prioritize organizing efforts at Iroquois Landing. Those efforts included direct employee outreach, engagement by representatives of ILA Local 2070 (which represents the tugboat and barge operators in the Port of Chicago), and discussions with local elected officials. As part of these efforts, the ILA held several meetings with 10th Ward Alderman Peter Chico in the winter of 2025 to discuss the ILA's intention to organize QSL and seeking his assistance on setting up informational picketing sites at Iroquois Landing.

The ILA was the first labor organization to actively pursue representation of the QSL employees at the Iroquois Landing facility. More than a year after the ILA had made its intention clear about organizing QSL, Operating Engineers Local 150 established a picket line in late May 2025 at QSL. The picket line came as a surprise given that Local 150 had represented the crane operators employed by a subcontractor at Iroquois Landing for decades without ever showing any interest in organizing the longshore workers at the facility. However, because QSL had recently canceled its lease with the subcontractor that employed the Local 150-represented employees, Local 150 now appeared to be out for revenge. This was never about the employees' working conditions for the OE, but retaliation for losing the cranes.

When the ILA received news that Local 150 had set up the picket line, the ILA made several attempts at outreach with Local 150 in order to seek a compromise that would allow the unions to coordinate their efforts. These efforts were repeatedly rebuffed and Local 150 showed no interest in working together with the ILA.

Then on June 13, 2025, a month into its picketing, Local 150 informed QSL that it was formally disclaiming all interest in organizing QSL employees and in seeking recognition from QSL. Local 150 also disclaimed any right to engage in any activity inconsistent with its disclaimer. Following that development, the ILA continued its organizing efforts, which included entering into a Neutrality Agreement and a Card-Check Recognition Agreement on October 3, 2025. Such agreements are well-established and lawful mechanisms for voluntary union recognition. Federal labor policy has historically recognized voluntary recognition as a means of promoting stability in collective bargaining relationships, one of the principal objectives of the National Labor Relations Act.

However, subsequent actions taken by the Operating Engineers tried to undermine the ILA's organizing process. In late October during the federal government shutdown, as the ILA was getting close to gathering majority support, Local 150 violated its disclaimer of interest by indicating an intention to file an election petition. Though it had already disclaimed interest, this was done by Local 150 in order to prevent QSL from voluntarily recognizing the ILA as the collective bargaining representative of its employees. The OE also began a misinformation campaign about the ILA, calling the ILA a "storefront" and "company" union and lying about ILA wages and benefits and its training record. Local 150 also bribed the employees to keep their



support, paying them \$1,000 a week to stay on the picket line and promising them higher paying construction jobs at other locations if Local 150 is unable to organize Iroquois Landing.

Despite the OE's best efforts, the ILA achieved majority support from QSL employees. On November 4, 2025, QSL recognized the ILA as the bargaining representative after a neutral third-party arbitrator affiliated with the National Academy of Arbitrators verified that a majority of QSL employees had expressed support for ILA representation and certified the union as the employees' collective bargaining representative. After achieving recognition, the ILA immediately set out to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement on the employees' behalf. Ten days later, on November 14, 2025, Local 150 withdrew its disclaimer of interest and filed a representation petition with the National Labor Relations Board.

Respect for Established Maritime Jurisdiction

The organizing campaign undertaken by the ILA is consistent with its longstanding commitment to respecting established maritime jurisdiction throughout the waterfront industry. Stable labor-management relations in the industry depend upon clear jurisdictional boundaries and professional conduct among labor organizations operating within maritime commerce.

Stability within traditional waterfront operations is essential to providing reliable and efficient cargo-handling services, both for employees and employers. The waterfront and marine terminals are the ILA's expertise and where the ILA focuses its organizing efforts while respecting other unions' jurisdiction. On the other hand, Local 150 has a history of encroaching on other unions' core jurisdiction, with a primary focus on "organizing" new members and not "representing" them.

Collective Bargaining and Employee Priorities

Bargaining efforts included communication with the workforce in order to create a neutral forum for employees to voice their concerns and facilitate constructive dialogue and employee participation. During these discussions, many employees expressed a desire to avoid strikes and maintain continuity of operations. While the right to strike remains a fundamental economic tool available to labor organizations, the ILA was able to pursue negotiations for approximately five months without resorting to strike activity.

This approach reflected employee preferences as well as a broader commitment to maintaining stable, productive labor-management relations while pursuing improvements in wages, benefits, and workplace conditions. Throughout negotiations, the ILA also placed workplace safety as a top priority.



Results of the Collective Bargaining Agreement: Bringing the Port Workers Up to Industry Standards

The ILA is very proud to report that a collective bargaining agreement between the ILA and QSL was executed on April 28, 2026. After five months of hard bargaining, **the collective bargaining agreement was unanimously ratified by the QSL employees.**

The agreement resulted in industry-standard wages, enhanced benefit structures, and greater long-term economic security for the workforce. The average increase to the employee's total compensation package (wages + benefits) was more than \$20/hour. This includes a defined contribution pension plan and coverage from one of the best group insurance plans in the country, all at no cost to the employees. The agreement also provides the employees with job and hours guarantees, manning requirements, additional job classifications, work preservation and no-subcontracting provisions, and enhanced training and safety requirements.

In addition, the agreement also established a Labor-Management Committee designed to provide ongoing collaboration between management and labor. The committee's responsibilities include oversight of hiring practices, safety initiatives, workforce training, productivity improvements, and broader workforce development objectives. The creation of this joint structure reflects an effort to institutionalize cooperation and provide a mechanism for addressing operational challenges before they become sources of conflict.

Experience, Partnerships, and Future Growth

The ILA representatives participating in discussions concerning Iroquois Landing collectively possess approximately 300 years of maritime experience. Throughout its history, the organization has worked closely with port authorities, ocean carriers, shippers, terminal operators, and other stakeholders across the transportation and logistics sector.

The union believes these relationships, combined with its operational experience, position it to contribute constructively to the long-term development of Iroquois Landing and the broader Port of Chicago.

From the ILA's perspective, successful port development depends upon collaborative relationships among labor, management, public authorities, and elected officials. Stable labor relations, safe working conditions, and workforce investment are essential components of long-term competitiveness within the maritime industry.

Conclusion

The ILA seeks to establish and maintain a professional and collaborative relationship with the Illinois International Port District, NASCO, and the employees of Iroquois Landing. The union's



objectives are not merely limited to representation, but also include the creation of a stable labor-management framework that supports operational excellence and economic growth.

Ultimately, the interests of labor, management, and the public sector converge around several shared goals: stable labor relations, safe and productive operations, expanded cargo opportunities, and sustained economic growth for the Port of Chicago and the communities that depend upon it. Through continued cooperation among stakeholders, the ILA believes Iroquois Landing can strengthen its role as a strategic transportation asset for the region while providing long-term opportunities for workers and employers alike.