

Protests shut two US west coast ports

by April Dembosky
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Occupy Wall Street protesters have disrupted operations at ports along the west coast of the US and Canada in a move to interrupt economic activity at companies tied to Wall Street.

The Portland and Oakland ports were effectively shut down on Monday morning as protesters blocked trucks from entering and exiting and prevented dockworkers from getting to work. Protesters also demonstrated at the ports of Long Beach, San Diego, Seattle, Anchorage and Vancouver.

“We focused on facilities owned by SSA Marine, which is partly owned by [Goldman Sachs](#), which we see as lining the pockets of the 1 per cent without regard to a fair wage for workers, economic rights, or environmental concerns,” said Michael Novick, a retired teacher who helped organise the protest in Long Beach.

Protesters called the co-ordinated demonstrations a “strike back” against the [dismantling of Occupy encampments across the US](#) last month, referring to the new target as “Wall Street on the Waterfront,” and calling the new tactic “Aquapy”.

Union groups that are sympathetic to the general concerns of the Occupy movement distanced themselves from Monday’s action, saying it would cost low and middle-class workers a day’s pay and that it overstepped the union in dealing with its own issues.

Protesters said they wanted to block the ports in solidarity with dockworkers who have been involved in an ongoing labour dispute with one of their employers.

“Support is one thing, organisation from outside groups attempting to co-opt our struggle in order to advance a broader agenda is quite another and one that is destructive to our democratic process,” said Robert McEllrath, president of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union.

The Teamsters labour union took a neutral position, while individual truck drivers expressed both frustration over being stuck at a closed port without extra pay and gratitude that the protests were drawing attention to their working conditions.

“We receive third world wages and drive sweatshops on wheels,” five truck drivers wrote in an open letter on Monday. “We cannot negotiate our rates. We are paid by the load, not by the hour. So when we sit in

those long lines at the terminals, or if we are stuck in traffic, we become volunteers who basically donate our time to the trucking and shipping companies.”

Goldman Sachs declined to comment.

Bob Watters, senior vice president of SSA Marine, said the protesters’ target and accusations were faulty. “Their claims of us not treating workers well is a misrepresentation and an inaccurate statement,” he said.

Occupy Wall Street protesters last [shut down the Oakland port](#) on November 2, when more than 7,000 people marched to the port and blocked entrances and exits.