

# Dutch dockers refuse to load freight onto P&O's Pride of Rotterdam in solidarity with UK's sacked ferry workers

Our reporters  
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Dockers in the Netherlands refused to load freight on Friday onto the Pride of Rotterdam ferry set for Hull, UK, in solidarity with the 800 seafarers sacked by P&O on March 17. The vessel was eventually able to leave the Europoort in Rotterdam.

A video showing a row of cheering dockers blocking the entrance to the ship was tweeted by FNV Dockers' Section National Secretary Niek Stam and was widely circulated. Posted at 6.42 pm March 25, it has been viewed more than 800,000 times.

The action by the Dutch dockers also sparked action in Hull Saturday when dozens of P&O workers supporters walked on the A64 and slowed down traffic entering King George Dock from Hedon Road. The traffic was arriving in Hull in preparation to board the Pride of Rotterdam, subject to delay by the Dutch dockers action.

The international solidarity by dockers at the Port of Rotterdam, the largest seaport in Europe, and the world's largest seaport outside of East Asia, demonstrates the enormous collective strength of the working class that could be mobilized based on a struggle for socialist internationalism.

The solidarity by the Dutch workers was therefore anathema to the British unions and Labour MPs, whose nationalist campaign is opposed to mobilising workers in Britain and across borders in the most global of industries and is instead focused on demanding the Conservative government intervene to "Save Britain's Ferries" and maritime industry. Ten days after the sackings, no industrial action has even been threatened let alone a strike ballot called, by the Rail, Maritime, and Transport (RMT) and Nautilus trade unions whose members were fired on the spot and removed off ships

by balaclava wearing, handcuff wearing thugs.

The Trades Union Congress twitter page could not bring itself to retweet the video of the Dutch workers action until 9.30am on Saturday morning, nearly 17 hours later. When it finally did, its tweet was liked over 13,000 times and shared over 2,600 times. Labour MP for Hull Karl Turner cynically retweeted the video with the words, "Join a trade union today."

Responses to the TUC were not as blasé. One comment read, "All credit to the Rotterdam dockers for standing with the @RMTunion against @POferries. But if they can fight, why won't you?" Another said, "TUC confuses warm words, with solidarity." Another wrote, "They're doing more than the TUC ... bit embarrassing if you ask me! Get off your knees and do more!! Solidarity to the sacked P&O Workers and international solidarity to comrades in Europe!"

The refusal of the unions to lift a finger takes place under conditions in which even the Tory government's inspectors had to detain P&O's European Causeway vessel in Larne, Northern Ireland last week for being "unfit to sail." Aboard a ship run by a scab workforce on wages as low as £5.15 an hour, inspectors found "failures on crew familiarisation, vessel documentation and crew training"—all issues that could jeopardise the safety of crew and passengers and other vessels.

On Saturday, hundreds of protesters marched and rallied against the sackings in the ports of Dover, Hull and Liverpool.

In Dover, protesters marched from the RMT headquarters to the docks, under a heavy police presence. Highlighting the dead end of the unions' perspective, two P&O ships were ready to depart from the docks staffed by scabs.

While a speaker from the RMT acknowledged the Rotterdam action, this was to emphasize that P&O CEO Peter Hebblethwaite should step down as he had managed to “destroy the reputation of this 185-year-old company in one day.” Were Hebblethwaite and his board to stand down, said a GMB union representative, “then and only then can we build the fantastic and iconic brand that existed before.”

Socialist Equality Party members distributed the statement, “The dead end of the ‘Save Britain’s Ferries’ campaign: Build rank-and-file committees!” calling for the rejection of nationalism and for an international strategy. Reporters spoke to those protesting.

**Chloe** said, “I am here supporting my sister who lost her job as a shoreside worker for P&O. The protests should not stop until they get justice. It is disgusting what the company has done. All workers need to stick together.”

**Layla** said, “My father-in-law was an engineer on P&O for 35 years, these companies should not be allowed to do this to workers. If P&O can do it and get away with it, other companies will do it and that is why we all have to pull together and let them know we won’t put up with it.”

**Paul**, a recently retired seafarer who used to work for P&O said, “What the company has done is abhorrent and should not have been allowed to happen. The blame is with the Tories for changing employment legislation. Hot air words don’t mean anything, action is what we need.

“I used to run a crew of 20 plus, then it went down to 16, then nine, and eventually six crew. We were sailing a ship, six on days and six on nights, 24 hours a day, your workload massively increased and to me that was unsafe. I left last year because my health was starting to deteriorate.”

Paul stressed the need for a highly trained workforce. “At the moment there are no ratings, no officers. What they have done is employ scab labour on inferior terms and it’s dangerous. I have dealt with many situations like people overboard and fires on ships. You need a trained team to deal with it. These people will not be trained. It takes at least six months to be inducted on a ship and that is just basics. You never stop learning, it’s an ongoing process.”

Paul worked ferries when the Townsend Thoresen

Herald of Free Enterprise sank shortly after leaving the Belgian port of Zeebrugge on March 6, 1987, with the loss of 193 crew and passengers. “That was horrific and lessons were not really learned.”

The 800 sackings were the latest in a long line of job cuts. “Not so long ago [June 2020] 1,200 people lost their jobs and now it’s another 800 sacked. You can’t run a business management top heavy. There are 1,400 people still left in the office. They have gone along with different CEOs coming in with bright ideas, wasting millions. They brought a ship back out of a refit. It cost them £25 million and now it’s laid up in Dunkirk rusting away. They talk about saving millions. But they have cost the company millions.

Paul said the impact of the job losses in Dover is catastrophic. “That is 600 people not spending in the town and in this current climate where everything is going up, you cannot get a decent wage. Then this company has come in to try and pay people less than £5 an hour.

“A few years ago, P&O flagged out the fleet to Cyprus and changed all the names. They said it would not affect anyone’s terms and conditions. It just shows you. The plan was a process over a five-year period to cut the crews.”

**John**, a National Health Service worker, said, “It’s an attack on the working class and just profiteers wanting to make more money and not caring about the workforce around them.

“We should be democratically run by workers, there shouldn’t be fat cats keeping all the money. Companies must be shown they cannot treat people in this way.

“The working class are suffering even more with this cost-of-living crisis. Everything is going up, but people’s wages are going down. The government is not doing anything to support workers, they just support the shareholders and people in business. We need to change the way this country is run. We need socialism, democratically run by the workers, for the workers.”



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