



The Bottom Line

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Strikes Planned at Felixstowe Port

Summary

More than 1,900 workers at Britain's Felixstowe port planned eight days of strikes beginning August 21st due to discontent over pay.

Background

In the era before containerized shipping, longshore work was labor intensive, requiring complex teams of workers to clear and load cargo. These included longshoremen, gang bosses, hatchtenders, winch drivers, donkey drivers, boom men, burton men, sack-turners, side runners, front men, and jitney drivers. Long hours and irregular work were expected. Beginning in the late 19th century, longshore workers on the U.S. West Coast attempted to organize to resist arbitrary employer control of the workplace better. An early attempt, the Stevedores, Longshore and Riggers Union of the Puget Sound, lasted for a decade before foundering in the 1890s. The next significant effort, the Longshore Union of the Pacific, quickly affiliated with the International Longshoremen's Association, the union of waterfront workers on the East Coast. In a dramatic strike in 1916, the ILA attempted to win union recognition in the West but was thwarted. Since that time, ports have changed. The move to modern, containerized shipping in the 1960s meant enormous transformations for the industry. Fewer dock hands were needed, as towering cargo cranes now did most of the heavy lifting. Furthermore, waterfront warehouse locations have become less significant as containerized cargo is easily transported and unloaded far inland.

Declared "essential" during the COVID pandemic, port labor is still getting sick in the literal sense and needing to take time off to recover. Ports in northern Europe are among the world's most congested partly because of Covid outbreaks and sporadic cases of labor stoppages.

On the Suffolk coast, Felixstowe handles the equivalent of 4 million 20-ft shipping containers every year from about 2,000 ships – including some of the very largest container ships ever made. It is the eighth-largest container port in Europe, according to the E.U. statistics agency, Eurostat.

Current Status

According to the union Unite, nearly 1,900 workers plan to stop work for more than a week starting on Sunday, August 21st, and ending on Monday, August 29th. The workers voted 92% in favor of strike action last week. The union said the latest round of talks with the company at the Conciliation service Acas had failed to yield a "reasonable offer," but

further negotiations are planned for Monday, August 8th.

Felixstowe is owned by CK Hutchison Holdings, a conglomerate based in Hong Kong that controls 52 ports worldwide. A company spokesperson said: "The port has not had a strike since 1989 and we are disappointed that the union has served notice of industrial action while talks are ongoing. The port provides secure and well-paid employment, and there will be no winners from industrial action." Around half of the containers brought into the U.K. are transported via the port.

Impact

Unite said in a statement that the strike action will have a "huge effect on the U.K.'s supply chain and will also cause severe disruption to international maritime trade, as well as the U.K.'s supply chain including the logistics and haulage sectors."

Workers elsewhere in the U.K. transport industry have also announced plans to strike in August after unions said wages are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living and their members need a pay rise.

RESOURCES

[Longshore Workers \(washington.edu\)](#)

[Eight-day strike by Felixstowe dockers expected to disrupt UK supply chain | Industrial action | The Guardian](#)

[Felixstowe: Workers at key UK port to strike for eight days - BBC News](#)

[Workers at UK's container port Felixstowe plan 8-day strike over pay | Reuters](#)