

The Province

Protesters turn `scab' ship away

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Labor activists quickly chased a freighter they had branded a "scab ship" out of Vancouver waters yesterday.

The group was angry that the Singapore-registered Neptune Jade -- loaded with containers in England by non-union longshoremen -- was attempting to dock in the port of Vancouver after being chased from ports along the U.S. coast by similar labor protests.

About 30 people gathered in the driving, early-morning rain to hoist soggy picket signs along a line at the entrance to the Vanterm docks in Vancouver.

Longshoremen arriving shortly afterward refused to cross the line and, after hasty negotiations in the Vanterm offices, departed.

By early afternoon, the Neptune Jade had set sail for the Japanese port city of Okayama, its reported cargo of seven containers still aboard.

The protest is part of an international campaign to support 500 British longshoremen fired in a dispute two years ago for refusing to cross a Liverpool picket line.

Supporters attempt to target ships like the Neptune Jade that are loaded at, among others, non-union docks in London.

Organizers of yesterday's protest said the Neptune Jade "is a scab ship filled by scab labor and we're stopping it."

A similar picket line immobilized the Neptune Jade for three days last week in Oakland, Calif.

Longshoremen there successfully fought an injunction sought by Hapag, the vessel's owner, in a bid to force them to unload the ship. It left Oakland last Wednesday.

Rick Rondpre, president of local 500 of the longshoremen's union, said yesterday he was "disappointed they tried an end run into Vancouver.

"And we were not about to cross that picket line," he said.

Neither Hapag, the vessel's owner, nor Norton Lilly, the ship's agent, could be reached for comment.

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