

HK Dockworkers Accept Offer, End 40-Day Strike

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HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong dockworkers have accepted a 9.8 percent pay increase, ending a 40-day strike that slowed traffic at one of the world's busiest ports.

About 90 percent of the workers voted late Monday in favor of the offer from four middleman contractors that provide staff to a container terminal operator controlled by Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing.

The [strike](#) [1] was the longest in years in the former British colony, now a semiautonomous Chinese city that retains a reputation as a stronghold of laissez-faire capitalism. It raised questions about the competitiveness of the city's port amid intensifying competition from regional rivals.

About 450 workers went on strike March 28. They originally demanded a raise of up to 23 percent to make up for pay cuts in previous years. They later said they would settle for a double-digit percentage increase.

Lawmaker and union leader Lee Cheuk-yan said the offer was a face-saving compromise but members are happy because the increase is for all workers, not just those who went on strike. The offer also addresses complaints about working conditions, with provisions for lunch and bathroom breaks, he added.

Striking crane operators had complained about being forced to eat and relieve themselves in their control pods because they didn't have enough time to make the long trip to use the facilities. They expressed their anger by camping out in front of a skyscraper in Hong Kong's financial district owned by Li, Asia's richest person.

Li's port operator business, Hutchison Port Holdings, said it can now "focus on restoring the port to its full operational capabilities."

"It's back to work as normal," Lee said, but he added that workers would not stop camping out at Li's tower until 100 crane operators who lost their jobs after contractor Global Stevedoring Service Co. went bust during the strike, are offered work by the other contractors taking up the slack.

The strike delayed cargo being moved on and off ships at the terminal, resulting in a backlog of 80,000-90,000 containers at the port during the strike, according to the Hong Kong Association of Freight Forwarding and Logistics.

Hutchison said last month that it was operating at 80-90 percent of capacity and that 100 ships had reportedly skipped the port because of delays. Some shipping companies chose to bypass Hong Kong in favor of nearby Shenzhen in mainland China or other ports in Asia.

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Other vessels berthed at terminals in Hong Kong not controlled by Hutchison. The company operates 12 berths at four of Hong Kong's nine container terminals and two others with a joint venture partner.

Hong Kong is a major transshipment hub for goods moving in and out of mainland China. It was the world's busiest port for years, handling shipments of jeans, shoes and toys manufactured in southern China's Pearl River Delta for export to consumers in the West. But it has been overtaken by Shanghai and Shenzhen in recent years.

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