

## Greek Wave Of Strikes Starts With Seamen

*The Associated Press*

ATHENS — Greek seamen manning Greek and foreign flag vessels launched a two-day strike Monday to protest proposed austerity measures slashing most of their tax-free privileges.

A farmers' protest that has cut the country in half by blocking main roads and rail links entered its 17th day on Monday with no apparent signs of a solution in sight. The farmers are demanding higher subsidies for their products, cheaper fuel and resettlement of \$1.7 billion owed to the state-owned Agricultural Bank.

In Piraeus, the capital's adjacent port city, seamen took to the streets to protest plans to eliminate tax breaks on their income. Their walkout paralyzed international shipping and passenger services to the Greek islands.

The seamen's demonstration marked the start of a weeklong wave of strikes planned by civil servants, teachers, doctors and diplomats in opposition to the government's bid to slash tax benefits and impose new levies.

The Socialist government begins a five-day debate in Parliament on Tuesday on the 1997 budget, which includes the austerity measures designed to bring Greece in line with its European Union partners.

"Such measures will further degrade our standard of living and diminish the size and strength of Greece's oldest profession," said Ioannis Halas, president of the 30,000-member Greek Seamen's Federation.

He said seamen in Greece would strike until Wednesday. Those on the high seas plan to protest for 48 hours at the first port they sail into by Christmas Eve, Mr. Halas said.

The ports of Hamburg, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Marseille and Genoa, where many Greek-controlled and Greek flag vessels call, were expected to be hardest hit by the strike.

Shipowners called the protest a blow to the formidable reputation of the Greek shipping industry and threatened to take legal action.

Greeks control the world's largest merchant fleet with an armada of 3,246 ships.

Of them, only 1,766 fly the Greek flag.