

Britons are beaten in riots at Greek port

By PAUL ANAST
IN ATHENS

BRITISH tourists were kicked and dragged across the quaysides of a Greek port by striking seamen yesterday.

Holidaying women and children were caught up in clashes between dock workers and riot police when they tried to board ferries at Piraeus in Athens.

Television pictures showed frightened tourists being grabbed and dragged away from the ships as they tried to dart through the ranks of about 1,000 strikers.

As seamen and holiday-makers came to grips, ferry officers and police were seen rushing to the foreigners' rescue.

Two men, apparently Greek, were filmed being attacked and badly beaten. The strikers later claimed they were police informants.

"It was terrible", said one unnamed British traveller speaking on Greek television. "We thought we would just hop on the ferry, as we have done other times we visited Greece, have a tour of a couple of islands and return by the evening.

"Instead, we found the entrance blocked by strikers and we were forcefully pushed back when we tried to get on with a number of Greeks. If it wasn't for the intervention of police, we would never have made it".

Greek authorities, angered by the likely effect on the country's crucial tourist trade, dispatched troops to the port after 2,000 riot police failed to restore order.

George Anomeritis, the merchant marine minister,



Picture: AP

Riot police clash with striking dock workers in the Greek port of Piraeus yesterday. They failed to restore order after several hours of violence and troops had to be sent in

went on television to appeal for calm.

"The state is determined to protect the peace and rights of the average citizen, of the traveller, and above all of the tourist who expects to find

hospitality and tranquility in this country," he said.

"The government is determined to protect this country's image as a holiday haven, and not to allow a handful of trouble-makers to

turn it into a brawling ground."

A police spokesman said: "A number of British and other holidaymakers suffered bruises or scratches or were pushed to the ground and

dragged off the ships before managing to return again. Some of them were kicked."

The incidents began early in the morning as the first ships were ready to sail at 7am to the nearby islands of

Aegina, Poros, Hydra and Spetses.

A long line of larger ferries also waited to leave for the popular Cyclades islands such as Mykonos, Paros and Santorini and to the more dis-

tant Dodecanese island group.

Riot police armed with batons and shields were deployed, forming lines to hold back the workers as scuffles broke out on the

docks. While police managed to drive back the seamen and ensure that all passengers travelling on foot were able to board the ferries, those with cars were unable to do so for fear of having their windows smashed.

A large number of British travellers were seen attempting to take the popular short day trips to picturesque islands like Hydra, where such celebrities as singer Leonard Cohen and Sir Richard Branson have homes.

One British family said they abandoned their effort to drive on board a ferry for Rhodes. Television pictures showed them trying to board all three available vessels - the Daliana, Rodanthi and Diagoras, but to no avail.

"We're giving up", the driver said in a heavy northern accent. "We'll come back tomorrow when it's all over."

Most of the strikers were members of the pro-Communist PAME union, but a spokesman for the Socialist government said that the ranks of the strikers were "swelled with professional agitators" and included "activists who had nothing to do with the marine profession".

The one-day strike was in protest over pension reforms proposed by the government, and in defiance of a court ruling which had declared the action illegal.

It was carefully timed to coincide with the start of the peak holiday season and cause maximum disruption. About 12 million tourists will visit Greece this year, one quarter of them Britons, more than any other nation.

Normal sailings were expected to resume today.