

News: Trade unions begin political strike action against unfair Government cuts

The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) and its affiliated unions have begun a programme of political strike action. These strikes are a protest against Government plans to undermine terms and conditions of employment and make unfair cuts in social welfare schemes.

What's it all about?

The Finnish Government is planning a major assault on working conditions, the right to strike, and social welfare. The cuts will affect employees and the most vulnerable people in society.

While the Government seeks to justify such cuts as a way of reducing costs and boosting employment, undermining the status of employees will have no significant impact on the Finnish economy or the employment rate. Instead, the Government's true objective is to give more power to employers.

Why have the unions launched political strike action?

The Government is not listening to the concerns of employees, and has declined to negotiate with their representatives in any meaningful way. The trade union movement must accordingly apply other approaches to ensure that the voice of employees is heard.

Unions affiliated to SAK began a programme of political strike action in autumn 2023, calling on the Government to cancel the cuts and initiate genuine dialogue with employee representatives. This means that the political strikes are not primarily aimed at employers, but seek to influence political decisions. This campaign of industrial action has been arranged under the banner of #SeriousGrounds.

Do I have the right to take part in political strike action?

As an employee, you have the legal right to take part in a political strike. The trade unions will decide which workplaces and duties are covered by the strike. Your employer cannot punish you for taking part in a strike arranged by a trade union.

You will not earn wages when you are on strike, but union members may claim strike pay from the union for the duration of the strike. Contact your own union for further details. If you are not already a union member, now would be a very wise time to join. You can find your union at www.tradeunion.fi (service available in Finnish, Swedish and English).

Further details of this political strike action are available on the SAK website at www.sak.fi/painavasyy (in Finnish) www.sak.fi/seriousgrounds (in English)

We are using the hashtags **#PainavaSy** and **#SeriousGrounds** on social media.

#SERIOUSGROUNDS

A catalogue of Orpo-Purra Government cuts



Erosion of working conditions

- No pay for the first day of sick leave
- Job alternation leave abolished
- “Relevant grounds” are enough to dismiss an employee
- Conditions below the statutory standard may be agreed at workplaces with no shop steward
- Special grounds for temporary employment only required when the job lasts for longer than one year
- Hampering settlement of industrial disputes by limiting the powers of the national conciliator
- A shortened period of layoff notice
- No duty to re-engage dismissed workers in businesses with fewer than 50 employees

Restrictions on the right to strike

- Restrictions on sympathetic and political strike action
- A €200 fine for individual strikers when a strike is found to be illegal
- A dramatic increase in union strike fines

Cuts in social welfare

- Child supplements abolished in unemployment benefit
- Earnings-related unemployment benefit already reduced after two months
- A prolonged waiting period for unemployment benefit
- Wage-subsidised employment no longer counting towards the employment condition for earnings-related benefit
- A longer employment condition for earnings-related benefit
- An employment condition based on prior earnings instead of working time
- Cuts in housing allowance
- Eligibility for unemployment benefit to begin only after phasing of outstanding holiday compensation
- Obstacles to eligibility for social assistance
- Abolition of the unemployment benefit and housing allowance portions that are protected during part-time working
- Abolition of adult education benefit
- Cuts in benefits for unemployed elderly workers
- Abolition of the increased parental allowance rate payable for the first 16 ordinary weekdays *)

*) The Government announced on 19 September 2023 that it is seeking alternative measures