

# Finnish port workers strike over wages, 2010

## Timing

21 January  
2010

to:

19 March  
2010

## Location and Goals

Country:

Finland

Location City/State/Province:

Kotka

Location Description:

Ports especially those used for international trade

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

The Transport Workers Union's main goals were to increase wages and include severance pay especially for employees made redundant to receive adaptation-support for up to 6 months after the end of their notice period if they had not been re-employed by that time.

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 097. Protest strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 097. Protest strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

- 051. Walk-outs
- 106. Industry strike>Dockworkers at international ports

Methods in 6th segment:

- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 106. Industry strike
- 107. Sympathy strike

Segment Length:

9 days

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Group characterization:

- Port Workers
- Stevedores

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Timo Raety (Transport Worker's Union president)

Partners:

Central Organization of Trade Unions

External allies:

Truckers

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Dockworkers (Transportation Workers Union)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Central Organization of Trade Unions
- Truckers

Segment Length:

9 days

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

National employers

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

## Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

7 out of 10 points

In 2009, thirty-three stevedores were dismissed from their jobs in various ports throughout Finland, and by January of 2010, they still had not received sufficient compensation as reported by the Transport Worker's Union (AKT). At the beginning of the month, the union began talks with the national employers to come to an agreement about severance pay and other issues such as wage increase and regulatory job protections; however, by mid-month the negotiations had slowed down to a near halt. The union threatened a 24-hour strike. On 21 January, they carried through on their promise. 3,500 workers walked off of their job, leaving four ports with no one to load or unload the cargo of new shipments.

A week passed by without any gains at the table, so the AKT placed a ban on all overtime work, and then on 1 February over 1,000 workers performed a wildcat strike for 24 hours in hopes that they would significantly speed up the labor negotiations. The strike reached ports in the cities of Helsinki, Kotka, Turku, Uusikaupunk, Hanko, Kokkola, and Naantali. These actions were accompanied by an ultimatum made by the AKT that set a deadline of 19 February with the threat of a strike that would cover all of Finland's twenty-five ports. However, when the date arrived Secretary of Labor Anni Sinnemäki intervened and used the authority vested in her position to postpone the national strike for two additional weeks.

The two weeks passed without incident, but also without agreement. On 4 March, over 3,400 dockworkers walked off of the job, which made the majority of Finnish ports inoperable. They formed a joint strike with the truckers who had begun earlier, causing a complete breakdown in all transportation of the majority of imported and exported goods. By the 9 March, negotiations began again and continued until the end of the week. The union negotiators had set their demand at one year's salary for redundancies. The Port Operator's Association considered this to be excessive and feared the losses that would be incurred especially in such a slow economy. On 12 March, an agreement still had not been worked out and the parties had to wait out the weekend to see if the next round of talks would bring better results.

The negotiations began again the following Wednesday, but despite the long duration of the meeting—over thirteen hours stretching into the early morning—the deadlock remained. It was at this point that dockworkers in Kotka heard that the company, Multi-Link Terminals, which operated out of a southern port of the city, had recruited thirty non-union workers through Facebook in order to load 1,000 containers that had been stranded by the strike. The union workers staged a demonstration outside of the port, gathering nearly 150 people to protest the outside hiring. The Central Organization of Trade Unions threatened to launch sympathy strikes as a secondary action to prevent the continuation of strikebreaker hiring.

While this was happening, several Finnish companies either had to shut down or start using heavy trucks that could carry the imports on passenger ferries from other European ports to which they had been rerouted. Paper and forestry companies had to shut down several plants and temporarily lay off thousands of workers. A mining company ran out of copper concentrates and was only able to continue its smelter using nickel and zinc concentrates for the coming week, if the strike did not end. By this time in the strike, the campaigners had stunted 90% of all Finnish international trade and interrupted almost \$150 million of exports per day. This was severely damaging to an already suffering economy that had seen its worst year in nearly a century. The pressure to reach an agreement was rising fast.

Finally, on 19 March, AKT president Timo Raety and National Conciliator Esa Lonka, came to a moderate agreement that included job security measures to be determined on the local level from options laid out in the agreement and staggered pay increases starting in April (0.6% of the current year and finishing in April of the next year (0.7% in October and 0.6% in April, 2011). The agreement did not include any measures concerning severance pay, which was disconcerting to AKT members, but they were satisfied with the gains that they had achieved.

## Research Notes

Sources:

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