



STRIKE

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HOW IS A STRIKE CALLED?

WORKERS ON **STRIKE**

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When workers and employers disagree on wages and terms of employment in collective bargaining agreements, strike action is the workers' strongest weapon. Just as workers have the right to strike under certain circumstances, employers can decide on a lockout and stop work. Rules on strikes and lockouts were first set in Iceland in 1938 with the adoption of the Labour Relations Act, law no. 80/1938, which has since been amended and updated many times.

What is a strike?

A strike occurs when a group of workers with the backing of a union agree to stop work, either partly or fully, in order to achieve a specific common objective, to improve their terms of employment or safeguard their rights. A strike can mean that all workers stop all work from a certain time, that part of the group stops work from a certain time, that all work ceases on certain days, that no overtime work is carried out, that no work is done on weekends or that certain aspects of work are not done, but all other work is done as normal. It may even be considered strike action if workers "work to rule", following procedures to the letter and performing work more slowly than is considered normal or usual.

What is a lockout?

Just as workers can decide to strike, employers can declare a lockout, i.e. stop the work and send workers home without pay. In general, the same rules apply to strikes and to lockouts.

When can a strike be called?

As long as collective bargaining agreements are in force, peace prevails in the labour market and strikes and lockouts are prohibited. This means that strike action can only be taken legally when collective agreements expire and the prohibition no longer applies. It is also a premise for calling a strike that negotiations between the parties have proved unsuccessful, despite mediation by an arbitrator. In other words, the attempt is made first to reach an agreement, but if no agreement can be reached the dispute is referred to the State Conciliation and Mediation Officer (in Icelandic, ríkissáttasemjari). If meetings held on the initiative of the Mediation Officer also prove unsuccessful, negotiations are terminated and after that a strike can be called.

How is a strike called?

A decision on strike action must be taken by secret ballot of union members; a majority of voters must agree to a strike. The union board, negotiating committee or stewards' council of the union in question decides to seek the approval of members to call a strike. Voting is generally done by mail ballot or, in recent years, by electronic voting. Union members are then simply asked whether they agree to go on strike at a certain time, what specific group will be involved, when the strike should begin and how it should be carried out. If no length of time for the strike to last is specified, it will be called for an indefinite period. Once a decision to strike has been taken by a vote, this outcome must be notified to the Mediation Officer and to the party the strike is directed against with seven days' notice.

Workers on strike

Workers on strike do not go to work and do not receive wages while they are on strike. Every worker to whom the strike applies must respect the strike, whether he or she voted for it or not. Nor may anyone else do the work of a person who is on strike. Generally some of the workers on strike act as strike wardens to ensure that no one violates these rules.

Further information on strikes is available, for instance, on the website of the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) Vinnuréttarvef ASÍ (in Icelandic), The office of the Federation of General and Special Workers in Iceland (Icel. Starfsgreinasamband or SGS) and member unions also provide further information.



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