

Strike wave sweeps across the Netherlands

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Since the beginning of 2023, the Netherlands has been shaken by a wave of strikes in the public and private sectors unseen in scope for years. Hardly any week since January has passed without Dutch workers entering into a struggle for better wages, working and living conditions.

This new wave of strikes takes place against the backdrop of relentless anti-Russian hysteria and intensified propaganda in the media to justify NATO's war in Ukraine. The right-wing government of Prime Minister Mark Rutte is increasingly involved in financing, arming and guiding the Ukraine military in NATO's proxy war against Russia.

On March 16, around 200,000 health care workers at 64 Dutch hospitals were on strike for a day, including in major cities like Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague, Eindhoven and Rotterdam.

In Amsterdam, at the Antoni van Leeuwenhoek hospital, a leading facility for treating cancer patients, doctors and health care workers in 48 departments struck for the first time ever. At the Spaarne Gasthuis hospital in Haarlem, 30 kilometers from Amsterdam, 48 departments were also on strike. At the Wilhemina Hospital in Assen, 33 departments were on strike. A one-day national strike was called by four trade unions, the FNV, the largest trade union federation in the Netherlands, the CNV, NU'91 and the FBZ, the Federation of Professional Organisations.

After decades of austerity, the outbreak of the pandemic—the Dutch ruling elite was among the first to implement a criminal “herd immunity” policy—conditions for staff and patients in public health care have turned from bad to worse and then from worse to a disaster.

As a result, one that could have been avoided by implementing a policy based on science, over 200,000 health care workers of a total of 592,000 were infected. Thousands are suffering from Long COVID symptoms.

Many have lost their jobs and are out of work, awaiting a to-be-decided compensation as low as €28,000 if they receive anything at all. During a renewed rise of COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations at the beginning of 2022, over 110,000 operations had to be postponed.

Health care workers are demanding higher salaries, compensation for irregular working hours and on-call duty, similar to the demands of workers in public transport, railway, municipal and retail sectors.

After the collective labour agreement for the health care sector came to an end on January 31, unions are reluctantly demanding a 10 percent wage increase as well as an additional €100 per month travel allowance to deflect the widespread discontent and anger amongst workers faced with rocketing food and fuel prices, exorbitant utility payments and higher interests on mortgages and rents.

Not placated by the crumbs negotiated by the unions, angered transport workers are preparing a new round of strikes. The unions are separating them into regional strikes and spreading them over six weeks, from February 28 until April 7. Transport workers are divided into two unions. The FNV is demanding a 16.9 percent pay increase over the next 12 months for its membership, whereas the CNV is bargaining for a 14 percent increase spread over 18 months.

Heeding a call from the state secretary for infrastructure to suspend the strikes in advance of the provincial council elections, the trade unions have promptly suspended the strikes under the guise of entering a 10-day round of negotiations.

Marijn van der Gaag, representative of the FNV, told [nltimes.nl](https://nl.times.nl), “The workload is so extremely heavy. Solutions really have to be found.” He added that the FNV can live with the compromise of suspending the strikes to give negotiations with employers a chance, concluding, “This means we will have 10 days to reach

a result together.”

CNV negotiator Hanane Chikhi also told the media that the union could accept a compromise.

Alongside workers traditionally under the grip of trade unions, workers employed in the liquor store chain Gall & Gall and the department store chain De Bijenkorf, both owned by multi-billionaires, went on strike for two weeks demanding a starting wage of €14 per hour.

At more than one hundred different locations, strikes broke out in more than 10 different sectors. At the beginning of February, the FNV warned the Rutte government that a “strike storm” was imminent. FNV Vice President Zakaria Boufangacha said, “We have never started a year with so many strikes and actions.”

Elise Merlijn, manager and spokesperson for FNV, told the press, “We know that the anger among employees is enormous. Employees feel left out in the cold. All that is being asked is to maintain purchasing power and reduce the workload, so that the groceries can be paid for and the wonderful work that is being done is sustained.”

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), in 2022 the country reached a record inflation level of 10 percent while wages were stagnant. This was the highest inflation in the last five decades.

The outbreak of strikes among workers in the Netherlands is part of the reemergence of the class struggle of workers internationally. From the beginning of this year, in Sri Lanka, a former Dutch colony, thousands of health care workers across the island went on strikes demanding higher wages to compensate for inflation now hovering at around 50 percent and to end harsh austerity measures implemented by the government of President Ranil Wickremasinghe. In the UK, hundreds of thousands of National Health Service (NHS) nurses and other workers have taken strike action that the health unions are working to sabotage and betray. Hundreds of thousands of other workers and youth have mounted strikes and mass protests.

In France, a revolutionary confrontation is developing between the working class and the government of President Emmanuel Macron. In Germany, hundreds of thousands are participating in public sector warning strikes and are demanding a full strike that the trade unions desperately seek to prevent. In Belgium, on March 10, public sector workers went on a nationwide

strike.

The main task workers face is to break free from the unions’ nationalist and pro-capitalist perspective and form independent rank-and-file committees, and to adopt an international socialist perspective to unify millions of workers throughout the Netherlands with their class brothers and sisters throughout Europe and internationally in a common struggle against austerity and war.



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