1-month-long strike by Norwegian oil service workers ended

Kim Nachtweid
4 August 2026

The long strike this year by oil service workers in Norway over the new sectoral collective agreement, the "brönnservice-avtale" (well maintenance agreement) lasted from June 15 to July 14—a remarkably long and intense labour dispute by Norwegian standards. It was fuelled by the rising costs of energy, food and housing, which have outpaced wage growth during the years of crisis and war since 2020. The cut in their real wages is hitting workers in Stavanger—the economically powerful and expensive home port of the natural gas and oil industry on the Norwegian continental shelf—particularly hard.

The oil service workers, represented by the SAFE trade union (Energy Workers' Union), carry out the actual pioneering work involved in exploring, drilling and casing natural gas and oil wells, as well as constructing and maintaining the entire production infrastructure. This also includes work that requires diving. In contrast, the ongoing extraction and separation of natural gas and oil on the platforms is carried out by oil producers, who are organised within the Styrke trade union. The employers' organisation for both sub-sectors is Offshore Norge, an association comprising in part transnational corporations such as Halliburton and SLB.

At the start of the strike, SAFE rejected the offer put forward by Offshore Norge for a pay rise of around 4.7 percent over the next 12 months as an unacceptable "dumping agreement," as prices had risen far more sharply. For instance, prices for an apartment in Stavanger rose by 14 percent during the 12 months of 2025.

SAFE's decision on June 18 to extend the strike to include just under 400 oil service workers was followed on June 28 by a lockout of up to 2,000 workers by several employers.

Finally, on July 13, the negotiating parties requested voluntary wage arbitration by the "Riksmegler," a national arbitrator responsible for setting collective agreements, and declared the industrial action to be over on July 14. By then, due to the indirect effects of the strike—such as drilling and repair work not being carried out—an estimated 2–3 million barrels less oil had been produced. This remains below the total daily production volume of 4 million barrels on the Norwegian continental shelf.

For appearances' sake, the capitalist Norwegian state invokes democracy and equality before the law. For workers, the right to strike is the most important democratic right. In practice, however, this has long been countered by a strike law, full of loopholes, designed to suppress industrial action.

A strike like the one just carried out by the oil service workers would not be tolerated if it involved the oil production workers—who have a direct influence on daily production volumes. During the 2022 sector-wide collective bargaining dispute over the "sokkelavtale" (continental shelf agreement), the government banned a wage strike that had just begun on several platforms. It was forcibly settled by the Riksmegler.

In suppressing the right to strike in 2022, the government invoked the "tvungen lönnsnemnd" (compulsory wage arbitration) provision. Under this provision, the government may prohibit and compulsorily arbitrate an "irresponsibly conducted labour dispute" where there is "a danger to life, health or safety, or where there are other serious consequences for the public." What appears to involve a high legal hurdle has, in recent years, developed in Norwegian government practice into a legal loophole that is increasingly being used to suppress striking workers.

The irresponsibility and the danger to life, health and safety cited by Labour Minister Marte Mjoes Pedersen to justify the compulsory arbitration of the 2022 wage dispute did not stem from the striking workers, but from the government. It suppressed the strike in order to secure gas supplies for its NATO partners in the imperialist war against Russia that had just begun—a war that poses major dangers to the Norwegian population. A strike would have increased the pressure on NATO to reach an agreement with Russia, a major supplier of natural gas.

The Norwegian population itself consumes hardly any natural gas, thanks to the abundant hydroelectric power available in the mountainous, rain-rich country. Electric heating is the norm, and 95 percent of natural gas is exported. The compulsory arbitration could not, therefore, be justified on the grounds of ensuring the population's basic supply.

However, the de facto abolition of the right to strike did not prompt Styrke to defend its members' democratic rights against the government. As in other countries, the trade union worked closely with the government and the oil companies to force the workers back to work.

The "Hovedavtale" (Main Agreement) between Norwegian trade unions and employers, which has been renewed repeatedly since 1935, severely restricts the right to strike. It obliges workers to maintain industrial peace during the two-year term of the collective agreement. All strikes at company level are illegal and receive no support from the trade union strike fund. Alternative local forms of industrial action—such as "Dagsing," a work-to-rule strike accompanied by a reduction in output and wages—are, without strike pay, nothing more than begging campaigns that first and foremost ruin the workers themselves and their families. Modern transnational corporations cannot be defeated in this way.

In this year's collective bargaining round, the oil workers' union Styrke and the employers' association Offshore Norge did not even allow a strike to come to pass. As soon as the collective bargaining negotiations broke down in April, they voluntarily requested state arbitration, thereby preventing industrial action. In reality, the negotiating parties—trade unions, employers and the government—have long been one and the same party in Norway.

The government in Oslo has been led since 2021 by the Labour Party (AP), which maintains close ties with the trade unions. The AP has been in power for more than 50 years since the Second World War. Over the past five years, it has drastically increased defence spending and turned Norway into one of the most aggressive advocates of NATO's war against Russia.

Jonas Gahr Støre's social-democratic minority government is supported, among others, by the Socialist Left (SV) and the Red Party (R). The SV emerged in the early 1960s from a split within the AP, whilst R was founded in 2007 by the Maoist Communist Workers' Party (KAP) and other pseudo-left groups. This so-called left-wing coalition has passed on the costs of rearmament to the working class and deepened social inequality.

The ritual of national arbitration, which trade union leaderships, companies and the government use to cut real wages, thrives on the illusion that the capitalist nation-state is an impartial, neutral authority standing above the classes. In reality, it is the apparatus through which the capitalists impose the costs of crisis and war on the workers.

For decades, Norway's ruling class has claimed that, through the responsible management of the country's abundant energy resources, it is creating prosperity for all, primarily through the so-called Oil Fund. However, it is mainly the elites themselves who benefit from the highly profitable oil industry, which ruthlessly exploits workers and generates huge sums for the global oil corporations.

The Oil Fund is the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, with a total value of around €1.8 trillion and holding more than 1 percent of the world's listed shares. While oil workers can for a time earn relatively good wages, they carry out extremely dangerous and harmful work, which serves as the source of the energy companies' vast fortunes.

Contrary to the claim that the fund safeguards social spending and prosperity, the established parties have agreed that only 3 percent of the fund may be channelled into the national budget each year. It thus serves as a mechanism to intensify cuts to social services. Governments are of course permitted to suspend this rule, in order to finance rearmament or military aid for the imperialist war in Ukraine.

Workers must respond by organising themselves across the boundaries of industry and nation to build an international movement against war, wage cuts and cuts to social services. This struggle requires a socialist and internationalist programme against capitalism, which is the root cause of the attacks on workers in Norway and across Europe.