

UK housing charity workers join strikes

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A shop operated by Shelter, a British housing and homeless charity (file photo)

London, December 6 (RHC)-- Hundreds of workers at Shelter, a British housing and homeless charity, have launched industrial actions, joining thousands of striking employees in various economic sectors across the country.

More than 600 workers at the charity started their protest action on Monday, in what their union, Unite, described as "a bitter dispute over pay." Staging the strike, the Shelter's staffers said the combination of insufficient payment and soaring inflation has prompted them to start worrying about their own housing security.

Unite said Shelter's management has imposed a three-percent salary rise, which it claimed "has left many of its own staff being unable to pay their rent" and haunted with the possibility of being made homeless.

"At the very base level... those working for a housing charity shouldn't be experiencing housing insecurity as a result of being unable to pay rent," an unnamed staff member said in comments released by the union.

Another Shelter employee, who is a single parent, said they had been forced to use an overdraft on their bank account and ration energy use to curb rising bills. "I get stressed when the kids' school wants me to pay for another school trip. The best acknowledgement my employer can give me for all my hard work is decent pay," the staffer said.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said it was "unforgivable that workers at Shelter find themselves actually being haunted by the prospect of being made homeless." "Shelter has sufficient reserves to pay its hardworking and dedicated staff a decent pay rise, but it has chosen not to," she added.

British workers in various sectors from lawyers to nurses, drivers, and airport ground personnel have held strikes this year as the country faces its highest inflation and worst cost-of-living crisis in generations. So far, the workers' demand for a pay increase has been rejected by government officials, saying it could not afford high increases that match the soaring inflation, and even if it could, such monetary increases would further fuel inflation.

UK inflation accelerated in October to a 41-year peak at 11.1 percent on runaway energy and food bills. Last week, British media reported that the high cost of living crisis in the UK has prompted Britons in some cities to eat pet food because they can't afford real food anymore.

According to the report, parts of Wales were hit so hard by poverty that people were forced to stoop to the lowest levels to just feed their families. The British media say people in some cities eat pet food amid the worsening cost of living crisis. Last month, food costs rose again, with shop prices of groceries over 12 percent higher than a year before, according to the report.

The British government continues to blame the war in Ukraine and the COVID pandemic as the main factors behind the economic downturn.

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