

Solidarity with the rail strikes!

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Railway workers are on strike against plans to cut pay, jobs and working conditions. The government is refusing to negotiate because they know a victory for the RMT will encourage millions of others to fight for a justified pay rise. We need to organise now to smash the Tory pay cap.

The government is hiding behind Network Rail and the private operating companies. Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has denied all responsibility, despite his department setting the annual budget for train operating companies. Network Rail boss Andrew Haines (annual salary: £589,999) has opposed “government intervention”, claiming it would encourage unions to “politicise disputes”.

But this is a political dispute. The strike represents the first serious test of the government’s public sector pay cap. The Tories know a victory for rail unions will set a precedent across the public sector. The precedent the Tories — and behind them the employers — want to set is that strikes won’t win real pay increases. The *Sun* was right to splash ‘class war’ across its front page. The employers want to keep pay low to maintain profits.

The government is using this dispute to set the benchmark for pay claims across the whole working class. The rail workers are one of the best organised sections of our movement. If rail workers can be forced to take a pay cut, the employers will use it as license to impose the same — or worse — on everyone else. That’s why this dispute has decisive importance for the whole working class. **That is why the rail workers must win.**

Defend pay and jobs

The latest figures show RPI inflation of 11.7% and projected to reach 14% by the Autumn. Workers need to pay their bills and buy food at today’s prices — not

yesterday’s.

That’s why we need to fight for inflation-proof pay claims: current inflation plus 1% for every 1% rise in inflation.

The employers want to cut thousands of jobs. Even without compulsory redundancies, job losses mean more dangerous railways for workers and passengers, fewer skilled jobs and fewer apprenticeships for young people. The same goes for every other industry.

There is no need to accept the loss of skilled and experienced roles. Any worker whose post is made redundant should be offered redeployment and re-training at the equivalent grade or better. **Share out the work with no loss of pay** to win a 35-hour week for all.

Public ownership

The argument that the pandemic has dramatically reduced commuter railway use is overstated. But in any case, tackling climate change, reducing pollution, and improving infrastructure for work and leisure requires a dramatic expansion of railways and public transport, not a reduction.

The Tories want to blame unions for the railways’ problems. But the government and bosses aren’t interested in modernisation if it hurts their profits. The railway is not run as a public service — it is run in the interest of private profit. The fight to defend jobs and conditions must go hand in hand with the fight to kick out the profiteers, and **return the railway to public ownership, run under the control of workers and passengers**, and funded

by taxing the rich.

Spread the action

RMT workers have shown the way forward. But to smash the Tory pay cap we need to coordinate our action. In every town and borough, **action committees should be formed** by delegates from trade union, workplaces, and working class communities. These can start by promoting the aims of the strike, fundraising, and organising delegations to picket lines.

As well as supporting the strike, action committees can form the basis for organising rank and file union members across the movement to maximise recruitment, turnout, and votes for action in their own ballots.

Everyone recognises the need for a united fightback. The TUC should be bringing the unions together, co-ordinating ballots and campaigns. But we can’t wait for them. We need to be prepared to act with the leaders when they fight — and without them if they won’t. That means **organising a rank and file movement** across the unions to agitate for common claims and joint action.

We all know what is at stake. That’s why the refusal of the Labour Party leadership to back the strike is so shameful. They should not be allowed off the hook. We need to use every appearance in the media to demand Starmer and the shadow cabinet back the strikes. Let’s unite to fight for:

- Inflation-proof pay: 1% for 1%!
- No job losses: share out the work with no loss of pay!
- £15 an hour or 15% for all!
- Nationalise rail, mail and utilities without compensation for the profiteers!
- Form delegate-based committees of action to organise solidarity and spread the strikes!

After the TUC demo: co-ordinate the strikes to beat inflation.

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ON SATURDAY 18 June, tens of thousands of people marched through central London to demand calling for pay rises to beat inflation, better working conditions, and tax rises for the rich to fund education, health, and environmental reforms.

Railway workers in the RMT union who will be striking over three days this week received huge cheers on arrival at the rally in Parliament square. Teachers and postal workers who are preparing for action mobilised large contingents, as did many other unions across the public and private sector.

Trade union leaders called for united action to win pay increases that keep pace with inflation. Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: 'Workers have had enough. The trade union movement needs to be reborn. We need to act together.'

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, whose civil service members face 90,000 job cuts, said: 'If we all work together, march together and take industrial action together, we can get the pay rise we deserve.'

Ahead of the march, nurses' union the Royal College of Nursing pointed out the effect that more than a decade of real terms' pay cuts has had on staffing levels and the wellbeing of patients. With thousands of nurses struggling to feed their families or even fill up their cars to get to work, the union is calling for upcoming NHS pay deals to not only match inflation, but for 5 per cent above it.

Action

On Sunday, the Financial Times reported on the growing concern in

government about the risk of pay restraint triggering a wave of industrial action. A cabinet minister said: 'If we get this wrong, we risk going into a de facto general strike that will create further turmoil that risks grinding the whole economy to a halt.'

This week, 40,000 members of the RMT will stage three 24-hour strikes against proposed job cuts and for pay rises that keep pace with inflation. The government, which controls the money, has refused to negotiate. They know that isolating and defeating the RMT will break the momentum of upcoming public sector pay ballots. That's why it's vital that activists mobilise the widest possible support for the strike: visit picket lines, expose the government's lies, and campaign for solidarity among the public.

Rebuild our movement

The demonstration showed workers are determined to prevent pay, jobs and living standards being cut to protect the employers' profits or balance the government's books. Activists need to organise now to turnout large votes for action in upcoming pay ballots. But mandates and one-day strikes will not be enough to win.

Our movement is on the defensive. At British Gas and P&O, the bosses have imposed big defeats on well-organised sections of workers. Saturday's

demonstration was the largest for many years — but it could have been bigger. Despite the efforts of grassroots activists, promotion of the demonstration by the TUC and some unions was lukewarm at best.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch challenged Labour to 'stand up and fight with us or get out of the way'. But Keir Starmer, leader of the party to which most TUC unions are affiliated stayed away. Blairite leadership contender Wes Streeting, who recently apologised to the shadow cabinet for publicly supporting the strikes, posed for selfies with TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady.

We must learn the lessons from the 2011 pensions' dispute which saw two million workers walk out in the biggest strike for decades — only for the TUC and Unison to agree a rotten sell-out with the coalition government.

To win real pay rises for tens of millions of low paid workers, to cap bills and rents, to prevent inflation eroding our living standards, we need to build a movement from the ground up:

- In the unions, we need to build rank and file strength in the control disputes and negotiations. Union and workers' committees should form county, regional, national, local and national action.
- To mobilise workers, we need to class them into the unions and into the unions.

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