

Trades Union Congress London rally attendees speak to WSWS

Our reporters
19 June 2022

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those attending the Trades Union Congress march and rally in London on Saturday. A number of those we interviewed were local reps of trade unions involved in the recent spate of strike ballots and industrial action.

Jackie, a National Health Service admin worker from Nottingham in the East Midlands said, “I think the government is trying to break the RMT [Rail, Maritime and Transport union] as they are seen as the strongest union. This is all about overturning terms and conditions. It will be very detrimental for all workers if they are able to succeed. This is a fight against the government.

“It is all about the government enrichment of best friends and donors to the tune of billions of pounds. Look at what happened with the PPE for COVID, £4 billion worth being destroyed. The private companies made a fortune.”

Laura, who works in local government in Nottingham, added, “The only way to describe it is criminal. They are now putting the equipment from the COVID testing centres such as the tents in landfill sites! We have to make a stand now. If we don't it will be far harder for future generations.”

John, a rail cleaner for South Eastern railway employed by Churchill, told us, “We've been on 22 days of strikes, and we'll be out for a lot longer, because Churchill isn't moving. £9.90 [an hour], no sick pay, no travel. It's time to get rid of them.

“There's a lot at stake. What's at stake is our future. If we back down now, there's a contract coming in for four years, then we aren't going to win anything if we don't stay resolute now. We have to stay strong, and we have to keep fighting.

“[Transport Secretary] Grant Shapps has come out

and said he wants to smash the RMT, the rail workers. Come and smash us then because we aren't going anywhere!”

John continued, “Let's get rid of [Prime Minister Boris] Johnson. He's a liar. He's been sacked from every job he's been in. Let's make it one more. The man is a vicious fool. He's the son of Trump, no different. Let's get rid.”

Asked his thoughts on the Labour Party, he replied, “Keir Starmer is a Sir! Labour needs to get back to what it says on the tin: Labour, workers!”

When our reporter explained that Labour is a party of big business and a new party of the working class is needed to be built, John replied, “It might well take another movement. And if that is the case then Labour needs to get rid of their name, because they're not for the Labour movement anymore. And today proves it. Where are they? I've seen one milling around, [Corbynite] Diane Abbott. She doesn't even come close to what we want. Let's get change, proper change.

“We want a decent pay rise. £9.90 an hour is a poxy wage. And everything is going up, so it doesn't cover it. We don't get sick pay, after a pandemic. We don't get free travel to and from work. But if we're directly employed by the railway, then we would. We're shafted from every which end. But it's their trains we clean.

“I've seen three different employers. And I'll see the back of all of them. Ten years I've been here. They'll go before I go. I find it patronising when someone says, 'find another job.' Okay, I get another job. Someone takes my job and they're in the same position.”

Phil, a station worker in Brixton, London and an RMT industrial rep, said, “We're fighting against 600 job losses on stations, attacks against our terms and

conditions, and also attacks against our pensions. There's an attack on the rail industry. Jobs, pay freeze and running down the railway. Like anything else, it's about making as much money as they can for the shareholders.

"It's a big battle between the railways and the government. It's a weak government, but we need the whole labour movement on our side. We're getting a lot of support from the rank-and-file labour movement.

"We want to protect our jobs, get a pay rise in line with inflation, and to ensure there are no redundancies. In the grander scale, if we win then it's a real win for the whole labour movement. We could bring the government down and revitalise the labour movement. That's certainly an aim for people I know."

Sandy Fraser, a rail worker from Scotland said, "There are thousands of Network Rail jobs under threat. They are looking to bring in agency staff as scabs. So, I think we've got to take a stand.

"The thing is, they are demonising train drivers for asking for a decent wage, but what about oil companies and electricity companies?" In relation to the recent mass sackings at P&O ferries, where 800 workers lost their jobs with no notice, he said, "It's a bad road to go down. One company gets away with that kind of nonsense and they all will try it."

Jim, a worker in Hackney Council in London spoke about the prospect of a movement against the Johnson government: "I think workers should be more organised. The rail, the buses, all the unions should be one thing, mobilise the whole thing together."

A member of the Unite union, he said, "We're doing trade councils, Hackney trade council, Newham trade council, where all of these people have come together to start the fight back. We're talking about coordinating stuff as we go forward. It's no use one union going and another not going. It has to be everyone, the whole lot, to bring this government down."

Asked about the situation facing workers in Hackney, he said, "We have three unions in Hackney, Unite, GMB and Unison. We balloted for strike action. We [Unite] were the only people who got over the line GMB didn't even have a ballot.

"We haven't had a decent pay rise since 2010. We've got recession coming again. We're going to pay again. Public sector workers pay every time. Austerity—public sector. COVID—public sector. Recession—public

sector."

Asked his thoughts on workers organising struggles on a rank-and-file basis, he said, "That's good idea. Any committee that brings workers together is a good thing."

Lisa Hyland, a teacher and rep for the National Education Union, said of the rail strikes, "I definitely support them. I don't know how I am going to get to and from school, but I definitely support them and I think that we all should be pushing back even more. When they were on the radio, they [rail workers] kind of said 'We just won't give in' and I think teachers should have a bit more of that."

Asked her thoughts on a unified strike of all workers, she said, "I think we are here to represent all public sector workers. I think it's really key that we don't all branch off. It's really important to get together and say we are all frontline; we've all been through the pandemic. We've been given a very hard time, even though we were going to school every day. We were doing all frontline work so."

Newt, a student, said, "The money spent on war every year could be going into more developed major issues [that] we're facing in this country. So, I'm thoroughly anti-war and against the war in Ukraine.

"I believe that an anti-war movement has to be developed, because we simply can't let this continue, and it could have been prevented years or decades ago.

"The Tories were the ones who had the power to create [government] bills. But I also believe that Labour is definitely guilty in a lot of their responses, especially people like Keir Starmer."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact