Workers in Sheffield, Manchester and London speak on the national rail strike

“I support the strike and we need to take wider action and prepare for a general strike.”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters attended the Orgreave Anniversary Rally in South Yorkshire on Saturday to speak with demonstrators about the upcoming national rail strike. The event commemorates the June 18, 1984 “Battle of Orgreave” during the year-long miners’ strike. Police violently attacked a mass picket of miners of the British Steel coking plant, injuring well over 100 and charging 95 with riot, unlawful assembly and other offences.

A former miner, Michael, who worked at Dinnington and was involved in the 1984-85 strike, said that he supported the rail workers’ strike:

“For years the workers have been supressed, since the defeat of the mine workers. We were the most militant workers at the time and that’s why [Conservative Prime Minister] Thatcher had to try and destroy us. Now they are trying to destroy all workers who are fighting back. What they [Johnson government] are saying about the rail workers as ‘the enemy within’, I can see the parallels. The unions, TUC [Trades Union Congress] were responsible for our defeat. The rail workers can’t allow that to happen. So many workers are now striking as they are fed up of being attacked all the time when the rich are just getting richer.”

Michael agreed that the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union will attempt to sell out the struggle and opposed negotiations with the bosses when none of their demands are being met. “I can see they are going to have a big scabbing operation, like they did with the miners. This must not happen. Workers and communities must unite and defend them. Their struggle is our struggle.”

Sam, a student science teacher, said of the rail strike, “I support all workers who want to take strike action to defend their livelihoods. I went into teaching as there is nothing else out there and I need to work to support my family. I know that it is really tough in education, with cuts and lack of funding. So many workers are being hit with the cost-of-living crisis. We need to unite against this government which is throwing people into poverty while they accumulate millions.

“I agree with an international approach. I always thought the unions were so ineffective and also did very little to protect their members, like during the pandemic. Companies organise worldwide, so it makes absolute sense that we should as well.”

WSWS reporting teams also spoke with rail workers in Manchester and London.

A conductor in Manchester said he opposed the government’s calls for strike breaking legislation. “Polls have been carried out recently showing that of the 47,000 polled, 85 percent supported the right to strike.

“We were key workers and had to come into work throughout COVID, which could have killed our families. We were not furloughed. The company made £200 million profits.

“I have attended meetings with management where there has been nothing meaningful said about pay bargaining.

“I would support wider action because workers who have problems in other industries should support each other.”

A train driver said, “The government are saying the

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footfall on trains is lower after COVID and this is one of the excuses they are using, saying there is no demand. Yet I am driving full trains.

"I think I am paid well. At the same time prices are going up and I am finding it difficult to pay the bills and put diesel in the car."

A revenues collections worker told our reporters, "I support the strike and we need to take wider action and prepare for a general strike. We've got to take action across the board with other workers, warning them about what is going to happen."

He added, "I cannot support either the Tory or Labour Party. I listen to Prime Ministers Questions and it's just a game for them. They looked after all their mates with the PPE contracts in the pandemic."

A younger rail worker commented, "There have been no safety features put in place since lifting lockdown. The unions have done nothing."

In Wimbledon, London, a Network Rail worker pointed out that they had "all worked through the COVID crisis and received no extra pay or recognition" and that "many workers died unnecessarily."

He explained the government's Great British Railways plan would lead "at least 1,500 experienced workers to lose their jobs," many of whom had "worked on the network for decades." He worried that the people's health and safety would be put at risk.

Another rail worker at London Bridge station said, "the cost-of-living crisis is running out of control, and we are left with no option but to strike." He added that management had been training "temporary staff with no hands-on experience" to work on the strike days, voicing serious concerns for passenger safety.

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