Workers and campaigners speak in support of the UK rail strike

Our reporters
22 August 2022

The national rail strikes in the UK have won broad support in the working class, who see rail workers as giving a lead to a growing fightback against the employers and the government. Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with several who came out last week to show solidarity at rallies and pickets in Sheffield and London.

Retired teacher Jane and teaching assistant Jo attended a rally for the rail strikes in **Sheffield** town centre. They told the WSWS the strikers "are the only people who are showing any opposition. The Labour Party is absolutely rubbish. They've got no answers, they're not attracting people, they've not got a way forward for people."

Speaking on the prospect of a general strike, Jane said, "You can see it building, and this is a glimmer of hope in what's happening generally, but it needs to be built on.

"I think young people will want it to grow, because I think young people are completely disillusioned with parliamentary politics. Think about how many young people [former Labour leader Jeremy] Corbyn attracted—well they've all dissipated but they're still out there, they still want change. Particularly young people in the green movement with what's happening to the climate—that's their future! And the government's not giving them one at the moment, nobody is."

On Corbyn's capitulation before the Blairites, Jane said, "That's always going to happen with the Labour Party. It was always going to happen because the Labour Party is wedded to the system that we've already got, and the system that we've already got is broken."

Jo added, "So is Corbyn as well, he's wedded to that system. He was always going to believe in Labour, and I think those 'left' MPs are still going to be with him in the Labour Party. They won't break away. It *is* a dead end, the Labour Party."

Especially since the pandemic, said Jane, "public services generally have just crumbled before your eyes. In the NHS it's ridiculous, on the front line the nurses and others who worked there have left because they can't stand it any more. It's not the job that they went in to do."

She opposed the enormous handouts to the rich during the pandemic because "clearly it doesn't trickle down, does it? Or else we wouldn't have food banks, people in work using food banks. We wouldn't have people who were homeless. This country is the fifth biggest economy in the world, and it's a disgrace really, public services are a complete disgrace."

In **London**, Richard, a campaigner with Islington Homes for All, came to support rail strikers at Euston station. "I'm here on a picket because I want to support the cause." He explained the need to "get together en masse and try to do things in a group. That's the only way to fight them [the government and the employers]."

Richard linked the rail workers' struggle with the struggle for affordable and safe housing. Comparing the threats to replace striking workers with agency staff and to cut safety-critical jobs through "modernisation" with the deregulation which enabled the Grenfell Tower disaster, he said that for many rail workers he'd spoken to "There's the pay, but it's also all about safety. The government wants to shrink the size, have a small state, and in order to do that you have to cut back on maintenance.

"Cut back on maintenance and you'll get another Grenfell. Do you really want a train carrying 800 people to come off the rails and a lot of people die

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because of shoddy maintenance?”

Describing the cost-of-living crisis, he said, “Every day there’s a new twist to make it even more difficult for people to live. We know there’s going to be a fuel price hike, it’s colossal. And now we’re talking about the price of food going up as well. The phrase used to be ‘heat or eat’. It’s no longer ‘heat or eat’, it’s ‘I can’t heat and I can’t eat.’

“And this is the crisis that this government doesn’t understand. They don’t know what it’s like to be poor. [Conservative Party leadership candidate] Rishi Sunak—his wife’s a billionaire. They’re not in touch with reality.

“Already this week the National Health Service has said with the cost of living crisis—the fuel and the food—that’s going to impact the NHS because they’ve got people coming into the hospital who are unwell because they can’t eat. They’re already making beds available for starving people! We’re supposed to be the 6th wealthiest nation on the planet and yet we’ve got beggars on the street, we’ve got food banks!”

“The reality is the rich are getting richer, we saw it all the way through COVID. It’s the way the commercial model works—it just pushes all the money to the top and they get richer.”

The Tory government, said Richard, “cannot fix the problem because they created it” and “Starmer hasn’t got a clue how to fix it either.”

He linked Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer’s ban on frontbench MPs visiting picket lines with the government’s own attacks on the right to strike. “The working man has only got two things he can do: withdraw his labour and picket. That’s got to be allowed. It’s like free speech.” As a result of the new Police Bill, “you’re still allowed to protest but you have to be silent. What is that? They’re trying to take away the only thing people have.”

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