

# 170,000 UK rail, post and port workers strike in largest mobilisation this year

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Saturday's day of action, billed by unions as a "megastrike", brought the UK's rail, postal system and much of the nation's container traffic to a halt.

The strikes were held alongside demonstrations organised by Enough is Enough (EiE), the pressure group founded by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Labour MPs allied to former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn. Tens of thousands rallied collectively in major cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow.

They were the first coordinated strikes since the start of a summer strike wave that has seen workers in key sectors fight for higher pay to combat record inflation and oppose the tearing up of jobs, conditions and pension rights.

Postal workers struck for 48-hours starting on Friday. Strike action by Unite union members in Liverpool and Felixstowe ports hit 60 percent of the UK's container traffic.

Around 170,000 workers were involved in Saturday's strikes all told. This included 115,000 postal workers, 54,000 rail workers and 2,600 port workers. The strikes were called by the CWU, RMT, Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) and Unite the Union.

Rail strikes hit the Network Rail infrastructure group and 14 train operating companies (TOCs). Around 40,000 RMT member were out, as were 9,000 ASLEF drivers at 12 TOCs, while 5,000 TSSA members were mobilised. Unite's few hundred rail industry members were also striking.

No trains ran between the UK's major cities, with only 11 percent of scheduled services operating nationally. The strike hit Transport for London, with no services running on the London Overground. The action had a knock-on effect Sunday, with service disrupted for the opening day of the ruling Conservative Party conference in Birmingham.

The main Enough is Enough rally was held outside London's King's Cross station, joined by an estimated 4,000 people.

CWU leader Dave Ward told the rally that "more action" was to come and that "more coordination" was needed. He declared, "the reality is that the Tories and bosses and super-rich have been co-ordinating massive attacks on working class people for years and years. The difference is now we're on the march."

This was empty demagoguery. The CWU and other unions have divided workers and suppressed combined action throughout the "summer of discontent" and called just a single day of coordinated protest on Saturday to let off steam. Ward studiously avoided any reference to a general strike to bring down the Tories. Instead, the CWU and RMT are seeking to use limited strikes to negotiate a rotten settlement with Royal Mail and the Tory government.

Ward made clear the central aim of EiE is to suffocate rising anger and channel it behind the Labour Party. He portrayed Sir Keir Starmer as a potential saviour, a leader who has denounced strikes, banned shadow ministers from attending picket lines, and ruthlessly purged left-wing members from the party. Ward promoted the illusion that Labour can be pressured to the left, stating, "We're going to make sure that we drive Labour into the right place to stand up for working people."

Labour was onboard with bringing the rail and energy companies back into public ownership, Ward claimed. He boasted of a motion he moved at the Labour Party conference "to make Keir understand that we were bringing Royal Mail back into public ownership as well". This is a pipedream.

Ward's speech was a declaration that workers must place their hopes in the election of a Labour government, "Keir if you do the wrong thing, then we'll call you out and we'll keep doing that; you do the right thing, you

stand with working people, and we'll stand with you, and you will win the next election."

Jeremy Corbyn was given pride of place as the opening speaker at the rally. It is two years since Starmer booted Corbyn out of the parliamentary party. This was the outcome of Corbyn's own cowardice in refusing to challenge the domination of Labour's right-wing, despite his mandate from hundreds of thousands of Labour members to do so in 2015-16. Corbyn's rout at the 2019 general election, and his handing the leadership to Starmer, was the result of his capitulation to the Blairites.

Corbyn performed his designated role at Saturday's rally, refusing to criticise Starmer. He did not even mention the Labour Party, avoiding any reference to its conference just one week earlier, the most right-wing in history, which began with Starmer leading the singing of *God Save the King*.

Corbyn's speech was a paean to the union bureaucracy, telling demonstrators, "What are we? We're unions." He called on "all the young people" to join a trade union, stating, "we're united in our utter determination to win all of these disputes and get rid of the Tory government and the ideology of free-market economics"—an ideology that is shared by Labour, no less than the Tories.

He concluded with a vague call for "the ideology of unity together to achieve a decent future together for all of our communities." But he made clear the focus must be on the election of a Labour government headed by Starmer, tweeting after the event, "As wages fall while profits soar, our message is clear. We are not here to manage. We are not here to broker. We are here to win."

No-one is less qualified than Jeremy Corbyn to "win" anything.

National Education Union leader Kevin Courtney, who is suppressing strike action by his 500,000 members to fight the public sector pay freeze said, "the mood has shifted", adding, "Mick Lynch is a god, Dave Ward is a god."

Mick Lynch, RMT General Secretary and the figurehead for Enough is Enough, closed the rally. His was a call for "unity" that was an appeal to Britain's middle class pseudo-left groups to join as one with the labour and trade union bureaucracy. "We are part of a progressive movement. Whatever we've had in the past, our differences, whether it's based on an ideology or where we're from, we have to put that to one side."

He continued, "We have to tell any politician, any of them, whether they are a Tory, whether they are a Liberal, whether they are Labour, or whether they are a national

politician in the nations, we are going to put you under manners. We will not accept cuts. We will not accept austerity, no matter who's delivering it whether it's in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff, all the cities, and all the parish councils for that matter."

Lynch avoided any criticism of Starmer or of the right-wing character of the Labour Party conference. He, Ward and their fellow bureaucrats share Starmer's appeal to nationalism, patriotism and corporatism. Within hours of the Queen's death the RMT and CWU had called off strike action "out of respect" for the 10-day period of "national mourning". They especially agree with Starmer's declaration that he is "not just pro-business, I want to partner with business, invite them to drive forward our modern industrial strategy: a true partnership between government, business and trade unions."

In a TV interview Friday, Lynch stated, "The people need to be out in the streets and demanding change from this government, and if necessary, a change of government entirely". As Starmer advances Labour as a responsible government, a defender of fiscal discipline amid the collapse of the pound and a financial meltdown triggered by the Tories' minibudget, Lynch and company are the "left" flank of an operation aimed at promoting Labour and protecting British capitalism from an insurgent working class.

The rally confirmed the assessment made by the Socialist Equality Party that Enough is Enough is "a political fraud in service to the Labour Party and TUC". As we explained, its central message is that "the working class can protest and complain, but they must not take up a political struggle against the bourgeoisie and its parties."

The statement concluded, "The working class is entering into a decisive struggle against the British bourgeoisie. This demands the development of an industrial and political offensive, not only against the Tories, but against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy which together police the working class on behalf of big business, the financial oligarchy and the state."



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