

UK rail and postal workers speak during Saturday's joint strike action

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to workers involved in **Saturday's strikes** in Britain. These saw the almost complete shutdown of the UK's rail network, alongside a national strike by 115,000 postal workers, and industrial action at two of the country's largest ports, Liverpool and Felixstowe.

At the train drivers picket line at **London's King's Cross station**, a picket and ASLEF union rep said, "The government has not moved one iota, but everyone knows the situation the government is in... We've had 12 years of austerity, and this is just another excuse for more cuts and more poor service for the customers really.

Asked about the increased war spending being imposed at the expense of workers' pay and conditions, the driver replied, "What are we doing in the world? Peace has to be answer. War doesn't solve anything. The rich get richer and the arms companies make money, money, money and here we are just fighting for a pay rise."

At **Euston station**, a striking customer service worker employed by Avanti said, "If we don't do something about it the whole country is going to have poor conditions. If we don't stop people treating working people like this other people won't get the chance to earn the pay they deserve as well.

"They want to cut jobs, they want to cut pay, they want to make us work more hours for less money. They want to take us off of our contracts and give us a new contract where we work more for less. We haven't had a pay rise for several years, even though the cost of living is spiralling out of control."

Joe, a train driver with 16 years' experience said, "We are here fighting what is a real-terms pay cut, year on year. We haven't had a pay rise for three years.

"We all worked through COVID and because we did this the government is now saying that *we* cost the country £600 per household! We were called 'key workers' at the time. Freight drivers were running supplies up and down the country. We as passenger drivers were running doctors, nurses other key workers up and down the country. For them to turn around and say we cost the country money and that is why we don't deserve a pay rise now, when they are giving away tax cuts to the richest, is ridiculous. Everyone deserves a pay rise to keep up with the cost of living."

Asked his thoughts about the rail strikes, Joe said, "There

have been no concessions on their part. They want to break the unions. What has been interesting is that the public are generally in support of strikers. The whole nation is struggling. If and when the nurses ballot and strike, they would have the support of the nation. The fact that barristers are out on strike, that should tell the government something."

John, a train guard on the RMT picket at **Sheffield rail station**, said the Tory's assault on workers had accelerated a fightback by workers. "Hundreds and thousands of people are taking strike action from different industries because of the budget.

"There's nothing we can report on our dispute because they are not making any offers. We've got an attack against pensions, pay rises that are way under inflation as we've had no pay rise for three years. We've got terms and conditions being attacked and compulsory redundancies coming in.

"If a few thousand people can elect who our current prime minister is, I think it's time for a change. They don't seem to be able to run their own party never mind resolve issues regards the dispute. I want a change of government.

"When we first went into dispute you had [Labour leader Sir] Keir Starmer banning MPs going onto the picket lines, which doesn't bode well with striking workers, especially when the Labour Party was built by the trade union movement."

WSWS reporters explained about the ongoing dispute by US railroad workers. John responded, "If workers want to collectively take action to better their own working practices and their own pay then I will 100 percent get behind that. It doesn't matter what industry they are in or what country. We are all working class people and we all deserve a decent living."

At **Manchester Piccadilly** station, a driver said, "It's a fascist state we live in, in all but name. It makes the [1979-91] Thatcher government look left. The National Health Service is under attack, it's being sold off in little bits and pieces.

"It's been a long time since the Thatcher generation, a lot of people aren't used to strikes and protests. That's supposedly what the TUC [Trades Union Congress] is for, but it's a non-functioning body, a talking shop, like the Labour party. There's no political party that represents what we do.

"We were classed as essential workers in the pandemic. The

money is there to pay us all, but it's in the wrong hands. The royal family own 10 to 15 castles why not turn them into homeless shelters? Waving the Union Jack doesn't pay the bills.”

Another driver commented, “The Labour Party doesn't want to talk about the attacks on the working class. I'm worried about the anti-strike laws. It doesn't take much before you end up with the far right. We have to disrupt things.

“The lasting legacy of capitalism is COVID, the energy crisis and the state of the railways. It's failed on three counts.”

At a picket line in **Bradford**, Sue, a postal worker with 35 years' experience said workers were striking as, “The employers are making money, they made a profit of £158 million, they made money during the pandemic, they have awarded themselves a massive bonus. But there is nothing left for us, the workers.”

Royal Mail's pay offer is tied to changes in terms and conditions so “if you go sick you would just get sick pay, £90 a week, starting later and finishing later, and people with kids would have to pay for childcare which they can't afford. They are moving our hours forward, just like that. They want us to bank our hours rather than pay us overtime. We would be working longer hours in the winter. Potentially you have got young women carrying a bag of mail at night in the dark at risk. They want to make us into an Uber style parcel delivery. They don't care about the letters anymore

“People are angry, people can't afford to heat their homes, can't afford to put food on the table. Nurses are going to food banks to put food on the table, it is ridiculous. It is like history is repeating itself. You had a flu pandemic in 1918, we have just had COVID. There was a general strike in 1926. There is anger in this country. The rail workers, the firemen even the nurses are thinking of going on strike. We are on strike, BT have been on strike. People's terms and conditions are being eradicated. People can't afford to put food on the table. Pensioners will be dying in their homes from hypothermia.

“People are angry, the nation is behind us. I would say it is time now for everyone to come together, enough is enough.”

Asked about Labour Party's refusal to back strikers taking action against the destruction of their pay and conditions, Sue said. “It is not the workers' party I was brought up to think it was. It was the Labour Party that part privatised the Royal Mail. What we need is a party for the workers. What we want is equality to be able to go to work and earn a decent wage to feed our families. That is all people are asking for, yet they are taking that away.

“People need to stand together, the people as a whole... We are going to see civil uprising. If people have nothing what are people going to do?”

On a picket line in **Kiln Farm, Milton Keynes**, a Communication Workers Union rep said, “They are giving us 2 percent when you consider the rate of inflation which is constantly going up. There is a further 1.5 percent for

acceptance of changes in working practices and a further 2 percent for unstated productivity improvements.

“In the terms and conditions changes they want to remove our allowances. They want to have people starting up to three hours later, which will affect a lot of people at Royal Mail who took this job on knowing that they would get an early start and early finish as it helped with childcare. Of course anyone now who has to do the school pickups will have to consider after school clubs which is going to be an extra cost. When we have late starts and late finishes it will affect those who rely on doing afternoon overtime or doing extra deliveries or doing collections. They won't be able to do them and will lose money there.

“Some people that do extra work will be a couple of hundred pounds a week worse off. They want to turn Sunday into a normal working day, the one day a week where people that do work six days a week have family time. They want to take away the Sunday supplement. Those that want to work overtime get an extra £5.30 an hour on Sunday.

“We worked throughout the whole of the pandemic, the packet volumes were astronomical. Workers at Royal Mail for over 30 years said they had never seen volumes like it. Every single day throughout the pandemic it was like Christmas. Royal Mail recorded record profits of £950 million last year, the CEO and directors awarded themselves massive bonuses and thousands of shares each. We just want to be treated fairly.

“If there was a general strike and all CWU branches got together, you have got the barristers out on strike, you got the train drivers. It would have significant impact on the country if everybody in separate industrial actions got together.”



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