

Striking workers speak out at UK rallies: “This is the only thing we have got, the right to vote and the right to strike.”

Our reporters
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WSWS reporters spoke to striking workers and protesters at rallies in UK cities during nationwide strike action by 500,000 workers on Wednesday. Thousands attended “Protect the right to Strike” rallies called by the Trades Union Congress.

Zarah is an English teacher. She said, “Pay is not the main issue for me. In every school that I have worked in, you see the complete normalisation of workloads being far too high and teachers working a fifty, sixty hour week. Stress levels are incredibly high. Lots of people are having mental health issues.

“Personally, I want to go into educational policy. Long term there’s huge reforms need to take place in education. Right now, I think pay is one way to rectify the situation. In Britain we’ve got more qualified teachers outside of schools than inside of schools.”

Lisa is a cleaner at DHL, on minimum wage and struggling to raise a family.

“Everyone needs to come together against the government and what they are trying to do to stop us protesting and the right to strike. I am in favour of a general strike. They are making the rich richer and the poor poorer and taking money out of our mouths. We’re living week to week and prices are increasing but wages aren’t going anywhere. I’m worse off than I was fifteen years. How many hours are you meant to work?”

Jennifer said, “I’m currently doing supply teaching. I was a trained as a maths teacher and so I’m an example of the one in five people leaving the profession because of the strain. It got to the point where I couldn’t face going into the classroom, even getting up in the morning, because there was just too much being asked of me.

“The strikes show that the government has completely underfunded and cut out the foundations of public services. This really hits the working class. It was the bankers who puts us into recession. Now they’re getting their bonuses back, and we’re dropping down in terms of our quality of life because they’re not willing to pay us what we deserve.

At the Sheffield demonstration and rally in Devonshire Green, **Gwilym**, a supply teacher at Staveley, Chesterfield, said, “I’m all for a general strike against this government. The Strikes Bill is a dangerous exercise in dictatorial power. This country already has the most aggressive anti-strike laws in the G7 countries.

“I have little confidence in the TUC [Trades Union Congress] and Labour Party. You cannot have a ‘workers’ movement’

without political representation. The answer to what workers face in the twentieth century under capitalism is not the return to the corporatism of the 1970’s. It should not be about working with the government or pressurising them. They have responded to pressure by trying to take away our right to strike.

“We need political demands to oppose any capitulation and instead of simply separate economic struggles. These would include workplace democracy and control over the economy against the profit interests of the rich and corporations. We should ally ourselves with workers overseas who are facing the same issues.”

Gemma, a teacher from High Storrs school, said, “For me this strike is about the future of teaching. There is a crisis of recruitment and retention and children are being let down.

“I left the NASUWT to join the NEU so I could strike. The government is trying to take away our democratic right to strike, which is the only way we can make ourselves heard.

“My favourite line out of *V for Vendetta* is ‘People shouldn’t be afraid of their government. Government should be afraid of their people’. When you do become afraid of your government that is the time to take action.

“The government are saying they cannot find more money for education, but billions were shelled out for faulty PPE. It is OK when it goes into the purses of their sponsors and backers, but not for the future education of children.”

Robert, an art & design teacher, said, “I’ve worked in education for 20 years and I’ve seen the changes from the Blair years through to the ‘Age of Austerity.’ Conditions are getting harder each year.

“The last time we had a pay rise was many years ago. I don’t consider a 1 or 2 percent salary offer to be a genuine pay increase because when compared to inflation it’s a pay cut in real terms.

“Schools are struggling to employ staff as there are fewer Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) coming through the system, particularly in subjects such as maths and science. There are too many staff having to teach those subjects who aren’t appropriately trained.

“The lack of money in the school system is pushing people away. There are better salaries and careers available in the private sector.

“The new anti-strike legislation is disgusting and is typical of

this government. They're so out of touch with the people."

Helen, a social care worker for adults with learning disabilities, said, "It's about time we did something about the attacks on workers. We need to get as many people out marching as we can, shouting about the issues."

"People are scared about where cuts to the NHS will lead. Something needs to be done about that. I'm anti-Tory and I oppose austerity measures. We've had twelve years of misrule that has led us to this situation of mass strikes. I'm hoping it's time for change."

"I've worked in social care since 1996. I've seen the effect of cuts in local authority funding and the impact on care provision in terms of lack of available healthcare teams, day services closing, and care units being disbanded. We're running crisis intervention only and it's scary the massive impact it's having on vulnerable people."

"The new anti-strike laws will make the situation worse. They claim it's for safety but we know that's not the real issue. It's about preventing strikes and pickets. They're first targeting the strong unions such as nurses, rail, and firefighters, but they'll extend the laws."

"The Labour Party is not a real opposition to the Tories and Starmer hasn't supported strikers."

In Manchester, thousands of protesters gathered in St. Peter's Square. **Rebecca**, a primary school teacher, said, "If we have children with special needs who might need a one-to-one support worker, there isn't any funding. We've been picketing this morning outside our school, giving out leaflets that have been translated into different languages to explain the issues."

Daisy, a primary school teacher, said, "The Tories are throwing everyone under the bus, destroying every kind of ability for us to work properly, and do our job. They are all for themselves, they look after their own."

Josceline, a reception teacher in a primary school, said, "We're waiting for the union to call everyone out. Everyone should strike."

Jan, also a primary school teacher, said, "The reason the strike is causing disruption is that it's such an important profession. We are treated sometimes like babysitters, but if we were paid like babysitters we'd probably get more money because child care is incredibly expensive!"

As strikers gathered at Jubilee Square, one teacher explained, "I just feel that teachers are not getting supported or valued anymore. The pandemic showed that it's just 'get them into school', and we've become child minders and social workers. Yet our workload has extended, so everybody I know is working at night, on weekends. It's not just about pay but you think 'Why am I struggling?' I've been teaching 27 years, and I've seen the decline in morale in schools."

Prashan Raja is a PCS member working at the Land Registry. She said, "Under the Tory government there's been major cuts. With the cost of living increasing, our salaries are nowhere close to it. There'll have been a good turnout today, lots of different unions here as well. So, I think we would be for standing united with all the other unions."

At the Bristol rally, teacher Pete said, "There is unbelievable

complacency over how the whole education system is built on the good will of teachers going the extra mile, working evenings, weekends, etc.

"Teachers are doing this because we care about our children, but you feel taken for granted. You're just seen as a unit to be squeezed rather than an educated, caring professional."

A female teacher added, "We have not had any pay rises in 12 years and we've been given 0.1 percent out of the budget from schools unfunded, that's not a percentage we wanted to be paid to take it away from the children."

"Look who is on strike, the whole country is on strike. The government don't care. They're wealthy enough they don't know what normal people's lives are like. So, we do need to have a new government. We've got firefighters here, we've got Unite [union] here, all of the teachers, other strikes, junior doctors, the railway workers, nurses, the whole country is coming to a standstill. An industrial nation where the economy is shrinking when everybody else is growing. But the government is doing well and they are so totally corrupt. I think we are walking towards a general strike. We will have to wait and see what happens."

Raquel, a teaching assistant, said, "It is not just the money. We need more staff, more resources. Sometimes you end up taking money from your own pocket. It is getting worse all the time and I think it is a global problem. But specifically in the UK we have so many rights that we fought for and now they are taking them away. These anti-strike laws are so awful. This is the only thing we have got, the right to vote and the right to strike. What else are they going to take away from us?"

"I am from Spain, where you are allowed to have a general strike which everybody joins. For example, the health system is not just for health workers, it is for everybody. So we need to protect it. The health systems everywhere are being privatised. We are not customers, we are patients."

A striking civil servant said, "Anything less than inflation isn't a pay rise it's a pay cut. I have colleagues who are going to be below minimum wage when the minimum wage rate goes up because of the contracts they're on. I don't think that's fair."



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