

UK rail workers resume strike action as negotiations stall again

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Mick Lynch, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) joins the members of rail workers during a strike outside Euston station in London [File: AP Photo/Kin Cheung]?

London, January 4 (RHC)-- Railway workers across the UK have launched strikes, accusing the government of blocking rail operators from offering an acceptable proposal on job security, pay and working conditions. Many workers find themselves unable to make ends meet as surging inflation and 10 years of stagnant wage growth batter them and their families.

Among the workers' other concerns that were brought up over the months that this dispute has gone on are job security, with threatened cuts to some maintenance teams that could in turn impact negatively the safety of the networks, their passengers, and the people working on them.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) at Network Rail and 14 train operators are holding two 48-hour walkouts on Tuesday and Thursday, while drivers in the Aslef union will strike on Thursday. Passengers are being warned of "significant disruptions" to their journeys, with only a limited number of trains running.

The government has said it cannot afford to give public sector workers an inflation-matching rise, meaning there is no end in sight to what has been dubbed a new "winter of discontent" in reference to the industrial battles that gripped Britain in the late 1970s.

Nurses, airport staff and postal workers have also joined the action, demanding pay that keeps up with the inflation hovering around 40-year highs, reaching 10.7 percent in November. Teachers are slated to go on strike in Scotland next week.

A Department for Transport spokesperson said inflation-matching pay increases for public sector workers would cost everyone "more in the long term – worsening debt, fuelling inflation, and costing every household an extra 1,000 pounds (\$1,200)" -- adding that "there is a fair and reasonable pay offer on the table" that the union has chosen to ignore.

Aslef general secretary Mick Whelan told the PA news agency that the union is "in it for the long haul," adding: "We don't want to go on strike but the companies have pushed us into this place. "They have not offered our members a penny, and these are people who have not had an increase since April 2019."

The government has called on union bosses to return to the negotiating table, aware that the strikes are taking a heavy toll on businesses that rely on commuters, such as coffee shops and pubs in town centres. As well as teachers, driving instructors, bus drivers, nurses and ambulance services in Scotland are expected to take part in strike action this month.

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