

UK experiences worst rail disruption in decades as strikes resume

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People walk past closed gates outside Euston Station as a strike action by the railway staff restarts, October 1, 2022. (Photo by AFP)

London, October 2 (RHC)-- Britain's railway workers over the weekend kicked off a 24-hour strike, the biggest in decades, as walkouts resume following the mourning period for Queen Elizabeth II. Members of four trade unions began the protest action on Saturday.

The work stoppage created considerable disruption across Britain, with no direct services running between London and major cities including Edinburgh, Brighton and Newcastle. Only about 11% of normal schedules were in operation, as drivers and signallers went out on strike.

The RMT union expects more than 40,000 of its members who work at Network Rail and 16 train companies not to show up for work on Saturday. Joining them are 9,000 train drivers, working at 12 train companies. Similar strikes planned for last month were called off because of the mourning period after the death of the queen on September 8th.

The rail workers' main grievance has to do with salaries. They want a pay raise so as to keep pace with a decades-high inflation amid a cost-of-living crisis. Tens of thousands of staff in various industries — from the postal and legal systems to ports and telecommunications — have also gone on strike across Britain since the summer. Many rail workers are also set to strike again on Wednesday, October 5th, and on other potential dates later in the month.

Mick Lynch, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, apologized to people impacted by the strike, but blamed the government. "The government has brought this dispute on," he told the BBC. "They (put) the challenges down to us, to cut our jobs, to cut our pensions and to cut our wages against inflation."

The United Kingdom, with the inflation rate at a 40-year high of 9 percent in April, is struggling with a huge rise in the price of energy. Economists say Britain is expected to have the highest inflation among the counties of the Group of Seven (G-7) not just this year, but also in 2023 and 2024.

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