

UK rail unions reject offer from operators aimed at averting Christmas strikes

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A railway platform at Liverpool Street station during heavily reduced rail services on the third day of national rail strikes, in London, Britain, June 23, 2022. (File photo by Reuters)

London, December 5 (RHC)-- Britain's trade unions covering the transport sector have turned down an offer from train operators aimed at averting strikes over the Christmas period. The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) in a statement on Sunday said no to an offer from the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) representing train companies that sought to stop the repeated strikes over pay, working conditions, and job security for rail workers.

The RMT said the RDG offer, which included a pay hike of up to 8 percent for the staff over two years, would lead to huge job losses and called for an urgent meeting with bosses on Monday. RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch said the offer does not meet demands for securing a long-term agreement on job security, a fair salary increase, and better labor conditions for workers.

"We have rejected this offer as it does not meet any of our criteria for securing a settlement on long-term job security, a decent pay rise, and protecting working conditions," Lynch said in a statement. He hastened to add that if the plan is implemented, it would "not only mean the loss of thousands of jobs" because of the closure of ticket offices, which would "leave our railways chronically understaffed."

In the ongoing row over pay, working conditions, and job security for rail workers, industrial action is scheduled across four 48-hour periods: 13-14 December, 16-17 December, and 3-4 January as well as 6-7 January.

Responding on the matter, British Transport Secretary Mark Harper said in a statement, termed the situation "incredibly disappointing." "The situation is incredibly disappointing, and unfair to the public, passengers, and the rail workforce who want a deal," he said. "This deal will help get trains running on time."

Rail workers in Britain have staged several strikes this year, including the country's biggest strike in decades during the summer, pressing demands for better pay amid the simmering cost-of-living crisis.

Last week, the RMT said that more than 40,000 railway workers would stage strikes over December and January in their long-running row over pay, signaling travel disruption before and after the busy Christmas holiday period. Train companies also warned of travel disruption in the run-up to the Christmas holidays from the strikes.

British workers in various industries from lawyers to nurses, drivers, and airport ground personnel have held strikes this year as the country faces its highest inflation and worst cost-of-living crisis in generations.

So far, the workers' demand for a pay increase has been rejected by government officials, saying it could not afford high increases that match the soaring inflation, and even if it could, such monetary increases would further fuel inflation.

The government has also warned of a challenging winter if services stopped working, while drawing up plans to use more of its soldiers to cover for firefighters and other workers. Economists say the cost-of-living crisis has engulfed not only Britain but the entirety of Europe, with workers going on strike every now and then across the continent, disrupting people's livelihoods, especially during holidays.

They link the soaring living costs in Europe to the COVID-19 pandemic and the raging Ukraine war, which has partially affected all countries' economies across the entire world.



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