

UK railway workers stage nationwide strike as inflation worsens

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Striking rail workers at Tonbridge station in Kent [Anealla Safdar/Al Jazeera]

London, July 27 (RHC)-- Some 40,000 railway workers in the United Kingdom have staged a walkout over pay, job security and working conditions as the country battles its worst cost of living crisis in decades.

The nationwide 24-hour strike on Wednesday brought the rail network to a virtual standstill, with only one in five trains running.

Mick Lynch, general secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), said strikes were necessary as wages have failed to keep pace with UK inflation, currently at a 40-year high and set to worsen.

“Network Rail have not made any improvement on their previous pay offer and the train companies have not offered us anything new,” Lynch said. “The government need to stop their interference in this dispute so the rail employers can come to a negotiated settlement with us,” he added.

Wednesday’s strike comes after RMT staged a three-day walkout last month, the largest in 30 years. The government urged union bosses and train operators to resolve the dispute.

Transport minister Grant Shapps told Sky News that the workers’ “employers are the people who have the mandate to negotiate this.”

Rail services were expected to resume early on Thursday. London Underground trains and buses were running as normal, but Eurostar reduced the number of trains through the Channel Tunnel as a knock-on effect, despite its staff not joining the walkout.

The cost of living crisis presents a major challenge to foreign secretary Liz Truss and former finance minister Rishi Sunak, who are vying to replace Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a leadership contest.

Truss has promised a further crackdown on trade unions, after MPs approved a controversial plan earlier this month to replace strikers with agency workers.

UK inflation is currently at 9.4 percent and on course to keep rising. Energy bills have risen rapidly because of high oil and gas prices following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and they are projected to increase sharply again from October. Food prices have also surged as the war in Ukraine halted grain production and exports.

Britain is grappling with the highest inflation rate out of the Group of Seven countries, which includes the world’s advanced economies.

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