

Labour Protests and Strikes in Britain: The Sleeping Giant Stirs



A scene from wildcat strikes at Amazon warehouses

Internationalist Voice

Last summer, a wave of protests and labour strikes swept across Britain, some of which were outside the control of trade unions (wildcat strikes), which became known as the “Summer of Rage.” Once again, a new wave of labour strikes and protests took place across Britain, from the health and postal sectors to the railways and education. However, such demonstrations are not unique to Britain, but occur across Africa, America, Asia and Europe. The strikes by Tunisian transport workers, Spanish airline workers, Portuguese port workers, Iranian workers in various industries, German and French railway workers, South African food workers, American airport workers and so on represent only a small number of the labour protests. In other words, we are currently witnessing a resurgence of class struggle not only in Britain, but throughout the world.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending has reached a record number.[1] The important point is that this report covers the pre-war period of imperialist Ukraine, and following the war the costs have risen exponentially. Only Britain, in line with its warmongering policy, has so far given 2.3 billion pounds of military aid to Ukraine along with educational programmes, and has pledged that this warmongering (aid) will continue at the expense of the British working class.[2]

Following the Russia-Ukraine (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) imperialist war, the global bourgeoisie launched massive attacks on the living standards of the working class in order to finance its warmongering. The global working class is paying the price of the war with skyrocketing inflation and falling living standards. Inflation has reached double digits, not in the peripheral countries, but in the metropolis of capitalism, such as Britain.

Not in the peripheral capitalist countries, where the life of the working class and the lower strata of society is below the poverty line, but in modern and civilized Britain, many British families have to prioritize between having hot food, heating the house, etc. There are those who have none of these. Philip, a British citizen who is sick, alone and afraid that he will freeze to death in his house, called the British radio station London Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) and sobbingly related:

“I’ve been on my own for nine days, I’m in my home, I’m freezing cold.” Philip said: “I turned to a local food bank for help, everything is a closed door,” adding: “I don’t care about Labour, I don’t care about Conservative, I care about my own survival... I’m freezing, I’m going to freeze to death in my own home. This is just not me, I’m not a victim.” In response to Philip, the presenter answered: “You are not alone, Philip!”[3]

How do the working class and the lower strata of society in Britain become poorer by the day as the bourgeoisie attacks the standard of living? Only one case is mentioned which still dates back to before the Russia-Ukraine (NATO) war. According to the “London Economy” report, between 2011 and 2021, the real salary of nurses decreased by 6%, and the number of experienced nurses decreased by 20%.[4] In the recent protests, nurses have been demanding an increase of at least 17% in wages, which means only a 5% rise in real wages, including inflation.

The British government sent 1,200 soldiers into the community as strikebreakers to counter the strikes and to fill the gaps caused by the striking ambulance drivers and border workers.[5] Of course, bringing in 1,200 soldiers (strikebreakers) can also have a double message. Apart from breaking the strike, if the protests get out of control, a repressive force will intervene. The British bourgeoisie, which is known for its deceit and cunning, will use unconventional forms to suppress and defeat labour protests and strikes, and as a last resort will even employ police repression. However, the civilized and democratic prime minister of Britain has also emphasized its use with complete determination.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, true to his predecessor's "Iron Lady" tradition, has unsheathed his sword, insisting that he has met with police chiefs and that the police have his full support to resolutely crack down on any illegal protests. In other words, if the workers carry out serious demonstrations other than the protests and strikes controlled by the unions, the police will take off the mask of democracy and show their repressive and dirty nature, like the Islamic criminal bourgeois police. Rishi Sunak says:

"This afternoon I met police chiefs to make it clear that they have my full support in acting decisively to clamp down on illegal protests. The public have had enough of this disruption and those breaking the law should expect to feel the full force of it."[6]

The significance of the British labour protests and strikes is that the working class in the metropolitan capital, at the heart of one of the most belligerent bourgeoisies, is reacting to the collapse of its standard of living. The British bourgeoisie wants the British working class to make sacrifices in defence of democracy, so raising the head of the British working class is of particular importance. The Thatcher government inflicted severe defeats on the British working class, especially during the miners' strike, to the extent that the British proletariat has not been able to straighten its back.

Given the current global conditions, it is a very conceivable possibility that a strike on the US railroads will be declared illegal. The US House of Representatives has approved a bill by which the strike in the railway sector has been banned under the pretext that it will have destructive effects on the country's economy. The bill passed the Senate and was signed into law by Joe Biden. Following the legalization of this bill, the stock value of most railway companies increased by 2.5%. Of course, the bill had already reached an agreement between the unions and the government. A hundred thousand workers were supposed to strike. A strike in the railway sector and stoppage of trains in America could not only damage the American economy by 2 billion dollars per day, but could also cause problems for the American war machine.

Although the American bourgeoisie managed to stop a strike in one of the key industries, the railways, by making it illegal, the bourgeois publications and magazines declare that 2023 will be the year of labour strikes in America. *Fortune*, a prestigious American business magazine, states: "America's worker-boss war is just beginning." [7] One of the headlines of the American *Times* articles is "2023 Will Be a Year of Worker Strikes." [8]

Unlike last summer's protests and labour strikes in Britain, some of which were organized outside of trade unions and in the form of independent (wildcat) strikes, the vast majority of current ones have been called by trade unions, and this is an alarm bell for the working class in Britain. The British bourgeoisie is aware of the potential of the sleeping giant that is the British working class, and the call of the trade unions shows that the British bourgeoisie is doing its best to channel the protests of the workers through trade unions and pre-planned strikes, to deplete the latent anger of the workers, and prevent the formation of independent strikes and labour struggles.

Unions hinder the class solidarity of workers by calling for different sections to act, arranging separate strikes (in each individual sector), and channelling protests. Trade unions do not organize the struggle of the working class, but its defeat.

The "radical" leader of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), Mick Lynch, flattered the British queen and suspended the strikes for her funeral. He showed in the interests of which social class he acts. He paid tribute to the symbol of the bourgeoisie as follows:

"RMT joins the whole nation in paying its respects to Queen Elizabeth. The planned railway strike action on 15 and 17 September is suspended. We express our deepest condolences to her family, friends and the country."[9]

Playing the role of police, by providing individual services on the one hand and suppressing workers on the other, is another part of the duties of the unions. In an example from the UK, i.e., in the democratic world, not a dictatorship, staff from the largest union, Unite, created a blacklist of workers whom they found to hold politically inappropriate view, which they provided to employers to prevent these workers from being hired, thereby ensuring the security of production and industry [10].

The apparent solidarity of the unions in the recent strikes between different sectors and the radicalization of their language is only so that the unions are accepted by the workers and they can carry out their duties more easily. The unions are extremely careful that the smallest discussion does not arise between different sections of the working class and that real and especially over-industrial general assemblies do not arise, while in protests outside the control of the unions, discussions, general assemblies, strike committees, etc. are formed, and strikes are organized by a committee that is coordinated by the workers themselves, such as, for example, Amazon or North Sea oil workers.

According to the above explanations, although the protests and strikes in Britain are an important beginning for the British working class, the main dilemma facing it is how it will react to the fragmentation and atomization of workers by the unions. In contrast to this division of the workers, we can only impose our demands on the bourgeoisie by extending the struggle to other industries and gaining the solidarity of our class brothers and sisters. It is only in the shadow of class struggle and solidarity that the creators of human blessings can not only defend their living standards, but also prepare the ground for the eradication of wage slavery.

As long as there is wage slavery, there is capitalism. Hell on earth is waiting for our class, for wage slaves. Class struggle is the only answer and horizon that is ahead of our class. The bourgeoisie fears the spectre of the class struggle more than anything, because it will lead to the revolutionary destruction of the capitalist system in its evolutionary process. This barbaric and dirty capitalist system must be brought down.

Internationalist Voice

8 January 2023

Notes:

[1] [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#)

[2] [Military assistance to Ukraine](#)

[3] [London Broadcasting Corporation](#)

[4] [A decade of pay erosion](#)

[5] [BBC](#)

[6] [Rishi Sunak](#)

[7] [Fortune](#)

[8] [Times](#)

[9] [RMT](#)

[10] Officials of the union Unite compiled a blacklist of more than 3,200 workers, in conjunction with 40 companies. Officials of the union divided the workers on their blacklist into three groups: “militant”, “troublemaker” and with a warning to be “careful”. The result of the blacklist was that many of the workers were left idle for a long time. Long-term unemployment has led to painful problems for these workers in the democratic country of the UK. *The Guardian* report can be read in the link below:

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/04/unite-officials-face-allegations-of-collusion-with-firms-that-are-blacklisting-activists>

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