

# Strike sees war of words between RMT and Shapps

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As strike action resumes, a war of words has erupted, with both RMT and Transport Secretary Grant Shapps suggesting the other is causing unnecessary issues for the travelling public.

Unions RMT, Unite and TSSA are striking today. RMT members are striking at 14 train operators and Network Rail, TSSA at seven rail companies and Unite members at Network Rail.

On Friday there will be an RMT walkout at London Underground and Overground.

On Saturday RMT and TSSA will hold more strike action.

RMT has said that Shapps is “prolonging” the debate, Shapps on Twitter suggested meanwhile that union bosses are holding the country “to ransom”.

## Evoking Thatcher

An article by Grant Shapps, behind the paywalled Daily Mail Plus service, suggests the government has a 16-point plan to “take on these Luddites... just like Thatcher did” (his ellipses).

He said that workers “aren’t striking because they’re hard up. They average £44,000 a year” (which, according to fact checkers, is a figure likely using driver salaries, who are not striking today). He said they were opposing reform “to carry on doing their jobs exactly as they did 30 years ago, in a world not just before COVID but before technological change.”

He said drones and sensors would be an effective way to spot faults on the line, rather than sending staff out on a live railway.

## Anti-union accusations

Meanwhile the RMT says Shapps is also holding up progress — albeit towards an agreement. The union has written to Shapps to demand that the government ends its deliberate “policy of prolonging rail disputes for political reasons”.

The letter reads: “Your government has made the decision to use taxpayer’s money to bailout private train companies from being liable for revenue lost because of industrial action on the condition the same companies comply with government instructions to hold down pay, cut thousands of safety critical rail jobs, introduce Driver Only Trains and close ticket offices across the network.”

He said the Conservatives had an “anti-union agenda”.

Previously, Shapps has said it is not for the government to intervene in discussions between employers and staff over pay.