

Weekend rail strike: Shapps suggests “imposing” changes on workers

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As the strikes rolled on into the weekend, with action from unions RMT and TSSA affecting services on Saturday, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has said that he is looking into using Section 188 – presumably of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 – to impose changes to rail staff working practices if they are not agreed to.

Shapps told [Good Morning Britain](#) on Friday: “It can’t go on indefinitely,” he said. “I’ve been going at this all summer, I haven’t been anywhere else. We have already moved forward on what’s called a Section 188. It’s a bit technical but it’s basically putting these changes in place which are modernisations which any sensible railway would need to have in place. We need to recognise we’re in the 21st century now.

“[...] So [they are] very sensible, common sense changes that we’re actually imposing, and I’ve moved ahead during this summer to ensure that this process of requiring this change has been put in place.”

[He told Sky News he would prefer them not be imposed but agreed to by members instead.](#)

Section 188 is about redundancy and giving notice to employees in a consultation via their

representatives. It says that if a consultation cannot reasonably be fulfilled before redundancy because of “special circumstances”, **then reasonable steps need to be taken beforehand to try and meet such criteria.**

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that Shapps had no authority to issue Section 188 notifications as he was not the legal employer. Lynch and the RMT said the politician now seems intent on “forcing through fire and re-hire”.

“Despite his denials, Mr Shapps has clearly been dictating how the train companies should conduct negotiations with RMT, and now he’s ordering them to fire and re-hire workers,” Lynch said.

“The minister also appears to be increasingly desperate and out-of-touch making wild claims about train services between London and Manchester without having a clue what is actually happening.

“Instead of threatening to cut thousands of safety-critical jobs, introducing driver-only trains, closing ticket offices, bailing out the private rail companies as well as bringing in more anti-union laws the government and the employers should enter meaningful negotiations with RMT.”

A letter from Shapps to Lynch

Shapps went on to write to Mick Lynch, **reproducing his letter on his Twitter feed on Saturday.** The letter urged the RMT to put a recent offer from Network Rail to members: which he describes as 8% over two years. In the letter, Shapps said some people had to travel to work: “Consider the hospital porter, cleaner and everyone else who needs to be physically at their place of work. Your action is often harming the least well paid the most.” He added he believed the union strike action was hurting the sector from which its members draw a livelihood.

Manuel Cortes, TSSA general secretary, cited a 2% pay offer, not 8% when he issued a statement about the action on Saturday.

“It’s clearer than ever that Grant Shapps is the block to resolving this dispute. **Industry leaders like Steve White are absolutely right – rail staff do deserve a pay rise** and talks are needed to break the impasse,” he said.

“Grant Shapps has a cheek saying that unions are blocking a deal when he knows very well it’s him and his own department preventing train operators from negotiating. The insulting 2% offer to rail staff came with conditions and with no job security. No one is going to sign up to that, especially in the teeth of a cost-of-living crisis.”