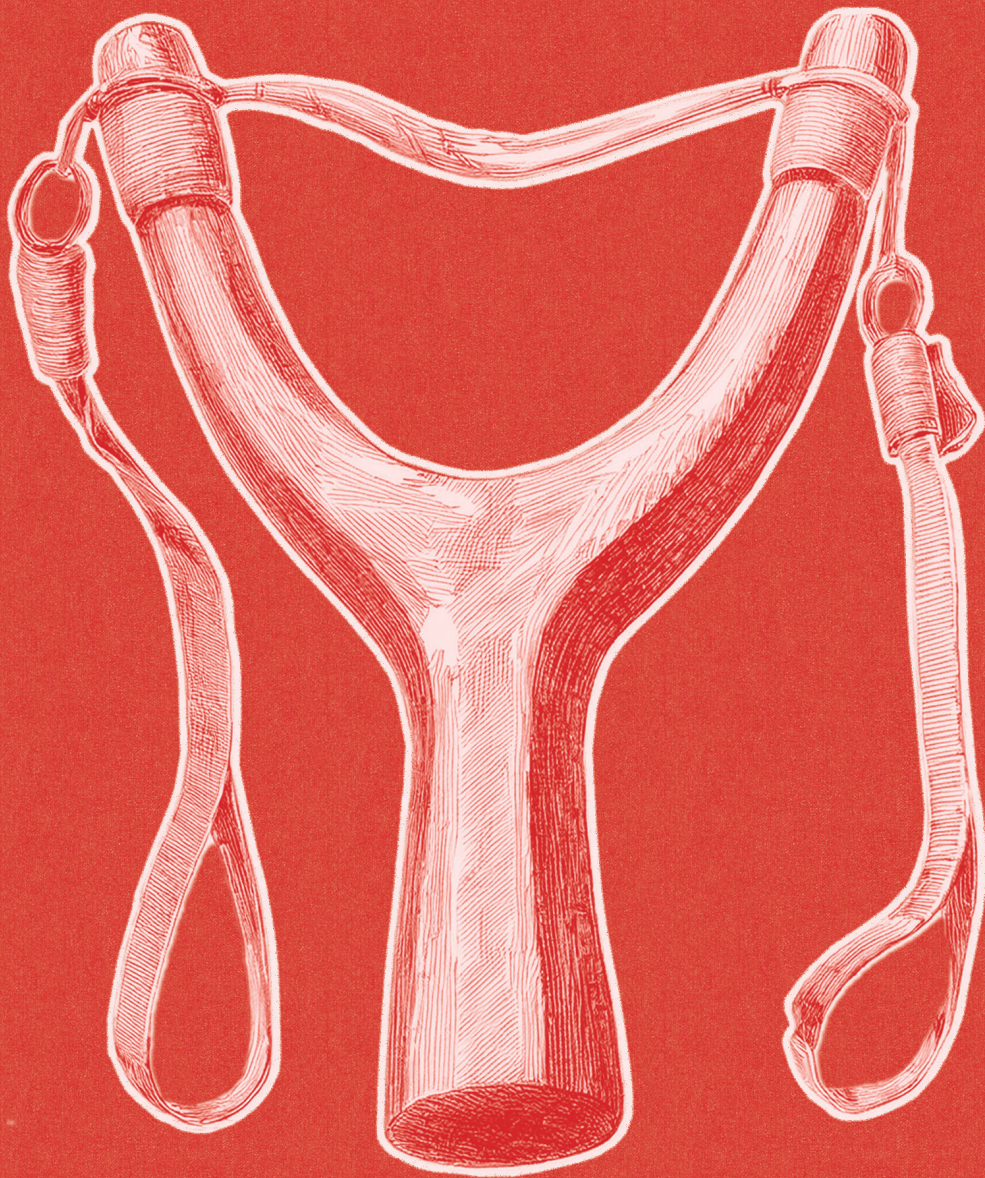


PUTTING STRUGGLE ON THE MAP:

STRIKE  **MAP**

A REPORT OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION
RECORDED VIA STRIKE MAP IN 2023



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STRIKE MAP

THE STORY SO FAR

We are really delighted to see the launch of our first ever annual report analysing the data we have now been collecting. Whilst we've been collecting this since December 2020, the report focuses on the data from 2023.

This report marks another milestone in the development of our project. From the humble origins of a Google map and free WordPress site to the professional website you will know today, used by hundreds of thousands and viewed by millions.

We want to start this foreword by thanking the two highly skilled academic comrades Dr. Andy Hodder (University of Birmingham) and Dr. Stephen Mustchin (University of Manchester), experts in strike data, for giving us the time to develop this report, something we have been trying to do for years.

We hope that this report can add to the discussion, analysis and data out there on strike action, supporting those interested in workers' struggle, including workers themselves.

Strike Map was started with a clear set of aims, which have always guided our work:

1. Document and present the levels of strike action in the country.
2. Enable others to see the levels of action and pass on messages of solidarity.
3. Encourage other workers in their struggles.
4. Bring those leading struggles together through a network (added in 2021)

Inspired by strikethreats.org (an attempt by activist and academic Robert Ovetz to document and understand the threat of action), as activists within the movement, we combined this interesting idea from the USA with the need to easily find our nearest strike, know where to send solidarity greetings and even where to visit our nearest picket line. Nearly four years later, and we know that Strike Map has become the place to go for so many.

We have even seen that the development of Strike Map has also impacted the world around us, with many unions and other organisations developing similar products, all part of better publicising of workers disputes & campaigns, making public support easier.

Throughout our evolution and development, we have attempted to constantly innovate Strike Map. Whether it be through our;

- fundraising- providing thousands of pounds to striking workers to ensure they are not starved back to work.
- rep's network – which aims to bring together workplace stewards, branch activists from all unions providing educational resources, events and courses.
- regional strike clubs- providing spaces for activists to talk and in some areas raising thousands of pounds for striking workers.
- visit a picket- a campaign post-Covid to encourage as many people as possible to join their nearest picket line, our book club events – discussing the key texts of the day.
- 'Industrial Unionism' pamphlet series- utilising the texts from our past to unlock some answers on how we overcome the systemic decline of organised labour in our present.

Along the way, what has kept us going and financially afloat, has been the incredible support of so many workers, union branches, union regions, local trades councils and national unions that have supported us. Not just by using our map during the big strike wave of 2022-2023, but also by supporting our work, enabling us to make the map better and better for all. We thank you all for that support and trust, thank you comrades.

Supporting workers in struggle has been key and we are proud to have co-led the campaign to Defend the Right to Strike with Campaign for Trade Union Freedom and 12 other unions, campaigning to see the repeal of the strikes and minimum services legislation and all anti-union laws.

It is not just national campaigns, we have supported local branches of unions in targeting 'Scab' agencies and board members that refuse to negotiate with workers. All of the tools and resources we have built we have made available for branches to take on the boss and win.

We have also won awards over the last few years, proudly accepting the Ron Todd award for social justice in 2023, and making the Big Issue top changemakers in 2022.

Over the last year we have moved from a purely activist led map, funded just through unions and individual donations, to an organisation supported by the General Federation of Trade Unions, providing the place for the vital education of a new layer of activists that have developed during the 2023-2023 'strike wave'. We also thank the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust (BANMT) for part-funding our work, and providing us with the support we needed to grow.

Strike Map today is a steering group of activists that lead on its development and support throughout the year. This collective leadership has strengthened our work even further, ensuring Strike Map will exist in the future, we thank every single person that has dedicated time as a volunteer for our map, thank you.

At the time this report is launched we are just weeks away from celebrating our fourth birthday. When we started this project, we were not sure how long it would last, and did not think we would be here four years later.

The rise of struggle that we have proudly 'put on the map' is something the whole Strike Map project is delighted to be a part of. As we enter a period under a new Government, we know that a revitalised trade union movement with high levels of public support has the power to fundamentally change our society. For many of us Strike Map has become a big part of our lives, something we continue to dedicate a lot of our time to.

We hope to produce a report like this on an annual basis as we aim to highlight the incredible resistance, collective action and worker power, often undermined, underestimated and missed by government stats. In solidarity with workers in struggle always.

Henry Fowler & Robert Poole.



Thank you to our incredible backers and supporters

The launch of this report would not have been possible without the incredible backing of the organisations below.

CWU North West Region
cwunorthwest.org

Lancashire Association of Trades Union Councils
e-voice.org.uk/latuc

Manchester National Education Union
neu.org.uk/about/contact-us/district-branch-finder/manchester

Manchester Trades Union Council
manchestertuc.org.uk

PCS North West Region
facebook.com/pcsnorthwest

Ten Boroughs Research Ltd
tenboroughs.co.uk

University of Manchester Trade Union Society
manchesterstudentsunion.com/activities/view/trade-union

UNITE North West Region
north-west.unitetheunion.org

UNITE North West Service Industries Branch (NW/70209)
facebook.com/UniteNWServiceIndustries

Working Class Movement Library
wcml.org.uk

We would also like to thank all the union branches, regions, trades council, national unions and individuals who have supported and affiliated to Strike Map over the last four years. This report would not be possible without you.

See a full list of our affiliates here:
<https://strikemap.org/supporters>

An introductory note from the report's authors

Andy Hodder and Stephen Mustchin

We are both very pleased to have been able to produce this report, and are particularly grateful to have been given access to the vast quantity of data that have been uploaded to the map by trade unionists and labour movement activists more widely.¹ This report would not exist without the actions of the activists across the movement. We hope that this report makes a contribution in terms of documenting the extent of the remarkable (in contemporary terms) increase in strike action, other forms of industrial action and successful balloting for strike action that emerged from summer 2022 and peaked in 2023. However, this is not solely an exercise in documentation, and we would hope that the report serves both to record but also to inspire debate and reflection on union action, whilst contributing towards strategy in the months and years to come. This is the first annual report Strike Map have published and our hope is that we can return to this as a regular annual publication in the future. This focus of the report is on the data entered into the map relating to strikes that took place in 2023. The data generated by Strike Map are essentially crowdsourced. Strike Map (2024) themselves describe it as 'worker powered'. Through this initiative, workers and activists are able to, quite literally, put struggle on the map. Union members and activists complete a form on the Strike Map website, identifying which union is taking action, where the action is taking place in terms of employer and postcode, the reason for the strike, and its duration. The bottom-up nature of this data collection process meant a great deal of time-consuming and painstaking work went into 'cleaning' the data, removing duplicate entries and so on. Ten Boroughs Research Ltd. carried out invaluable work in addressing some of these issues and Andy devoted many days and weeks to manually going through the entries in order to ensure accuracy and that we had a robust dataset on which to base the report that follows. There is more detail on this exact process in the appendix. This is largely why we have focused on 2023, the peak of the recent strike wave – Strike Map do have data going back to 2021 and also for 2024. We hope to return to the 2024 data next year, but detailed work on the pre-2023 data would have been more resource-intensive than our 'day jobs' would allow. What we do have, however, is an accurate, detailed and quantifiable picture of what went on during the biggest upsurge in industrial action seen since the late 1980s, and the alternative collection of strike data from below that this represents is hugely useful to us as industrial relations researchers, particularly in light of the limitations of the data now collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). We have drawn on a number of sources to evidence our analysis and the majority of these can helpfully be accessed online (see full list of references at the end of the report).

It is important to consider the purpose of collecting such data and attempting to measure the incidence, scale and duration of strikes. In an article from 1880, in a first attempt to measure trade disputes and strikes, the Victorian statistician G.P. Bevan (1880: 36) bemoaned how:

'Striking has become a disease, and a very grave disease, in the body social, a remedy for which has long occupied the attention of learned sociologists and legislators, but which as yet shows no sign of having run its course. I think therefore that it is not only useful, but necessary, for all who are interested in the proceedings of capital and labour (and who are not, directly or indirectly?), to examine and diagnose this great evil in all its bearings, as it is only by so doing that we can arrive at any hope of alleviation.'

He goes on to argue for stronger forms of mediation and arbitration in order to prevent strikes from taking place. It therefore has to be acknowledged that the initial purpose of strike data in the UK (including the later series of data published by the various government departments from 1893 onwards), was to measure (and therefore 'manage') the so-called 'labour problem'. The primary concern was with levels of social unrest, and the ostensible effects of this on wages and inflation as identified by the powerful. This contrasts markedly with the valuable work Strike Map have done, which has raised the profile of individual strikes and their place within a wider movement, built possibilities in terms of solidarity, and demonstrated the enduring importance of industrial action as a means of furthering the demands of workers following a long period of decollectivizing industrial relations and other measures of union decline.

We were invited to write this report on the back of our previous work with a range of trade union organisations (including the British Dietetic Association, the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers, the European Trade Union Confederation, FH - the Danish Trade Union Confederation, the GMB, the General Federation of Trade Unions, the Public and Commercial Services union, the University and College Union, the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians, The Trades Union Congress, and Unions 21). Andy Hodder is a Reader in Employment Relations at the University of Birmingham, and Stephen Mustchin is a Senior Lecturer in Employment Studies at the University of Manchester. Between us, we have over 30 years of experience of teaching industrial relations to students at different levels of their studies, and have both researched, written and published widely on industrial relations themes including strikes and industrial action. Andy's research has examined trade union action, identity and purpose, trade union engagement with young workers and new technologies in employment relations. In relation to this report, Andy has written on conflict and control in the contemporary workplace (Edwards and Hodder, 2022), the relationship between strike action and union membership growth (Hodder et al, 2017), and the reasons why members vote in strike ballots (Bessa et al 2024). Stephen's research has focused on work, employment and labour within the public sector, changing union strategies and international work, the role of the state in regulating work and employment, and a series of historical articles based on archival material and oral history interviews focused on strikes (see Mustchin, 2011; 2014; 2016; 2021; Darlington and Mustchin, 2019). Together we have published some of the first data-driven academic articles on the recent strike wave (Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a; 2024b). We are very pleased to be continuing this work and to have access to the data made available, especially in a context where increasingly fewer academic researchers have been writing on these themes.

We hope you enjoy the report and find it useful.
Andy Hodder and Stephen Mustchin

¹ As authors, we were not paid to produce this report, but both of our jobs feature time devoted to research activities which we used to develop and write it up. We want to thank Ralph Darlington for his helpful comments and suggestions on a previous version of this report.

Transforming the BMA, striking for pay restoration

Dr. Emma Runswick, Deputy Chair of the British Medical Association (BMA) council

The BMA Pay Restoration campaign has reshaped the British Medical Association (BMA) and the British labour movement. In the course of the campaign, the BMA has elected new leading officials, called over 100,000 doctors to take strike action, won hundreds of millions of pounds in consolidated pay, established a strike fund, trained hundreds of activists and forged a path focussed on **organising** to win change.

The BMA is largely disconnected from the labour movement in the UK. It is not affiliated to the TUC. We did not join the 2021-22 strike wave in concert with other public sector workers, and nor were we cowed as the other unions pulled out of dispute. Doctors were operating on our own timeline, with a proactive claim: the full restoration of pay lost to inflation since austerity – and with it real terms pay cuts – began. For resident (previously termed “junior”) doctors, the loss was 26.1% in RPI, for consultants (the most senior doctors) over a third. This poor pay is in stark contrast to elsewhere in the anglosphere and is causing an exodus of colleagues. We argued that doctors were not worth any less than 2008, and neither we nor the patients we serve, should have to pay for the financial crisis.

The demand to be paid exactly what our senior colleagues were paid in 2008 is studiously fair, and speaks to the sense of generational inequality already so widely felt. Despite the shock “35% demand” splashed in media headlines, doctors stood fast. The TUC has now adopted pay restoration in the public sector as a priority in campaigning with the new government.²

Doctors discussed strategy ahead of balloting and striking. As rotational staff, resident doctors had risks that we would not meet the legal thresholds via postal ballots. We delayed balloting and organised, before smashing records in February 2022. We have now won 12 ballots and taken 50 days of strike action across the UK. We have won pay uplifts (10-24% dependent on grade and location), and various non-pay improvements such as shared parental leave, easier access to overtime pay, commitments to increase job numbers and reduce rotation, contract reform, and reform to the Pay Review Body. Along the way, we beat NHS cartels which were holding down pay rates for extra-contractual work, created peer-to-peer networks of thousands of members, and recruited 40 thousand people into the union.

In some ways our action has been limited: we have to be careful about patient safety, visa rules for international colleagues who are ¼ of our number, and time out of specialist training that prevents progression; and inevitably we haven't got every strategic decision right. Our long dispute is of course evidence

that we would not give up, but it is also evidence that our strategy didn't give us the leverage to win quickly, at least in England. Despite this, BMA members have won among the best outcomes in the public sector.

We have demonstrated that strike action can win, that union members will rally around strong demands, that unions can win repeat ballots.

The future is all to fight for. When presenting and recommending offers, BMA leaders, who are all working doctors themselves, have made it clear that they are first steps, to bank and build upon. Doctors have learnt that strike action is both respite from overwork – an opportunity to be with friends the rota usually forces separation from – and an effective tool to win change. We are raring for action if governments do not continue a path to pay restoration, but reps now also see collective bargaining and industrial action as solutions to other workplace problems.

Moreover, doctors now see the BMA as an effective trade union. In 2016, doctors at BMA conference opposed joining the TUC largely due to fears it was “too left wing”; now, many doctors invigorated by strike action see our BMA as analogous to radical and successful unions such as RMT.

The ripples of the 2016 contract dispute make doctors fiercely alert to the risk of “selling out”, and to loss of control over their representatives and disputes. There is therefore limited support amongst doctors for working with unions who closed disputes earlier in the strike wave, especially in the NHS.

Beliefs based in workplace dynamics where rotational resident doctors are often badly mistreated by systems and colleagues bleed into trade union discussions, reducing the likelihood of working with other health worker unions.

The relative success of our campaign is partially attributed to our independence.

This exceptionalism presents risks, given the scale of some demands will require coordinated action across professional groups and industries. To overcome this perception, some BMA members are turning to work with other unions, but fundamentally other workers and their unions must respond to the gauntlet thrown down. Radical, successful trade union wins are possible with clear political direction and organisation.

As our slogan goes:

Stick together

Strike together

Win together

² See the (carried) 2024 TUC Congress Motion 'C11: Public Services', <https://congress.tuc.org.uk/c11-public-services/#sthash.kkqYNRfN.dpbs>

Assessing strike action in 2023: the role of Strike Map

Introduction and background to the 2022-2023 strike wave

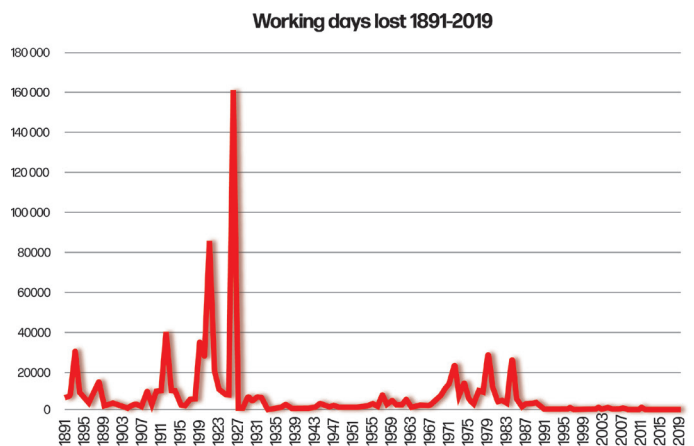
This report details the extent of strike action recorded via Strike Map throughout 2023. Whilst 2023 marked the peak of the recent strike wave, it has its roots in the preceding years. The strike wave began in early summer of 2022 - a period which saw an upsurge of disputes, ballots for industrial action and strikes in Britain, and an increase in industrial action including some lengthy, significant disputes was also evident elsewhere in Europe and the US (see Birelma et al, 2023). As the country emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic, the most obvious trigger for this marked increase in strike action was the spike in inflation in Britain and elsewhere resulting in part from the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and its effects on energy prices and logistics, although further inflationary pressures driven by problems in supply chains and post-pandemic industrial recovery also contributed to cost of living increases (Edwards et al, 2023). Between 1997 and 2021, Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation averaged 2% in the UK, but rose throughout 2021 and peaked at 11% in 2022 (at the time of writing it has returned to 2%, the target set by the Bank of England). This was also a time of political turmoil - repeated scandals centred around the Boris Johnson government, and Johnson's resignation, followed by the brief Liz Truss government, led to further inflationary pressures including rapidly increasing interest rates and raised borrowing and mortgage costs. These factors combined to form a galvanising effect for large proportions of the workforce. Mirroring patterns of union membership, the strike wave began in the public sector and key public services. Reflecting on the start of the strike wave, Jill Rubery noted that these workers had 'at least three key grievances: the impact of the extended austerity measures introduced from 2010 on their living standards; the empty implied promises by the nationwide clap for frontline workers in the pandemic; and the excessive workloads caused both by the pandemic and by labour shortages in the post-pandemic period.' (Edwards et al, 2023:31).

The extent of strike action taken in the last few years is particularly significant when placed in the context of the last thirty years. Figure 1 shows the overall trend of working days lost in the UK in the period leading up to 2020. From this we can see that, 2018 saw historically low levels of strike action (with 67 disputes commencing, and 81 disputes in progress that year, involving 39,000 workers and with 273,000 days not worked (see Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a: 241)³. Whilst it would be fair to assume that the pandemic depressed levels of strike action overall, there were a number of important, relatively high profile, and in some cases lengthy disputes in the period leading up to the current strike wave that are significant in terms of the context pre-figuring the 22-23 action.

³ The ONS did not publish data on strike action between 2020 and 2021, breaking a continuous annual data set dating back to 1893. This break was ascribed to pressures on capacity within the ONS due to the pandemic.

We note some illustrative examples as follows.

Figure 1: Working days lost 1891-2019



Source: Office for National Statistics

The UCU strikes in higher education over pay and pensions commenced in 2018, but continued intermittently throughout the pandemic and into 2023. A significant dispute at Rolls Royce in Barnoldswick over job cuts and closures lasted from August 2020 to January 2021, and ended with the protection of some jobs and key facilities. January 2021 saw the start of a long running dispute between the GMB and British Gas against fire-and-rehire practices. This action saw 7,000 workers affected and 44 days of strike action taken. Between February and May 2021, 500 Unite members at Go NW, a bus company in Greater Manchester took strike action against 'fire and rehire' practices in another high profile dispute supported by the local trades council, and political groups, amongst others. Also beginning in 2021, workers at CHEP, a pallet factory in Trafford Park, Greater Manchester, took 21 weeks of strike action which ended in April 2022. This was the longest strike in Unite's history to date, and ended with an above-inflation pay rise of nine percent in total, three extra days of annual leave, and a £1,000 lump sum to workers (Glover, 2022). In a further case of fire and rehire, the spring of 2022 saw 800 workers dismissed without notice and replaced with agency workers by P&O Ferries - a move widely condemned by unions and political commentators alike (Dobbins, 2022).

Whilst these examples are non-exhaustive, they are clearly instructive – the use of fire and rehire tactics was widely viewed as unfair and unethical, sympathy with those on strike appeared to be stronger than is often assumed, and many of these disputes concluded with positive gains and the successful defence of working conditions. Although difficult to evidence in detail, the situation leading into February-June 2022 was one where workers and unions were mobilised and driven by norms and grievances relating to fairness and decency. Many of these disputes then held a relatively high profile in the public eye, in part due to residual social solidarity in the aftermath of the pandemic. In direct response to the uptick in worker militancy, the ONS recommenced the publication of data on strike action in June 2022 (backdating this to January of that year). Indeed, June 2022 is broadly accepted to be the starting point for the 22-23 strike wave and all three key measures of industrial actions

(number of strikes, numbers of workers involved, and numbers of days not worked) increased markedly from this point (see Table 3 in Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a).

June 2022 saw the biggest rail strikes in 30 years, which resulted in considerable media coverage. As a result of this, Mick Lynch made regular appearances on television news and elsewhere, drawing widespread admiration for the forceful, straightforward way that he made the union's case (see Gall, 2024; Boyle, 2024). By July 2022, ASLEF members had voted in favour of strike action, whilst TSSA ballots were underway. Outside of rail, we saw the first strike by dock workers in 30 years when Unite members walked out in Felixstowe and Liverpool (see Burchell and Rhoden-Paul, 2022, and Reuters, 2022). Ballots were also being conducted by GMB at British Airways, PCS in the civil service and the CWU in Royal Mail (see Hodder, 2022; McDonnell et al, 2024). By the end of 2022, there were a total of 2,518,000 working days lost, the most since 1989 (Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a: 240). The ONS reported industrial action having taken place in a total of 524 unique companies, and this figure increased to 779 for 2023 (ONS, 2024a).

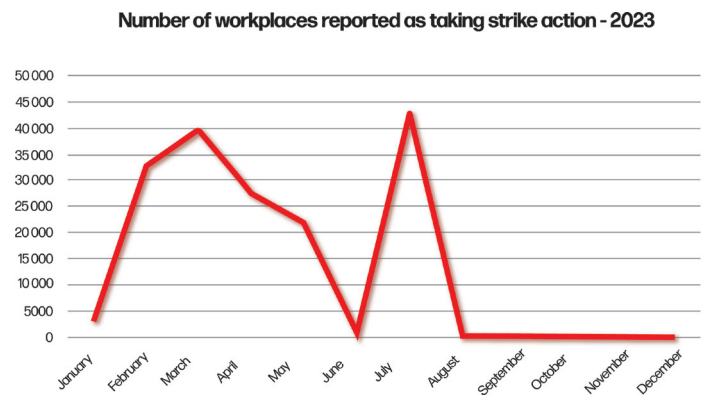
Having outlined the context leading up to the strike wave, the following section outlines and analyses the Strike Map data for 2023 as levels of action reached a peak.

Strikes in 2023 - a detailed analysis

We now turn to the data submitted to and recorded by Strike Map to explore the trends and dynamics of the strike wave. These data are unique in that they capture disputes at the level of the workplace. The data recorded by Strike Map provide an interesting and important development in strike statistics in the UK, particularly given the paucity of detail now published by the ONS (Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a). We therefore believe the Strike Map data have considerable value in enabling commentary on a range of key measures that are not meaningfully published elsewhere. The following section provides an overview of these data, followed by non-exhaustive narratives extracted from the data to illustrate how the strike wave developed in seven broad sectors of the economy - transport, healthcare, education, the civil service, local services, logistics, and manufacturing.

Across the whole of 2023, over 228,000 entries were made to the map. Following a 'cleaning' process to remove duplicates (see appendix for further details), we were able to identify a total of 170,048 unique entries made to the map in 2023. Figure 2 details the spread of these entries across the year (see also Table A1). The majority of entries to the map occurred in the first half of the year. A total of 73.85% of all entries ($n = 125,578$) were made between January and June, with a further 25.52% of workplaces logging action in July ($n = 43,397$). Indeed, July was the month where entries to the map peaked. The remainder of the year (August to December) accounted for only 0.63% of entries to the map ($n = 1,073$). Comparing the Strike Map data to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data is difficult as the data measure different elements of strikes (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Number of workplaces reporting as taking strike action across by month



Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data.

Both data sources identify peaks in industrial action in the spring of 2023, although the Strike Map data indicates a greater peak in July than the official data show. The decline in the level of strike activity in the second half of the year is also not as pronounced in the ONS data. These differences can partly be explained by the nature of data captured by Strike Map (in that strikes occurring on the same day in one employer with multiple workplaces are counted multiple times, leading to an overstatement of industrial action in terms of the number of individual disputes), and an uneven distribution amongst contributors to the map (see below for more detail on this point⁴).

Figure 3: Working days lost 2023 (000's)



Source: Office for National Statistics

The Strike Map approach to recording strikes at the level of the workplace is not without problems. As noted by Fisher (1973: 59), on the one hand, 'the establishment may be a unit of measurement that more clearly depicts points of tension, although where there are several establishments within a firm and the dispute is common to them, counting by numbers of establishment may lead to over-statement'. The figures presented in Figure 2 relate to the total number of entries to

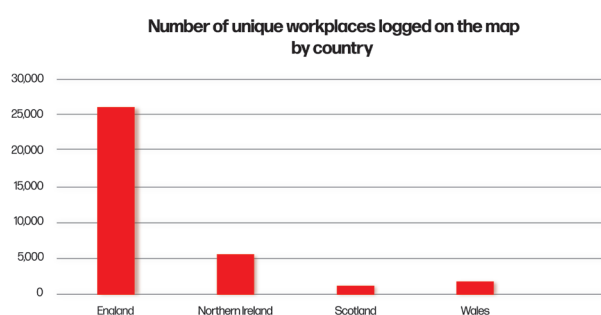
⁴ An example as to how these data differ from ONS records is as follows. A one-day strike by PCS members in the Department for Work and Pensions could be recorded in the map for each of the workplaces logged by activists (every workplace where action is being taken), whilst the ONS would record this as one dispute. This means there can be multiple entries made to the Strike Map data in relation to the same dispute.

the map, and therefore include multiple workplaces where more than one day of action was recorded (this is particularly the case in relation to strikes in the education sector). In an attempt to limit the extent of this problem, further analysis found that strikes were recorded at a total of 34,424 unique workplaces. This figure therefore provides an indication of the number of strikes which is important 'for this shows, albeit imperfectly, how often workers have been prepared to stop work in disputes with management' (Edwards, 1983: 211).

A total of 27 unions logged action on the map across the year. The unions that contributed to the map reflect the pattern of strikes and union membership across the public sector and key public services. However, this does distort the data somewhat. For example, of the 34,424 unique workplaces where strikes were recorded, education unions (including Educational Institute of Scotland, Irish National Teachers Organisation, National Association of Head Teachers, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, National Education Union, Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association, Ulster Teachers' Union, and University and College Union) accounted for 85.3% of entries. This in part explains the temporal distribution of entries to the map (see below for more detail on the sectors in question), and is reflected in the ONS's data on working days lost by industry, which demonstrates that the education sector had the most working days lost in 2023. Beyond the education unions, GMB, the Public and Commercial Services union, Unison and Unite featured prominently on the map (see Table A4 for a full breakdown).

If we consider the geographic breakdown of the workplaces recorded on the map (see Figure 4), it is clear that the majority of entries related to disputes in England (n = 26,057 - 75.69% of all entries). Northern Ireland provided the second most disputes logged on the map (n = 5,469), with Wales and Scotland completing the list. These differences reflect the impact of devolution on state policy (see McKay and Moore, 2023). That the majority of action was recorded in England is likely reflective of the Westminster government being more likely to prolong disputes to add weight to the introduction of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act (2023), and is reflective of long standing Conservative hostility toward unions and strikes (see Lyddon, 2021: 495). It should also be noted that unions in Northern Ireland are not restricted by the same laws as the rest of the UK, such as the Trade Union Act (2016).

Figure 4: Number of unique workplaces logged on the map by country

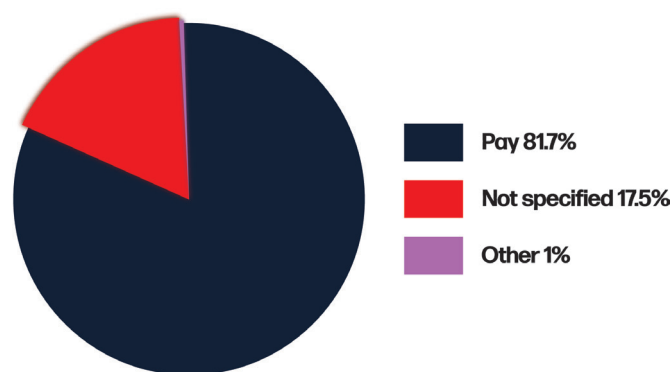


Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data.

The Strike Map data also provide unparalleled insights into the demands of workers across 2023. The ONS has not published data on the reasons given for striking since 2018. Analysis of the most recent official data (2000-2018) found that pay was the dominant cause of industrial disputes (Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a: 241-243), whilst some early analysis from the Resolution Foundation suggested that this trend continued into the recent strike wave (Comminetti et al, 2023). The analysis of the Strike Map data confirms this (see Figure 5 and Table A3). Pay and pensions accounted for a total of 28,137 entries to the map (81.7%). Other disputes were logged in relation to working conditions, redundancy/restructure, victimisation of a trade union representative, fire and rehire, health and safety, bullying and harassment and Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment). However, these data are limited by the fact that 6,040 entries to the map (17.5%) did not list a reason for the strike (see the appendix for a full discussion of these data).

Figure 5: Reasons given for striking by unique workplace

Reasons given for striking



Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data.

The impact of the strike wave by sector and industry

We now outline the sectors where the most high profile strikes occurred throughout 2023. As noted above, the majority of action occurred in the public sector and key public services, and so these sectors feature prominently in what follows. However, we have also included examples from a range of other sectors to give some illustration of the range and scope of action that took place across the year. It would be impossible to describe in detail all of the disputes in question, but we hope these non-exhaustive examples go some way to documenting a monumental year for industrial action in the UK. Given the prominence of education unions in the Strike Map data, we start this overview with a look at disputes in the education sector. The sector level overviews below mainly draw on the Strike Map data. These data have been central to the writing of this report, and have been supplemented with relevant journalistic, academic and trade union commentary where available. Strike data have always utilised such sources. Indeed, the ONS (2024b) note that their figures include strikes that 'are picked up from reports in the media and trade union websites, with all businesses with

employees on strike surveyed'. The references we include in the sectoral overview below are as much for further reading as anything else.

Education

In October 2022, the two largest teaching unions, the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), and the National Education Union (NEU) announced their intention to ballot for strike action over pay. Whilst the NASUWT did not meet the 50% ballot threshold required by the Trade Union Act (2016), NEU members achieved a turnout of 53% in January 2023, and called 6 days of strike action in England across February and March (Clarke, 2023a). The NEU then confirmed it would not announce further strike action for two weeks whilst talks took place in an attempt to resolve the dispute (Clarke, 2023b). These proved unsuccessful and the unions threatened to escalate action in the spring. By April, the latest pay offer had been rejected by the teaching unions, and the NEU called further strikes for later in April and early May. Whilst the NEU action was ongoing, three other unions were balloting for industrial action, which was to be coordinated if the ballots were successful. Although the NASUWT and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) did not meet the turnout threshold needed to strike in England in these ballots, they were committed to re-balloting on the issue of pay. A fourth union, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), announced their intention to ballot members for the first time in their history (Shearing, 2023). An additional two days of action was called by the NEU in July, bringing the total action taken in England by NEU members to 10 days. The strike was ended by the middle of July, when the four teaching unions recommended members accept a 'properly funded' 6.5% pay rise (Shearing and Standley, 2023). Reflecting on this deal, the NEU's General Secretary, Mary Bousted, commented to the BBC 'It's not all that we wanted, and we will continue to campaign for better school funding and for a restoration of teacher pay - but for a one-year pay award, it is a significant achievement' (Standley, 2023).

In Northern Ireland, four teaching unions took action in February, with a half-day strike over pay. This action by the NASUWT, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), the Ulster Teachers Union (UTU), and the National Education Union (NEU) saw many schools closed until midday. This action was followed by a further one day strike in April, also over pay. The strike in April represented the first time that all five teacher unions coordinated strike action together on the same day. Action was taken by members of INTO, the NAHT, NASUWT, NEU and the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU), the five unions that comprise the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council. This strike also marked the first time in its 125-year history that members of the NAHT went on strike over pay (McCann, 2023). In November, the teaching unions announced a further five days of strike action as part of the long-running dispute. This announcement saw action taken on 29th November, as the dispute continued into 2024.

In Scotland, members of the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS), NASUWT and the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS) took strike action over pay in January. Further action was scheduled to take place across

February and March, but was ultimately suspended in March after a revised pay offer was made by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). Outside of teaching staff, school support staff (represented by Unison) took strike action over pay towards the end of the year, and were scheduled to be joined by members of GMB and Unite before all three unions reached a pay deal to bring the dispute to an end. In March, action was also taken in Wales over pay by members of the NEU. Further action by NEU members was called off after a revised pay offer was received, and accepted by members in March. NAHT members began action short of strike in February, and continued this action until the middle of November before members voted to accept an improved pay offer and a new workload agreement.

In higher education, the University and College Union (UCU) continued their action as part of two disputes (the 'four fights' dispute over pay, workload, equality and casualisation, and the pensions dispute over the Universities Superannuation Scheme, USS). Both disputes had been underway for some time as we approached the start of 2023 (see Lewis, 2024 for a discussion). In January, UCU announced 18 days of strike action across February and March, although some days were suspended due to ongoing negotiations. However, these talks proved unsuccessful, with strike action resuming from 15th March and the union balloting to extend its six-month mandate for action. The campaign continued with action short of strike (ASOS) in the form of a national marking assessment boycott, which began on 20th April. This marked the union's first national marking boycott since 2006. In many institutions, employers responded to the marking boycott in a hostile manner. A number of universities chose to deduct up to 100% of pay of staff participating in the ASOS. Unsurprisingly, these decisions were met with an escalation of action from various branches. There are too many examples to list in detail, but two illustrative examples are as follows. In response to a 50% pay deduction for taking part in ASOS, UCU members at Stirling University held a three day strike in June, whilst members at the University of Leeds called an indefinite strike (which ran from 15th – 23rd June) in response to 100% of pay being deducted due to ASOS. The marking boycott ran until 6th September. At the same time as announcing the end of the ASOS, UCU announced further strike action for five consecutive days during the last week of September. Designed to coincide with the start of the academic year, staff at Scottish universities took action at slightly different times to ensure maximum impact of the strikes. However, the impact of this action was limited as 89 branches voted to not take part in the action, meaning that the full week's action was taken at only 42 institutions, with a further 10 universities taking one day of strike action. The pensions dispute was successfully resolved in October 2023 when members voted to accept the restoration of benefits. The four fights dispute remained unresolved as the union were unable to achieve the 50% turnout threshold required by the Trade Union Act (2016).

Transport

In the above section outlining the context and background to the recent strike wave, we pointed to the importance of high profile disputes and strikes in the transport sector from mid-2022 onwards. These strikes were so substantial, the Government responded with the introduction of the

Transport Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill 2022 in October 2022, which in turn was ultimately superseded by the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 (see Hodder and Mustchin, 2024b; Katsaroumpas, 2023). The rail strikes in this period saw action taken by ASLEF, RMT, TSSA and Unite across 2022 and 2023 (with some disputes continuing into 2024). These strikes formed part of multiple disputes: between RMT and the Rail Delivery Group (which represents the private train operating companies) over pay, enforced changes to working practices including the closure of station ticket offices and the removal of guards from trains; between TSSA and the Rail Delivery Group on many of the same issues as the RMT dispute; between RMT and Network Rail over pay; and between train drivers (who are mainly members of ASLEF, but with a smaller number who are members of RMT) and the Rail Delivery Group. Additionally, Unite members employed in Network Rail electric control rooms were also engaged in a pay dispute in 2022. Strike days took place in relation to these disputes across 2022, and in December 2022 the Rail Delivery Group made an offer of a 10% pay increase which was initially welcomed by the RMT, and following further negotiations this dispute was settled in both Scotland and Wales, but the Westminster government intervened in terms of negotiations in relation to England, reducing the pay offer to 8% with added strings including an expansion of driver-only trains (Austin, 2022). This intervention prolonged the industrial action in England significantly. Whilst the disputes ended at different times, industrial action (either through strike action or action short of strike) took place in every month of the year, apart from April. ASLEF and the RMT sought to coordinate action across the different disputes to maximise the impact of the strikes (see Hodder and Mustchin, 2024b).

As the strikes continued, so too did the negotiations. RMT's dispute in Network Rail was settled in March 2023, when members agreed to a pay offer and called off the strike planned for later that month. However, the crew and station staff dispute continued. Despite an offer being made to these workers at the same time as the Network Rail offer, this was rejected by the union. Consequently, between May and September, a further 7 days of national action were taken by RMT members amongst crew and station staff. At the same time, the RMT continued their campaigning in opposition to proposals from English rail operators for mass closures of station ticket offices – the union campaign and widespread public opposition to the proposals (with 170,000 members of the public responding to the consultation, overwhelmingly opposing the closures) brought wider issues relating to service quality and passenger safety into the discourse surrounding the dispute. The plans were eventually dropped in October 2023. In this same month, the RMT held a successful strike ballot as part of the crew and station staff dispute. This ballot result provided leverage in negotiations with the Rail Delivery Group, and on 30 November, RMT members voted to accept the pay offer from 14 train companies, bringing an end to this particular dispute. The ASLEF dispute continued into 2024 with further strikes, before an agreement was finally reached. The duration and scale of this series of linked disputes on the railways are highly significant, with intricate dynamics of balloting, member responses to pay offers, variation between occupational groups, rail franchises and the complex web of employers on Britain's privatised railways.

Beyond the rail strikes, there were a substantial number of other transport disputes and strikes. These were often within smaller and more localised services and functions, and included disputes on bus services, tram services, ferry services and in airports. For example, almost 1,800 Unite members working as bus drivers for Abellio were engaged in a long running dispute over pay. The dispute saw multiple days of action taken in 2022 and early 2023 and caused significant disruption, with some reports suggesting 104,413 scheduled bus journeys did not run with a further 12,376 journeys partially affected (Greater London Authority, 2023). The dispute was resolved in February when members voted to accept a pay rise (Sayce, 2023). Across the country, further bus strikes were threatened across multiple employers, including First in Oldham, and Stagecoach in both Greater Manchester and Warwickshire (see Flash, 2023a; BBC News 2023a, 2023b). In September, action was taken by almost 1,300 staff working for Go North East in Sunderland over pay. The dispute included drivers, engineers, administration and clerical staff and technology support staff, across six depots in the region (BBC News, 2023c). Amongst tram services, GMB and Unite members within Manchester's Metrolink tram system held successful ballots for strike action in 2023. Strike days were called by both unions (Unite in June 2023, and GMB in September and October), which provided leverage in negotiations to end the disputes (see BBC News, 2023d; Timan, 2023).

Outside of England, other modes of transport faced strike action. For example, in Scotland, Unite members caused disruption in February at the state-owned Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. The action closed Dundee Airport to flights, whilst disruption was reported at five further airports (BBC News, 2023e). In April 2023, a week-long strike over pay by Unite members within Northern Ireland's Department for Infrastructure led to the suspension of ferry services on the Strangford – Portaferry route (McGirr, 2023). These examples demonstrate how strike action emerged within often highly localised, smaller transport service providers beyond the headlines generated by the national rail strikes.

Healthcare

Since 2022, a wave of strikes have taken place within the National Health Service (NHS). Early in the strike wave, these strikes were described as 'the most widespread industrial action in the history of the NHS' (White, 2022). These strikes began in response to the government imposition of a pay award significantly below the high rate of inflation, following the advice of the pay review bodies. The union response to this subsequently saw strike action by members of the British Dental Association (BDA), the British Medical Association (BMA), the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists (CSP), GMB, the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA), the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), the Society of Radiographers, Unite, and Unison, with further ballots called by the Royal College of Midwives and the British Dietetic Association. A notable feature of these disputes was the emphasis placed on issues beyond the immediate pay award, with unions and their members referencing several years of pay suppression, inadequate staffing, increased workload pressures during the pandemic, patient safety and the wider state of the NHS.

The RCN strikes began November 2022 across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with further strikes taking place in December. Moving into 2023, discontinuous strike action occurred throughout January and February in England, when strike action was paused for talks with the Health Secretary (Triggle and Pym, 2023). These talks ultimately proved unsuccessful and further action was taken until May, at which point the six month mandate for industrial action secured by their ballot and under the conditions of the 2016 Trade Union Act expired in England. The RCN dispute in Scotland was resolved in March 2023, but action in Wales continued into June. Beyond the RCN, ambulance workers (members of GMB, Unison and Unite) took strike action from the end of 2022 and into the first half of 2023. Across the NHS, there was a level of coordination, with the GMB, RCN, and Unison taking concurrent industrial action in early February 2023. Action taken by the CSP during this period represented the first time the union had taken industrial action over pay (see Hodder and Mustchin, 2024b). In March 2023, an improved settlement increase was agreed for nursing and ambulance workers. The RCN, Unison, GMB, CSP and the British Dietetic Association recommended the offer to their members (although Unite did not recommend acceptance or rejection when consulting members over the offer). RCN, Unite and Society of Radiographers members voted to reject this pay offer despite a majority of union delegates on the NHS Staff Council voting to accept it (Healthworker Bulletin, 2023). The rank-and-file 'NHS Workers Say No' cross-union group campaigning for further pay rises and opposing the offer emerged during this period.

Further strikes occurred from March 2023. 'Junior' or resident doctors (members of the BDA, the BMA, and the HCSA) began strike action as part of a long running dispute that was not settled until July 2024. This dispute was arguably the most resilient and long lasting campaign of industrial action seen during the recent strike wave. In July 2024, following the election and change of government, an improved pay offer was negotiated by the BMA averaging 4.05% on average in addition to the existing 2023-24 pay award and backdated to April 2023. In September 2024, 66% of members voted to accept this somewhat improved offer (Department of Health and Social Care and Streeting, 2024). Emma Runswick's preface to this report highlights the dynamics of this remarkable dispute in more detail.

Overall, it is clear that the strikes across the NHS in this period were remarkable. We saw widespread industrial action across different groups of workers and unions - many of these were going on strike in the NHS for the very first time. Historically, NHS workers have been somewhat reluctant to take strike action due to their commitment to providing care, and so the surge of action across the NHS is even more extraordinary. The action taken by the various unions caused major disruption and drew significant public support. The agreed pay settlements were an improvement on what had been offered originally, and would not have been achieved without the collective action and resilience of workers who took action.

The civil service

Across the civil service, there was widespread discontent and action proposed by each of the three main unions. Civil service industrial relations have been strained for some time following years of austerity and reform, and has tended to result in a militant response by the Public and Commercial Services union (Hodder, 2015). The 2023 strikes in the civil service need to be understood in this historical context. Following an industrial action ballot over pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy terms in November 2022, the PCS achieved the 50% ballot threshold in 124 separate bargaining units across the civil service and public sector. The following is a non-exhaustive account of industrial action taken by PCS across these bargaining units. The union commenced a programme of targeted strike action across different employers and regions in December 2022. As the union entered 2023, this dispute continued with action taken by call centre members and other workers in the Rural Payments agency in the north of England and Wales. In the same month, PCS members took action in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) and National Highways. The action continued on 1st February as the union called the largest civil service strike for over a decade. This strike involved all eligible bargaining units in the civil service that met the ballot threshold, with the union estimating that 100,000 civil servants took action on this day (PCS, 2023a). Further targeted action took place in February in the DVLA, DWP, the British Museum, and Border Force before another day of civil service wide action on 15th March, planned to coincide with the Budget. This action was coordinated with UCU, NEU, ASLEF, RMT, the BMA, the HCSA, Prospect and NUJ members across BBC Local services. Bolstered by a successful re-ballot of some employers, the PCS strike on 1st March alone was estimated by the union to involve 133,000 members. Further action was also taken in March by members in the Animal and Plant Health Agency, the DVLA and DWP, whilst more than 1,600 staff employed by the DVSA were engaged in rolling action across the country between 6-28 March. In addition to this, PCS members in Ofsted announced a twelve-day strike in the same month.

Moving into April, the union's national campaign escalated further and saw another civil service wide strike on 28th April. Before this however, British Museum workers took seven days of strike action over the Easter holiday (April 6-12). British Library workers also took 14 days of action', while National Highways workers walked out from April 3-7. Driving examiners in the DVSA took further regional rolling action from April 5-28. In Northern Ireland, Border Force officers and immigration staff in Belfast also took action, whilst there was a five-week strike by just under 2,000 members in the Passport Office (in Belfast, Durham, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport, Peterborough and Southport). These workers were joined by a further 1,000 members across the rest of the Passport Office workplaces in May. May also saw action taken by the union's members in HM Revenue and Customs. The union was able to maintain the mandate for the dispute with a successful re-ballot in many areas in May 2023, and later that month, the union's annual delegate conference voted to continue the campaign. As a result of this widespread and long-lasting programme of

action, the union was invited to the Cabinet Office for talks in June along with the other civil service unions. Whilst this led to some concessions (namely an increased pay remit, a £1,500 cost-of-living payment, guarantees on redundancy terms, and further negotiations on pay and staffing), in September, the union's membership voted in a consultative ballot to continue the campaign. September then saw action taken by members in The Pensions Regulator in Brighton in a dispute over fair pay. In summarising the action, the union reflected that 'Our strategy of targeted strikes has enabled us to call more successful industrial action than at any other time in our union's history, with targeted strike action involving thousands of members. We have also had three national strike days involving tens of thousands of members. Our strike action has been brilliantly supported and workers have flocked to join the union' (PCS, 2023b).

Beyond PCS, both Prospect and FDA members were also frustrated with pay. Prospect members in the civil service took two days of strike action in March (to coincide with the PCS strike on budget day noted above) and in May as part of a dispute over pay, job losses and redundancy terms. Further strikes were intended for June, but were ultimately suspended in May 2023 after the government offered 'meaningful talks' (Morton, 2023). The FDA were also considering balloting for strike action in April 2023 in response to ministers imposing an average pay rise of between 4.5% and 5%. In what would have been the union's first ballot for 40 years over pay, the ballot was suspended at the same time as the proposed Prospect strikes for the talks which took place in June 2023.

Local services

We now turn to local services. By local services, we mean direct employees in local government as well as workers in functions that have been outsourced and privatised, but remain within the broader remit of local government provision. In England, the local government collective agreement, with terms set by the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services, was not challenged by national strike action, with members of the three main unions in local government (GMB, Unison and Unite) voting in November 2023 to accept the employer offer. All three unions had held disaggregated ballots for industrial action but did not meet the ballot threshold to call a national strike. Yet as councils are not legally bound to follow the local government pay increase, there were a number of local disputes across England relating to refuse workers. For example, refuse workers staged almost two weeks of strikes within Tower Hamlets in September. The dispute came to an end with an improved pay deal, which also saw 50 agency workers being insourced (Unite, 2023a). A similar dispute took place between waste and recycling workers and Warrington Borough Council. The Unite members took strike action between October and December, with the council failing to secure an injunction against the strikes. In total, five rounds of walkouts took place before the strike was concluded with an improved offer relating to pay and the temporary workforce in December (Watterson, 2023).

In Scotland however, following strikes over pay in 2022, further strikes took place across 2023 in local government. The Scottish Joint Council pay negotiations were ultimately concluded in

November, when members of the three main local government unions voted to accept an improved pay offer, a key feature of which was a minimum hourly rate of at least £15 for all workers (Unison Scotland, 2023). In Wales, Unite members employed as refuse workers by Wrexham Council voted to accept an improved pay deal following seven weeks of strike action (Unite, 2023b). In a similar dispute at Cardiff City Council, Unite members took 12 weeks of strike action between September and December as part of a dispute on a range of issues including pay and a bullying culture that continued to run into 2024 (Unite, 2023c).

The industrial action was not limited to workers directly employed in local services, with widespread action also taken by those in outsourced services. For example, in June, GMB members employed as waste and recycling workers by Serco across Sandwell, West Midlands, took strike action over pay. These workers had been engaged in what had been described as 'an increasingly bitter dispute', which came to an end following a pay settlement of 8.5% (Flash, 2023b). In July, around 150 Unite members employed in refuse services by Serco took strike action in South Gloucestershire in a dispute over pay, which was settled by August due to an improved pay offer of 10.1% (Unite, 2023d). In September, approximately 50 workers at waste processing sites within the Nottinghamshire County Council area took strike action over pay, affecting approximately 250,000 households (Martin, 2023). This dispute was settled in October 2023 when the GMB members accepted an improved pay offer from Veolia.

Some significant disputes and strikes also took place within the social work and social care functions of local government. In June, United Voices of the World (UVW) members employed at Sage Nursing Home in North London took three days of action coordinated with other UVW members in other workplaces, including at Amazon, the Department for Education, the London School of Economics, and two schools (UVW, 2023). This coordinated day of action represented a significant achievement for a small, independent union, and came on the back of further industrial action in the preceding two years, winning important gains in relation to pay and staffing – again, non-pay concerns relating to service quality and safety were prominent in these disputes. A long and bitter dispute began in September, when mental health social workers who are members of Unison and employed by Barnet Council took industrial action over 'unsafe' staffing levels and pay. As the dispute continued into 2024, these Unison members took a total of 81 days of industrial action, which had been escalated when the council used a recruitment agency to bring in strikebreakers (Samuel, 2024). This dispute, affecting 32 employees, has not been fully settled although strikes were suspended at the time of writing (Barnet Unison, 2024). Also in September 2023, a further significant strike occurred within private care homes in Scotland. GMB members at the Cardonald, Ballieston and Stobhill Care Homes in the private Minster Care Group took strike action due to cuts to overtime pay rates, reneging on previous agreements over pay, and attempting to derecognise the union (GMB Scotland, 2023). Once again, the employer sought to break the strike by bringing in agency workers on higher hourly rates of pay than those on strike. Strike action in social care is relatively uncommon (see Whitfield, 2022), yet these examples are notable. They illustrate the pressures faced by a workforce in relation to service quality,

safety, and staffing levels, as workers come into conflict with the privatised and marketized ownership structures that prevail within the fragmented patchwork of local services in the core and periphery of local government.

Logistics and manufacturing

The most high profile strikes in logistics occurred when Amazon workers took action for the first time in the UK. The GMB has been campaigning to improve worker rights at Amazon for more than a decade, and members began a long running strike at the Coventry fulfilment centre in January. Following a successful ballot in late 2022, workers began strike action over pay with a one day strike on 25 January. A further day of action was called for 28 February before the GMB ramped up their campaign with action in every month between March and August, followed by four more days in November. In total, approximately 1,000 GMB members at the Coventry site took 28 days of action across the year as part of this historic campaign after Amazon offered an hourly pay rise of £1 (GMB, 2023). In August, the workers in Coventry were joined in the dispute by GMB members at the Rugeley fulfilment centre, in what the GMB described as ‘the biggest week of industrial action in the company’s history – across two sites’ (GMB, 2023). In November, GMB held a ‘solidarity protest’ outside Amazon’s Swindon depot to coincide with the strikes taking place in Coventry. At the time of writing, the dispute is ongoing.

Unite members took a range of strike action across multiple logistics firms in 2023. For example, workers employed by Lineside Logistics took strike action over pay in May and June. The company are responsible for engine and parts distribution at Ford’s Dagenham factory (Rose, 2023). This dispute was followed by a six day strike across November and December by 30 Unite members employed by GXO Logistics to deliver beer for the Greene King brewery. The strike ended in December following a substantially improved pay deal for 2023 and 2024 (Wickens, 2023). Elsewhere in GXO, almost 150 members took strike action in December. This group of workers, employed in the cold storage warehouses that supply Iceland supermarkets across the South West of England, rejected a below inflation pay deal, which led to the action (Parker and Bassingham, 2023). Whilst most of these disputes were about pay and conditions, one strike occurred in May 2023 in response to the sacking of a Unite representative. The action was taken by HGV drivers, employed by GXO on the contract to supply City Plumbing and PTS outlets (Socialist Party, 2023). Beyond Unite, approximately 50 members of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) employed as health system warehouse workers in the Business Services Organisation of the Department of Health participated in a five day strike. The strikes saw these low paid logistics workers take action over pay and safe staffing as part of a dispute which continued into 2024 (BBC News, 2023f).

Finally, we outline a number of strikes in the manufacturing sector. These strikes tended to involve fewer workers, and received far less publicity than the action taken in the other sectors detailed above. Despite this, and reflecting the nature of employment in much of what remains in terms of manufacturing in Britain, there were some significant, long

running disputes in food and beverage processing employers. In January, engineering workers and Unite members at the Diageo bottling plant in Leven, Scotland called a series of stoppages in a dispute over pay and the attempted imposition of a lower rate for new employees. This was a longstanding issue that had been raised through grievance procedures as far back as 2019. Following further strikes throughout 2023, the dispute was finally settled in September 2024, with a 10.4% pay deal (Unite, 2024). In May 2023, a bargaining group of 100 Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) members at Allied Bakeries in Bootle, Merseyside staged two 48 hour strikes (Ali, 2023), ultimately settling in August with a 17.3% pay rise over 2 years (Trinder, 2023). Also in August, strike action commenced at Brown Brothers, a meat processing factory in Dumfriesshire, over pay. The Unite members staged several rounds of strikes across August and September before the dispute concluded with a three-year pay deal amounting to 13.2% in the first year and a commitment to pay real living wage upratings (Dodds, 2023).

Beyond food and beverage, further disputes occurred in manufacturing. There are too many to outline in detail, but we offer some brief examples. In January 2023, a strike by Unite members at the Co-op’s Glasgow coffin factory entered its fourth month in a dispute over pay. The strike involved around 50 craft workers who rejected a pay offer of 4% for 2022 and 5% for 2023 (Kollewe, 2023). Also in Scotland, at Mahle Engine Systems in Kilmarnock, 120 workers took strike action in May and June 2023 over management’s failure to apply an additional increase to the entire workforce following a 3.4 per cent annual pay increase made in January 2023 – this dispute was settled at the end of June with a 10.7% pay deal covering the whole workforce (Unite, 2023e). At the same time, more than 200 Unite members at Trelleborg in Tewkesbury and Bridgwater took strike action in May over pay. The dispute in the company, which manufactures seals used in the aerospace, automotive, medical, food and energy industries, came to an end in June when workers secured an offer of 11% over two years having initially been offered a 5.2% one-year deal (Unite, 2023f). In Northern Ireland, ten days of strike action took place at Survitec in Dunmurry in June 2023, a manufacturer of marine life-saving equipment. Unite members took several days of action over pay, before settling after an offer of a 10% increase was made, nearly doubling what had originally been offered by management (Webber, 2023). Our final example outlines strike action by skilled workers at Lincatt, a kitchen manufacturer in Lincoln. These Unite members took multiple days of strike action in September and October over pay, before earning a significantly improved two year pay settlement amounting to 13% (Griffin, 2023). From these examples it can be seen that industrial action was not solely a public sector phenomenon in the period in question, and while the examples raised here are relatively small and localised, they demonstrate a willingness to act and mobilise, with numerous examples of pay rises being won that went above and beyond the prevailing rates of inflation at the time.

Conclusions

To draw the report to a conclusion, we reflect on the extent of the recent action. As noted above, we have seen a substantial increase in strike action in recent years, which peaked in 2023. As workers grappled with a cost of living crisis on the back of years of austerity in the public sector and the generation of super profits in the private sector, it is clear that the data collected by Strike Map have captured a moment of significance. The account provided in this report has attempted to illustrate the extent of these historically elevated levels of strike action and demonstrate the sheer breadth and scale of the 2022-2023 strike wave.

Whilst a spike in inflation from February 2022 onwards was undoubtedly the core driver of the disputes that subsequently took place (reflected in the prominence of pay as the reason given for striking), this only tells part of the story. The nature of collective bargaining in Britain with its narrow focus on pay and hours of work inevitably means that disputes emerge with a far wider range of grievances as unions brought together a number of issues on ballot papers. We were able to identify a number of these broader issues that were commonly referenced; staffing levels and patient safety in disputes within health and social care; issues relating to ticketing offices, the interests of passengers and the more general condition of the railways in a privatised, fragmented system during the national rail strikes; and issues relating to staff workloads, turnover and the impact on learners were widely reference across all levels of education provision.

These wider issues derive from the broader context of austerity, pay suppression and in some cases the influence of marketisation, leading to years of downward pressures on pay and working conditions, meaning that simmering grievances in many different areas of employment provided the basis for an upsurge in industrial action once the drastic and immediate increase in the cost of living took effect. This combination of factors meant that we witnessed large groups of workers develop a sense of injustice at work, and therefore a sense of bargaining awareness (Brown, 1973) as a precursor to mobilisation (Kelly, 1998). Such militancy needs to be understood in the context of the extremely hostile legal environment within which trade unions operate (Lyddon, 2021; Katsaroumpas, 2023). In spite of this, we saw several unions surpassing the ballot thresholds (sometimes in successive ballots), often with staggering results. A number of unions also coordinated action at various points in the strike wave, and such action was complemented with a wide range of local demonstrations and rallies. In much of the UK, unions were able to use the legal restrictions of the Trade Union Act to legitimise industrial action amongst groups of workers that had never taken strike action before (see Lyddon, 2021). We therefore saw in practice the distinction between organised and mobilised unions (Holgate et al, 2018). As more and more unions started to take action, others joined the fight, termed by some as ‘the revival of resistance’ (Thomas et al, 2023), and the ‘forward march of labour resumed’ (McDonnell et al, 2024). As we have outlined in the above discussion, not only were large groups of workers taking action, they were achieving significant wins (see Webber, 2023). As such, the spread of action can be partly explained by Brown (1973: 143–144) who noted ‘It

may be that a group of workers has always felt inhibited from using its bargaining power by a feeling of social or vocational obligation but that, when they see a comparable group using it with consequences that are rewarding and not catastrophic, they revise their view’.

However, this action did not occur in a vacuum. Developments within the labour movement itself contributed to the work involved in building capacity within unions. While results have been mixed, most mainstream unions have increased their focus on organising and seeking to build power and capacity within union branches and unionised workplaces, involving union official-led initiatives as well as a broader, increasingly networked activist base (Simms et al, 2013; Holgate, 2021). Alongside this, there has been a transformation in terms of access to labour-related online courses, seminars, networking and information sharing, in part driven by social media but amplified by the widespread adoption of online video conferencing during the pandemic. Training relating to organising also became increasingly accessible in the years prior to the strike wave – the late Jane McAlevey’s Organizing for Power training and networking program has been delivered for over 25,000 organisers from 130 countries.⁵ In Britain, initiatives influenced by this include, to name but a few, the work of the Ella Baker School of Organising, the peer to peer network Organise Now, the renewed educational work of the GFTU, as well as numerous other activities such as the now annual Troublemakers at Work conference for grassroots trade unionists.⁶ As we noted in our introduction, Strike Map has also played a vital role in this process through driving solidarity via messages of support, financial donations, and crucially, support on picket lines. Thus, the Strike Map data presented here need to be understood in this context - they have been created primarily as a means of encouraging such solidarity, whilst also helpfully serving a secondary purpose in providing the foundations for this report. Many of the strikes involved younger workers who may have never been on strike before. The hope would be that this new, networked generation of unionised workers, (many of whom have suffered considerably due to recent economic crises), remain active inside unions and can build and sustain the union movement in the years to come. Caution is needed as union membership among young workers is far from high (Simms et al, 2018), and union membership density continues to fall. Yet these wider changes and experiences of action are vitally important for the future of the labour movement.

In putting together this report, we have tried to go beyond classic accounts of industrial action that rely on the official data published by the ONS (see Knowles, 1952; Durcan et al, 1983; Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a). We hope that the data presented in this report inspire further case-study based research into this important period of strikes. This report would not have been possible without the numerous contributions made to Strike Map by union members, activists and officials. Such data have been invaluable in enabling us to evidence what has happened in this period in a way that goes far beyond the increasingly narrow focus of the ONS’s reporting on industrial

5 <https://janemcalevey.com/speaking-engagement/organizing-for-powers-core-fundamentals-2024/2024-05-07/>

6 See <https://www.ellabakerorganising.org.uk>, <https://www.organise-now.org.uk/about/> and <https://troublemakersat.work/>

action. The Strike Map data do have their limitations, but we believe they are able to complement the official records. For the first time, we have been able to document the number of individual workplaces taking action. We are also able to use the Strike Map data to demonstrate the reasons given for striking - something missing from the ONS records since 2018. But we have also tried to offer something more substantive beyond facts and figures. As such, the aim of writing this report has been to remind the movement that 'there are people behind numbers' (Perrot in Franzosi, 1995: xviii).



Appendices

1) A note on the data

All strike data (including those published as part of official national statistics) come with a range of health warnings about their reliability and validity (see Lyddon, 2007 for an overview, and Hodder and Mustchin, 2024a for a discussion of the current issues with the ONS data on labour disputes). The data provided by Strike Map for this report are no different. We have outlined in the main text of this report how the Strike Map data differ from the official record published by the ONS, but it is helpful to elaborate further on a number of issues the data present. Strike Map (2024) acknowledge that their data have limitations - they 'do not claim to be an official account of all action across the country, or represent all the collective action and different tactics of disruption that people are engaged in'. This is an important clarification. Therefore, despite the clear commitment of the individuals continuing to support Strike Map by submitting instances of strike action, we cannot make any claims about the reliability of the data (although we did check the accuracy of the examples provided above, and detail our 'cleaning' process in what follows). There are also issues with the completeness of the account presented in this report, and like all records of strikes (see Lyddon, 2007) we anticipate there is a significant degree of under reporting. We hope this will change as Strike Map continues to grow and develop. Despite this presumed under reporting, we do believe the dataset is substantial enough to permit meaningful insights.

We also need to outline the process of 'data cleaning' undertaken. Data cleaning is a common process in social science research, designed to improve the quality and validity of the data and any subsequent analysis. It permits the identification of problematic data entries (such as missing variables) and if not done carefully can lead to over and under reporting of various phenomena (see Osborne, 2013 for a discussion). We outline our approach to this process here. The initial data file we received from Strike Map in May 2024 contained 228,325 entries of strikes for 2023. Following an examination of these data, we were able to identify a large number of issues that would require cleaning. First, there were a number of duplicate entries - for example, for each date and workplace where there had been a NEU strike, there were five entries on the map. Many ASLEF strikes had also been entered multiple times. Second, we were also able to identify a number of entries detailing strikes outside of the UK. For example, a number of entries related to the IF Metall strikes at Tesla in Sweden. Third, the data contained a small number of 'test entries', presumably made to check the functionality of the Strike Map website. Fourth, some entries did not specify the union involved in the action in the 'correct' column needed for analysis. Fifth, a small number of entries did not contain either the name of the employer where action was being taken, or the name of the union involved in the strike - these entries would need to be removed from the dataset. In order to resolve these issues, we liaised with Ten Boroughs Research Ltd, who were able to clean the data using Python. We are extremely grateful to Alex James at Ten Boroughs for undertaking this work.

We then reviewed the revised data file, and found that further data cleaning was still required at this point. This involved the

need to remove the NUJ strikes in both Guernsey and Jersey (as these are outside the UK). We also needed to add (manually) missing variables to several thousand entries (specifically relating to the geographic breakdown by country of the workplaces recorded on the map). Each of the entries to the map were then checked manually to ensure the name of the union on strike was correct. A small number of errors were corrected at this stage. For example, a number of strikes by Irish National Teachers Organisation had been coded as strikes by the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, and some entries relating to the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists strikes had been included as separate unions due to the use of slight variations of the union's name (at the point of data submission to the map⁷). Upon correcting these issues, we were left with a final dataset of 170,048 entries, meaning a total of 58,277 entries were removed during the cleaning process.

Finally, we note two further processes undertaken to further our analysis. First, as noted in the report, the 170,048 data points relate to the total number of entries to the map, and therefore include multiple workplaces where more than one day of action was recorded. We subsequently initiated a process within Excel to sort the data in order to identify unique workplaces, and limit the extent of this problem. This process found that strikes were recorded at a total of 34,424 unique workplaces across the UK. Second, the reasons given for striking at the point of data entry produced a long list of 22 separate reasons for the strikes. Unfortunately, a large proportion of entries to the map did not include a reason for the action. Whilst we have no way of knowing why these details are missing, some potential explanations include either the person submitting the strike mistakenly missing this section of the form, or not being aware of the strikers' demands and so deciding not to enter anything. The smaller dataset of 34,424 entries were manually recoded as follows to enable more meaningful analysis. Where multiple reasons were logged together (e.g. 'Pay and safety', or 'Pay, pensions, jobs and cuts to Civil Service Compensation Scheme'), these were recoded by the first reason listed (in these cases, pay). This process resulted in the nine categories listed in the main body of the report.

⁷ Clearly, some unions feature more in these data than others. This issue does distort the data somewhat, but the problem is unavoidable due to the nature collected by Strike Map. Indeed, it is likely a product of who is uploading the information to the map, over which we have no control.

2) Data tables

Table A1: Total workplaces reported as taking strike action by month - 2023

Month	Number	%
January	2,916	1.71%
February	32,869	19.33%
March	39,782	23.39%
April	27,653	16.26%
May	21,726	12.78%
June	632	0.37%
July	43,397	25.52%
August	170	0.10%
September	539	0.32%
October	240	0.14%
November	39	0.02%
December	85	0.05%
Totals	170,048	100.00%

Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data

Table A2: Unique workplaces recorded on the map by country

Country	Number	%
England	26,057	75.69%
Northern Ireland	5,469	15.89%
Scotland	1,178	3.42%
Wales	1,720	5.00%
Total	34,424	100.00%

Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data

Table A3: Reason given for striking by unique workplace

Reason	Number	%
Pay	28,137	81.737%
Working conditions	181	0.526%
Redundancy/ restructure	52	0.151%
Victimisation of a trade union rep	5	0.015%
Fire and rehire	3	0.009%
Health and safety	3	0.009%
TUPE/change of employer	1	0.003%
Bullying/harassment	2	0.006%
Not specified	6,040	17.546%
Total	34,424	100.000%

Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data

Table A4: Unique workplaces recorded on the map by union

Union name	Number	%
Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF)	225	0.654%
BDA (Dentists)	24	0.070%
British Medical Association (BMA)	350	1.017%
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP)	47	0.137%
Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)	984	2.858%
Fire Brigades Union (FBU)	1	0.003%
GMB	690	2.004%
Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA)	203	0.590%
Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB)	2	0.006%
Irish National Teachers Organisation	1,067	3.100%
National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	1,065	3.094%
National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)	1,076	3.126%
National Education Union (NEU)	23,951	69.576%
National Union of Journalists (NUJ)	39	0.113%
National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)	333	0.967%
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)	92	0.267%
Prospect	26	0.076%
Public and Commercial Services union (PCS)	874	2.539%
Royal College of Nursing (RCN)	384	1.116%
Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association	1	0.003%
Society of Radiographers (SoR)	39	0.113%
Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA)	1	0.003%
Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU)	1,064	3.091%
Unison	648	1.882%
Unite the Union	893	2.594%
United Voices of the World (UVW)	7	0.020%
University and College Union (UCU)	338	0.982%
Totals	34,424	100.000%

Source: Author analysis of Strike Map data

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