

Starmer should be 'more upfront' in supporting striking workers, says union boss

A trade union boss has suggested Sir [Keir Starmer](#) is "embarrassed" to stick up for workers as dockers at Britain's largest container port strike for the first time in 30 years.

[Unite](#) general secretary Sharon Graham told broadcasters on Tuesday that the [Labour](#) leader should be "more upfront" in supporting strikers, who "need people in their corner".

Her intervention came three days into an eight-day strike at the [Port of Felixstowe](#), where almost 2,000 dockers have walked out in a dispute over pay.

Several people who have worked at the company for decades told the PA news agency on Monday that they are relying on food banks and struggling to make mortgage payments.

The union is calling for a 10% pay rise to keep wages roughly in line with inflation, while the port has proposed a 7% increase plus a £500 payment.

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Asked by LBC's Tom Swarbrick if Sir Keir supports the strike, Ms Graham said: "For me, actions speak louder than words, and I'd have to say no.

"I really hope what's not happening here is that the party that was created by workers is now embarrassed to stick up for workers. That would be something that I think would be a miscalculation.

"This is the time that workers need a voice, you know, they need people in their corner. I'm firmly in their corner – I'm getting a lot of flak for it but I don't mind – and I'd like Labour to do the same."

Ms Graham also told Sky News: "Of course I would like Labour to do more, of course I want them to do more to support workers in a more upfront way."

Unite is the latest union broadside against Sir Keir, who attracted criticism when he urged frontbenchers to stay away from rail strikes last month.

He drew condemnation from Ms Graham, Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union boss Mick Lynch and TSSA general secretary Manuel Cortes when he sacked Sam Tarry, a shadow transport minister, for giving media interviews from picket lines.

Former Labour leader [Jeremy Corbyn](#) waded into the row last

week, telling PA that his successor's decision was "very unfair".

Ms Graham also played down claims that raising workers' pay could fuel inflation, arguing that rising prices are the fault of "profiteering" companies.

"It's not wages causing any part of inflation at the moment – wages are down, actually, by 3%," she said.

"The second spike of inflation is down to profiteering and the profiteering of companies. The top 350 companies in Britain, their profit margin has gone up by over 73% since before the pandemic."

According to accounts filed with Companies House this month, the Port of Felixstowe saw its profit after tax increase by 15% between 2020 and 2021 to £53 million.