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Think piece: The anger behind the strikes [1]

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What drives 750,000 people to the point of ruining everyone else's day by striking? PJ Byrne reflects on the "anger deriving from a wounded sense of self-worth" that drives so many people to strike over so small an issue.

Summer is very nearly upon us, and for many it is a happy time of year, one we associate with pleasant memories of carefree youth and halcyon days gone by. I for one remember, as a child, lazy Sundays fishing on the creek that flowed out of the marsh alongside our house; as a teenager, spending hot and breezy afternoons skippering a rickety, thirty-year-old catamaran on Long Island Sound; and, as a law student, flying back to America to watch the Fourth of July fireworks by the water with my family.

We all have comparable, though doubtlessly very different, memories and experiences of summer, and have been having them for hundreds of years ? and, sometimes, people have described these in even more saccharine terms than I have just done. Take, for example, sixteenth-century poet Alexander Hume's ode to "A Summer Day": "The flourishes and fragrant flowers / Through Phoebus' fostering heat, / Refresht with dew and silver showers / Cast up an odour sweet... All labourers draw home at even, / And can to other say, / Thanks to the gracious God of heaven, / Which sent this summer day."

Unless, of course, those labourers happen to belong to a public sector union. As some of you might know, major unions in the UK are planning co-ordinated strike action this summer, which looks likely to go ahead. At least officially, this is being done to protect the unholy trinity of unionised life ? holiday, pay and pensions ? and it looks like they are going to try to spoil the party while they are at it. Strikes are planned across the government, which most of us are bound not to notice, except perhaps those of teachers and, in particular, transport, where tube workers are threatening to interfere with Wimbledon. Interfering with tennis is, of course, insufferable, and raises the question: during such a lovely time of year, when so much is going on, how can 750,000 people ? all of whom have jobs in which they voluntarily consented to be employed ? be grumpy to the point of wanting to ruin everyone else's fun?

View the whole article. [3]

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Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/regulation-and-industry/think-piece-the-anger-behind-the-strikes
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5822

[3] http://www.adamsmith.org/think-piece/regulation-and-industry/a-thicket-of-summer-grass%3a-the-thymotic-anger-behind-the-strikes/
[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[5] http://disqus.com