

## RMT STRIKE: "IT'S CLASS WAR" VICTORY TO THE WORKERS!

This Tuesday, rail workers in the RMT (Rail, Maritime, and Transport) union undertook the first of three days of strike action planned for this week. This saw stations closed and trains halted across the country.

In London, striking railway workers were also joined by RMT members on the Tube, shutting down the Underground and bringing the capital to a standstill.

This is the largest railway strike for decades, and is shaping up to be a monumental fight for the whole labour movement, as RMT members struggle to defend their jobs, pay, and conditions.

It is also shaping up to be the first of many big strikes set to come in the months ahead, as the working class fights to protect its living standards in the face of inflation and wage squeezes.

A victory in this rail strike will therefore be vital in emboldening the whole class: from teachers and posties, to doctors and cleaners.

### Media frenzy

Of course, even this single day of action has considerably frightened the ruling class, who have gone into overdrive to attack and smear the union.

The bosses' media have launched a vicious offensive against the RMT: attempting to label the union as 'extremist'; its general secretary Mick Lynch a 'Marxist'; and it's 'overpaid' members as being 'blackmailed' by their leaders to 'cripple' the country.

Such lies and hysteria are to be expected, as the organised working class increas-

ingly moves into action and fights for its own interests.

For once, however, the gutter press has told the truth, with this morning's cover of the S\*n declaring: "It's class war!" – as Murdoch's rag warned of the potential for a summer of strikes by other workers.

To his credit, Mick Lynch has run rings around the capitalists' attack dogs – whether these be sensationalist TV presenters, Tory MPs, or industry leaders; consistently cutting through their nonsense, and putting forward the real reasons behind these strikes in numerous media appearances.

And despite the barrage of reactionary propaganda, one recent poll showed that a majority of ordinary people – 58% – think the rail strikes are justified. Meanwhile, in spite of the bosses' best efforts to demonise the RMT, the same poll found that those surveyed believed that the Tory government is more to blame for industrial action going ahead than the union.

Indeed, the RMT's demands – to defend jobs, and for a real pay rise – are clearly gaining an echo, with workers across Britain sympathetic to the strikers, as inflation increases to a four-decade high of 9.1%, and the cost-of-living crisis bites ever harder.

### 'Labour' Party

Disgracefully, in his mission to prove himself a reliable representative of big business, establishment champion 'Sir' Keir Starmer has advised Labour MPs on the frontbench not to attend RMT pickets lines.

Such shameful behaviour has done nothing to appease the capitalists, however. Despite the Labour leadership's efforts to distance the party from the strikes, the Tories and the right-wing press have continually attempted to link the two – even though the RMT is not affiliated to Labour!

At the same time, Starmer's refusal to support the strike has disgusted workers and activists across the labour movement.

Nevertheless, a number of Labour MPs have disobeyed their leader's orders, and have visited picket lines to offer their solidarity.

This defiance is welcome. Support for workers taking action should be the bare minimum expected of any 'Labour' representative.

### Picket lines

Socialist Appeal supporters also showed solidarity with striking RMT workers yesterday, visiting picket lines up-and-down the country.

Comrades in Tottenham, London, attended the picket line at the Seven Sisters depot. The strikers told us harrowing stories of a culture of bullying and racism from senior management, leaving some workers with mental health problems.

Members from other unions – including the CWU, Unison, NEU, and Unite – were also there to offer support.

Our comrades spoke to local RMT members, who correctly pointed out that the Tories are trying to make a spectacle out of this dispute, in order to attack the whole labour movement. But this is backfiring, as most workers are also facing attacks on their real wages and conditions, and are in support of this strike action.

One striker boldly pointed out that the only way forward is to mobilise the entire trade union movement, with the aim of a general strike to bring down the Tories. This is exactly the perspective that the labour movement should arm itself with.

Comrades attending the Liverpool Street picket line interviewed the secretary of East London Rail Branch, Walé Agunbiadé, who also highlighted the strength of public

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(cont.) support, as well as rising inequality.

Socialist Appeal supporters in London also joined the picket at Kings Cross station, helping give out RMT leaflets and talking to people about the strike.

The comrades reported an optimistic mood on the picket line. Only 30% of services on the East Coast Mainline were operating – far below the management's hopes of running 80%. Lots of cars honked their horns in support, and passers-by gave their thumbs up.

Darren, one of the striking rail workers, told Socialist Appeal: "There can be no room for apathy when your jobs, terms and conditions, and pensions are at risk. But there will be no room for sympathy when you have no job left to fight for."

Our comrades also visited the picket line in Newcastle. Support here was overwhelmingly positive, with one passerby

stating: "It's about time we stood up to these bosses thinking they can get away with treating staff like this!"

One striker told us: "Support from the public has been great. The public realise that we don't earn £41,000. They haven't fallen for the Tory attacks and lies."

A colleague of this worker then responded: "Why would we be on strike if we earned over £40,000 a year? It's rubbish what they are coming out with."

In Leeds, the picket line was also rock solid. Workers spoke of safety as a major concern, even before pay, with various cuts potentially leading to heightened risks – and even deaths.

RMT members understood clearly their role as the first wave of strikers in a tsunami of militant action. Many mentioned not just being out on strike for themselves, but for the entire working class.

Our comrades also supported picket lines in Sheffield, Nor-

wich, Ipswich, Cardiff, Clacton-on-Sea, Cambridge, Morpeth, Acton, and many more locations across the country.

## Turning point

This strike has the potential to be a turning point in the class struggle in Britain. All eyes are on the RMT.

A win in this battle will be a huge spur for the entire trade union movement, which has been steadily and surely gaining momentum over the past year, with strikes and disputes spreading across industries and regions.

Indeed, this fact is recognised by the Tories, with deputy PM Dominic Raab stating in one interview that "we [read: the ruling class] can't allow the unions to win this argument"

As such, it is vital that the whole labour movement gets behind the RMT.

Already, a national strike of teachers is on the cards, with

the NEU warning the government that the union will move to ballot members if their demands for a proper pay rise are not met.

And more than 115,000 postal workers at Royal Mail – organised in the CWU – are also set to vote on potential strike action over pay.

Similar national industrial action looms in the civil service, courts, and telecoms industry. And no doubt victories for these workers would encourage NHS staff and local government workers to mobilise also.

The trade union leaders must provide a fighting strategy: organising co-ordinated action across the movement – not only to strengthen these struggles, and to win for their members, but to bring down this government of the billionaires and bosses.

As Nick Oung, RMT member and Socialist Appeal activist, correctly states: "The bigger our strike, the better our victory will be!" ■

# SOCIALIST★APPEAL

# WHO ARE WE? and WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

The Tories are the political representatives of big business. As defenders of capitalism, they are the sworn enemies of the working class.

Neither do we have trust in Keir Starmer and the right-wing Labour leadership, who are taking the party back to Blairism.

The capitalist system is in a complete impasse. It cannot be reformed. It must be overthrown.

We are fighting for bold socialist policies to defend workers and challenge the capitalist system.

- Answer the cost-of-living crisis with a £15 per hour minimum wage. For a sliding (rising) scale of wages, with increases in pay, pensions, and benefits automatically linked to prices.
- If the bosses say they can't afford this, we say: Open up the books! Let the working class and the labour movement see the accounts! If firms plead bankruptcy, they should not be bailed out, but nationalised under workers' control.
- For a fully publicly-owned and free health service, under workers' control and management. Reverse all privatisation and outsourcing. All private health and care services must be nationalised without compensation, and integrated into the NHS.
- Fight the climate catastrophe and inflation with expropriation and socialist planning. Nationalise the energy monopolies, big supermarket chains, and distributors, without compensation.

- Ban evictions and cancel housing debts. Give local authorities the power to cap rents at affordable levels. And bring empty properties and the assets of the big landlords and management companies under public control.
- For a mass programme to build a million council houses a year. Nationalise the land, construction companies, and banks to provide the resources to accomplish this.
- To fight job cuts and unemployment, work should be shared out without any loss of pay, in order to lower the hours of the working week.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws. No to class compromise. All union officials to be regularly elected, with the right of immediate recall by the membership. Officials to receive no more than the average wage of a skilled worker.
- Fight for the real emancipation of women. Remove all barriers to women working: provide free nurseries, after-school childcare, and care for the elderly. End all forms of discrimination. Equal pay for work of equal value.
- Abolish the relics of privilege and feudalism: the monarchy and the House of Lords. The assets of the parasitic landlord class and aristocracy should be expropriated for the public good.
- Scrap tuition fees and student rents. Free education and full maintenance grants for all. End marketisation – kick the profiteers out of education. Put staff in control in schools and univer-

sities.

- Many small businesses are faced with bankruptcy – squeezed not only by the banks, but by the big monopolies. By nationalising the banks we can supply these small businesses with the lifeline of guaranteed low-interest credit.
  - The financial resources required to fight the crisis must not come from increased taxes or more austerity, but through the nationalisation of the banks and finance houses. Rather than a 'wealth tax', we call for the expropriation of the monopolies.
  - Instead of building up the national debt through government borrowing, the money needed should be obtained entirely from expropriating the accumulated profits of big business and the billionaires.
  - No to austerity! Reverse the cuts! The working class must not pay for this crisis!
  - For a mass campaign to bring down this criminal Tory government and do away with this rotten system!
- It is clear that the market has failed and capitalism is in a deep crisis. It is the anarchy of capitalism that prevents the rational planning of society's resources, in Britain and internationally.
- We therefore stand for the nationalisation of the 100 biggest monopolies, banks, and insurance companies – under workers' control and management – without compensation. They have stolen enough from us already.

On this basis, the economy can be democratically planned in the interests of the majority, and not for the super-profits of a few billionaires.

- As internationalists, we fight for a Socialist Federation of Britain linked to a Socialist United States of Europe and a World Socialist Federation, in order to plan resources internationally for the benefit of all. This would allow humanity to begin solving the urgent issues of climate change, disease, and poverty that face society and our planet.

There is, however, a crisis of leadership in the labour movement. Those who have attempted to patch-up capitalism have been found wanting.

It is therefore time to energetically build the forces of Marxism, embodied today in the International Marxist Tendency, which alone offers a revolutionary way out of this crisis. ■

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