

VICTORY TO THE RAIL STRIKES! FIGHT FOR NATIONALISATION!

From 18-20 August, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) will be carrying out its third round of national strikes in three months on the railways, as part of its dispute for jobs, pay, pensions and conditions.

The strike will involve over 40,000 workers at 14 train operating companies (TOCs) and the infrastructure controller Network Rail (NR). Meanwhile 13,000 workers in London will bring the city's transport to a halt on 19 August, including RMT tube and Overground workers, and Unite bus drivers.

Across the transport network and beyond workers are being subjected to the same attacks. Despite the massive cost-of-living crisis, workers in transport are effectively being asked to accept a pay freeze, or a real-terms pay cut.

So far, the 14 TOCs have made no offers at all. Meanwhile, NR has proposed a derisory pay rise of 4%, well below the RPI measure of inflation of

around 12%. And even this offer has been made in exchange for a series of vicious cuts, including the lay-off of a third of the workforce.

On the Underground, meanwhile, Transport for London (TfL) bosses propose to lay-off 600 workers and cut pensions.

Cuts and privatisations

All of these cuts come down to an attempt by the Tory government – and standing behind them the capitalists – to increase profits at the expense of rail workers' pay and conditions. In fact these same bosses and Tories would gladly sacrifice the entire industry for the short-term gains of a parasitic cartel.

As Patrick, Tube driver and RMT member told us:

"I used to be a ticket office clerk. Every step of the way they wanted to kill [TfL]. They

tried to defund the company first, to make the company unworkable. But the money is there.

"At some point they are going to say: 'this doesn't work, let's privatise it' – just like they did with British Rail. So it comes as no surprise to us: the plan is known and we have to fight against it."

The same is true of the current cuts across the network. Rather than 'modernising' the industry, these attacks would merely cannibalise Britain's already-archaic rail infrastructure, leading to inefficiencies, rising costs and fatal danger to workers and passengers.

The recent disruptions on Avanti West Coast, described by Avanti bosses as "unofficial strike action" are symbolic of this problem. In actual fact, the many train cancellations which caused havoc for travellers in mid-August had nothing to do with any planned or co-ordinated action.

In fact, workers simply refused to take on overtime shifts owing to

the exhausting conditions they have to work in. It is not their fault that the bosses have severely understaffed the service. Even working to the letter of your contract is enough to disrupt things, it seems!

As the cuts deepen, we can only expect such decay of the railways to get worse. As Patrick says of the Underground: "Ten years ago they cut 900 jobs and now they want another 600 to go – so when is enough going to be enough?"

Re-nationalisation

Meanwhile, the profits of the bosses have never been so high. The rolling stock companies – the parasites of parasites on the railway, who are responsible for the leasing of trains to the TOCs – extract hundreds of millions of pounds in dividends to shareholders each year. Their profits, as with those of the TOCs, are mostly owned by foreign rail monopolies and banks.

These profits are therefore entirely parasitic, serving no purpose for investment that would improve the conditions of workers, the service of passengers or the economy as a whole. Yet it is on their altar that rail workers should sacrifice their pay, conditions, jobs and safety. The prospect of an affordable and high quality transport service is therefore scuppered in favour of their profits.

It is therefore necessary to demand the wholesale re-nationalisation of all these private companies and their profits, which have only been detrimental to the industry over the last 30 years of privatisation. Only by taking their wealth and resources back into public ownership and workers' control can the demands
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(cont.) of the strike be sustainable.

The first two waves of rail strikes have sparked a powder-keg of indignation across the whole of the working class, which is now moving towards industrial action in the postal service, civil service, BT, education, hospitals and more.

“A general strike is getting more and more realistic,” according to Patrick. “Consciousness is getting more radical, the workers are more open. We shouldn’t stop, we need to keep pushing.”

Coordination

Indeed, the mood for coordinated industrial action can be felt on all picket lines and in all workplaces. After all, these cuts are not isolat-

ed to the rail sector, or even the public sector. Workers across the board have been made to suffer over 14 years of crisis, pay freezes and cuts, and are itching to fight back.

It is in this context that left trade union leaders – including Mick Lynch, Sharon Graham and Dave Ward – have come together in the ‘Enough is Enough’ campaign to fight the cost of living crisis.

We embrace any move towards co-ordination in order to defend and improve living standards. The question is, where should it go?

In our view, the first aim of any campaign across the trade unions must be to organise the rank-and-file around a far reach-

ing socialist programme, and to transform the labour movement into a weapon to achieve it.

This would include the building up of cross-union workplace committees, trades councils, and the shaking up of the TUC as a whole. This could then act as a vehicle for the coordination of the industrial struggles of various sectors.

Workers’ control

With such organisation, the working class could begin to feel its real strength. A one-day public sector strike, launched in this way, could be the opening shot of a cross-union campaign to bring down this Tory government and replace it with a socialist alternative.

The Avanti train disruptions and RMT strikes both demonstrate that not a wheel turns and not a lightbulb shines without the kind permission of the working-class. Yet it is the bosses who determine our conditions, and they will stop at nothing to protect their interests.

If the current disputes show anything, it is that we cannot settle for a simple redistribution of power or wealth. Rather, it is time to overhaul the whole lot: for workers’ control of industry, for the expropriation of the banks and monopolies that dominate the economy, and for a socialist plan of production.

- Victory to the rail strikes!
- Fight for re-nationalisation and workers’ control!
- For coordinated action across the entire labour movement! ■

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 universities.

- 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 manage-

ment – 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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