

# Rail unions collaborate in London Underground job losses

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London Underground (LU) is pressing ahead with its axing of 800 jobs, with no opposition from the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and Transport and Salaried Staff Association (TSSA).

Tube workers have been served with displacement notices and new rosters issued—minus the 800 posts—ahead of the February 6 deadline. The job losses are mainly in the ticket offices, but include other station staff. At Canary Wharf the number of Customer Service Assistants is to be reduced from 25 to 11. The job losses will also mean station staff having to work more rostered weekends. At Wembley Park ticket office staff will have one weekend a month.

After four separate days of joint strike action towards the end of last year, the RMT and TSSA enforced a de facto no strike agreement over the Christmas and New Year period. Both unions even lifted the overtime ban on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day after re-entering talks with LU management on December 17.

The unions have stifled any further strike action on the basis of engaging in a review procedure, which has proven to be worthless.

TSSA acknowledged, "While we are talking, they are going full steam ahead with the implementation of cuts. Even as the talks are taking place new issues are emerging which we will have to address (including new ticket machines which they hope will allow further reductions in staff)."

The RMT, led by the nominally left Bob Crow, has maintained a deafening silence while it remains ensconced in talks with management.

At the same time as leaked company documents show plans to operate unmanned stations during traffic hours, the RMT continues to promote the line that LU and Conservative London Mayor Boris Johnson will undergo a Damascene conversion and rescind the job

cuts. This position is only good for disarming Tube workers and spreading demoralisation.

The review procedure is solely aimed at assuring the continued role of the unions within the restructuring process and whittling down the collective resistance of workers. Instead of a unified approach, the review operates on a station-by-station and line-by-line basis. By its own account the RMT fully accepts the criteria laid down by LU. It writes, "Management propose that a review takes place of those locations where RMT and TSSA believe that resulting proposals for Ticket Office service are inadequate."

The underlying reason for the cuts—the siphoning off of public funds to compensate for the bailout of the banks and the failed consortia involved in Public Private Partnership—is not addressed. The £16 million that LU management project will be saved through the elimination of 800 jobs is far less than the £60 million its squandered on legal fees alone over the last five years, relating mainly to the fall-out from the PPP (Public Private Partnership).

The unravelling of the RMT and TSSA's token opposition demonstrates that opposition can find no coherent or effective outlet within the framework and under the leadership of the unions.

Tube workers have demonstrated their readiness to take up the fight, with some 11,000 across all grades participating in four days of strike action. This has been the first strike by TSSA members on London Underground since 1926—the year of the General Strike. The strike has remained solid, even though Tube workers have lost wages while receiving no strike pay from the unions.

It is the polarisation of the dispute that has pulled the rug from under the feet of the RMT and the left pretensions of Bob Crow. The limitation of strike

action to a series of one-day stoppages, staggered over months, was based upon a perspective that this would exert sufficient pressure on Johnson and LU to back down. However, the dispute has taken place within the context of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat government announcing the most draconian cuts to public spending in British history and a deepening world economic crisis. In order to impose cuts of this severity all forms of organised resistance are to be crushed. This is why the ruling elite is determined that no compromise should be reached and that the tube workers must be taken on and defeated to serve as an example to the rest of the working class.

Since the strike began the number of intended job cuts has doubled to 2,000 across Transport for London.

A broader-based and genuinely militant opposition to the austerity driven cuts of the government would also cut across the attempts by Crow to revive illusions in the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party as an oppositional force. Crow has called for the TUC-organised demonstration on March 26 to be built as the start of the fight back against the austerity programme, working with a handful of Labour MPs within Parliament to present empty motions of protests against the job cuts. All of this is aimed at concealing the fact that the TUC has worked to suppress any opposition to job losses and pay cuts and that the Labour Party is fully committed to the cuts.

While Crow has called for a generalised strike movement, there was no attempt to overcome the isolation of the dispute and unify the struggles of Tube workers and firefighters when back-to-back strikes developed in November. There was a clear argument for closing the Underground on safety grounds, with the withdrawal of emergency cover, but the union left it to individual members to decide whether to book on.

Even at a sectional level the unions have enabled LU management to divide and rule. While the drivers union ASLEF held a strike on December 26 over bank holiday pay, it has kept its members working throughout the course of the dispute against job losses. This is the chief reason why LU has been able to maintain some kind of train service on strike days. Crow has made no criticism of this strike-breaking, or an appeal to the rank and file to reject it. In fact, ASLEF were able to vote for the TUC motion at last year's conference declaring solidarity with striking

Tube workers, such as its worthless character.

Having blocked further strike action against the job cuts, the RMT called a second one-day stoppage on January 17 over the unfair dismissal of two union activists, but confined this to train drivers only on two of the network's 11 lines. The victimisation of Tube workers has been far more extensive than these two cases. Management has also been allowed to threaten workers that have been involved in other industrial action called by the unions, without any opposition.

The 800 job losses are only the beginning of a total restructuring of LU and its parent body. The doubling of job losses since last September to over 2,000 is required due to the reduction of the central government grant to TfL by 21 percent by 2014/5. TfL is currently working on a major restructuring plan entitled Project Horizon, which will begin implementation and this will mean further job losses.

Tube workers must break the political straight jacket that TSSA and the RMT have placed around the dispute and link up their struggle with the rest of public sector workers in local government facing job losses and pay freezes. The defence of workers' livelihoods must be joined with the opposition to the dismantling of social provision on which millions depend. In opposition to the looting of public resources to fund the bail out of the banks, a mass political movement must be developed to bring down the coalition and replace it with a workers' government, to reorganise the economy under the democratic control of working people to provide decent paying jobs, housing, education, health care and affordable and safe public transport.



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