

British trade unions push productivity deals and enforced arbitration during Olympics

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The trade unions are pushing through productivity deals in the transport sector ahead of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games due to start 27 July.

As far back as January 2007, Trades Union Congress representatives responded to the Olympic Delivery Authority draft transport strategy, “The TUC and affiliated unions wish to put on record our shared commitment” to ensure that the ODA’s “core objectives” are met. To this end the TUC established *Unions2012* involving all transport unions. They agreed a set of “principles” with Olympic authorities as an “opportunity” to “showcase” Britain and enforce a “centralised pay and conditions agreement with all the main employers.”

The statement summed up the TUC’s commitment to removing the threat of industrial action or protest from a transport workforce that has already experienced a vast increase in productivity due to a wave of job cuts over the last three years. The TUC insist that essential to the “smooth running of the Games ...” is that they should be “consulted at all stages of the planning and operation.”

As part of the consultation procedure, the TUC was notified in advance by the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) and London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) that there would be 70,000 “volunteers”—or more correctly, unpaid workers—at the games. The TUC responded by urging, “Along with contracts of employment ‘A Volunteers’ Protocol’ should be agreed to cover these aspects of the operation of the Games.”

This protocol would allegedly ensure that volunteers would get meal breaks and appropriate training! Once the trade unions were brought on board the Olympic gravy train, they duly abandoned the demand for direct

employment of workers, particularly in the construction industry. The TUC is now working with Olympic authorities and private contractors to police an army of unpaid workers.

To this end the TUC proposed a “joint problem solving” approach where “issues pertaining to the utilisation of labour for the Games will be discussed”. They urged the formation of a “Positive Industrial Relations Reference Group” that involved all “key stakeholders”. “[W]e view the establishment of an effective mechanism for dialogue between those unions organising in the transport sector, Olympic delivery stakeholders and contractors as an essential element of the ODA’s transport strategy”, the TUC states.

The TUC agreed that “a highly diverse range of security duties” will be necessary, from “patrolling to searching and scanning dignitaries, officials, members of the public” using “complex scanning equipment”, adding that transport security “cannot be treated as a separate entity to security for the overall project.”

Noting that a Transport Security Working Group has been established, the TUC demanded, “It is essential to involve trade unions in these discussions ...”

On 3 September 2008 the TUC reported agreeing a “Principles of Cooperation” document with LOCOG and ODA. Its main objective was to “deliver the Games on time, on budget.”

The Olympic authorities and the TUC agreed to meet every six months. The TUC report of the agreement cited then Labour Party Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell, who thanked “the TUC and ODA’s commitment to a constructive and co-operative employment relations framework for London 2012” that showcased “positive working relations.”

After the signing of more protocols Jowell added, “I am delighted after so much hard work and commitment

on the part of the TUC and London 2012 we are witnessing the formal agreement of the principles. They demonstrate the excellent working relationships between the unions and London 2012.”

The election of a Conservative/Liberal Democratic coalition government in May 2010 that immediately declared war on the living standards and social rights of the working class had no impact on the TUC’s arrangements. It sought even closer collaboration with the Tories to remove any remaining threat of industrial action during the Olympics.

In February 2011 the TUC agreed with Olympic authorities and conciliation service Acas a further “protocol of understanding” and a “Games-Time Grievance Resolution Protocol” that is “designed to deal quickly with practical day-to-day issues that are likely to occur during the Games.”

Acas head Ed Sweeney stated, “We have learnt from what has happened at previous Games and the World Cup in South Africa, where labour disputes spilled over. ACAS will fast track any issues that arise to get our staff involved without delay, both in the lead up to and during the Games.”

Sebastian Coe, a former Tory MP appointed chair of LOCOG by the last Labour government, praised the TUC:

“We have always enjoyed great support from the trade union movement since the very beginning of the bid, and today’s signing of the protocol with the TUC and Acas is a natural next step ...”

To provide themselves with a veneer of respectability, in April 2011 the TUC presented a letter to the International Organising Committee from trade unions around the world urging a sweat-shop free and exploitation-free Games to be written into the Olympic Charter and the IOC’s code of ethics.

This came as it emerged that Games materials were being produced by child labour and super-exploited workers in Asia. The letter stated that workers often faced “extreme pressure to meet production quotas”, faced “dangerous working conditions” and “extremely long hours and low wages.”

TUC officials can conduct such phony campaigns because none of the affiliated unions nor their allies in the pseudo left parties will examine its own role in accepting a mass of unpaid labour and part-time, unstable contracts for the rest.

The TUC and its affiliated transport sector unions began pushing through such productivity deals at breakneck speed ahead of millions of additional visitors on a rundown transport system. Concerns have been expressed about dangerous overcrowding on the already overcrowded London Underground network. Where reluctant companies refused to negotiate, the unions have organised strike ballots to force through productivity deals. These agreements involve coercion, threats, exclusions for sickness and payments to be agreed after the three months period is up between unions and management.

The scale of the increase in workload can be seen on the Dockland Light Railway (DLR), run by SERCO, serving east London and the Docklands financial district. The Rail Maritime Transport union (RMT) agreed a productivity deal for “train captains” employed as the sole member of staff onboard the driverless DLR trains. During the games the service is expected to operate an all day peak service with an increase of 57 percent in passenger loads and involving 45,000 additional hours of work—all for payments tied to meeting productivity targets.

The RMT representing Network Rail maintenance workers have, in return for a productivity-related payment, agreed to refer all disputes between 27 July and 9 September automatically to Acas. A Network Rail spokesman explained that “no industrial action can be taken whilst we are still negotiating with Acas.”



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