

Pseudo-left offer their services to rail unions before London Underground strikes

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In response to a massive vote for strikes by London Underground workers against the loss of more than 1,000 jobs through the closure of all 265 ticket offices, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) formed an organisation called Hands Off London Transport (HOLT).

It did so in alliance with the Labour and the Green parties, along with various Stalinist fractions and pseudo-left groups.

HOLT is a smokescreen behind which the RMT and Labour Party will assist London's Conservative Mayor Boris Johnson to force through mass job cuts.

After the ballot result, RMT's *London Calling* web site, dominated by the pseudo-left, urged London Underground (LUL) to "see sense." On 20 January *London Calling* published an RMT Central Line Newsletter that went still further, declaring, "*Of course the unions are willing to discuss stations reorganization... But all our experience tells us that talks only get anywhere when industrial action is called.*" [emphasis added]

This confirms warnings made by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in a statement distributed across the Underground network that the actions of the RMT from the outset were aimed at defending the privileges of the union bureaucracy by securing their negotiating position in a restructured Underground network. It insisted that a struggle to defend jobs could only be carried out through a break with the RMT and the formation of independent organizations based on a socialist strategy.

To prevent such a development and to defend their own positions within the union apparatus, the entire fake "left" fraternity ahead of the first scheduled strikes placed their organizations at the disposal of the RMT.

Most open is the Socialist Party (SP), notorious for its

justifications of every act of sabotage by the unions. In return, its members have been elevated to prominent posts. Steve Hedley, RMT Assistant General Secretary, is a leading SP supporter. The SP declared its "full support for the RMT." It called for "broadening" the front against the government but only under the control of the "organized trade union movement"—a euphemism for the strangulating grip of the union bureaucracy.

From LUL's initial ticket office closure announcement in November to the RMT's announcement of the first strike dates in February, nearly three months elapsed. This gave LUL management ample time to prepare strikebreaking operations and a free hand to promote its voluntary redundancy package agreed with the RMT. The SP described these sabotaging tactics, deployed on hundreds of occasions, as providing the unions "vital time to prepare the ground in the stations."

On January 22, SP London regional secretary, Paula Mitchell, issued a statement defending the RMT's latest efforts to do a deal with management:

"As we go to press the RMT are in discussions at [the conciliation service] Acas. Members will expect the union to exhaust every possibility to negotiate," she wrote.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) simply regurgitates RMT statements. In the few leaflets it has produced, the SWP refers to RMT decisions as "great," that it "sets the pace" if other unions "hold back." The aim is to rebuild illusions in the RMT to provide a breathing space to carry through a sell-out, only afterwards to bemoan a "lost" opportunity before moving onto the next dispute.

Another organization that has allied itself with the RMT is Workers Liberty (WL). It describes the actions

of the RMT thus far as “positive,” as though looking on from outside and not already an integral part of that bureaucracy. It described the RMT’s sabotaging tactics as a “chance” for workers to “convince your TSSA and ASLEF leaders that you want to fight”—referring to the white collar and train driver unions.

In another statement WL, again posing as a rank-and-file pressure group, urged “our” union to use its parliamentary group of Labour MPs and the TSSA to use its affiliation to the Labour Party to take up the issue. This is the official line of the RMT, who are using the struggle to resurrect the fortunes of the deeply discredited Labour Party ahead of the local and general election.

During a debate organized at Westminster Hall on the ticket office closures, one of those Labour MPs, Diane Abbott, eulogized former Labour party Mayor of London Ken Livingstone. But she was forced to admit that Livingstone “introduced a smaller program of [ticket office] closures.”

Other Labour MPs urged government ministers to enter “consultation” with unions and pressure Mayor Johnson to end his ban on meeting union officials. Labour wants to impose cuts by working more closely with the trade unions, so as not to undermine the control of the unions over the workers.

Workers Liberty’s Janine Booth, a former national executive member of the RMT, became notorious in 2011 for defending the RMT’s calling off of powerful strikes by 10,000 Underground workers and imposing 800 ticket office job cuts through Acas.

The WL issued a statement blaming the defeat of the 2011 strikes not on the RMT’s and its own pro-capitalist policies, but on “the ineffectiveness of 24-hour strikes.” It claims the RMT’s calling 48-hour strikes this time is a great breakthrough. It does not explain why two-day strikes—that RMT leader Bob Crow, in any case, is trying his best to head off—with the same pro-capitalist strategy, would produce a more favorable outcome.

Through their accumulating acts of sabotage, the pseudo-left hopes to open up even more lucrative opportunities for their members in the upper echelons of the trade union bureaucracy. Any struggle to defend jobs, wages and working conditions can only take place in a break with the RMT and its fake “left” henchmen and through forming new genuinely democratic

organizations of class struggle.



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