

Pseudo-left groups silent on rail unions' effort to call off strikes

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When London Underground (LU) first announced mass closure of ticket offices, the Socialist Equality Party produced a statement challenging the pseudo-left's attempt to portray the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union as bucking the trend of other unions. The SEP opposed their claim that the trade unions could be revitalised through rank-and-file pressure.

The SEP explained that the RMT had long been transformed into "agents of London Underground management" and was committed to "maintaining the profits of the corporations at the expense of workers" and imposing budget cuts because "their own highly privileged positions are based on maintaining the status quo."

The conduct of the RMT bureaucracy before and during this week's LU strike has proved the correctness of this assessment. RMT General Secretary Bob Crow's most telling remark on the first day of the strike was, "We have always had job cuts, it is the way you go about it."

The RMT delayed organising any action until almost three months after ticket office closures were announced—eventually calling two 48-hour strikes on February 4-5 and 11-12. Meanwhile LU's "voluntary redundancy" offer has taken effect, while the RMT and the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA), which represents managers and supervisory grades, re-entered talks in a failed effort to reach an agreement.

The RMT wasted months appealing to Conservative Party London Mayor Boris Johnson to stick by his electoral promise not to close any more ticket offices, focusing on a phony legal inquiry into whether LU's voluntary redundancy offer was legal. It is only asking for LU to uphold agreed procedures frequently used to liquidate jobs, as it has done in previous disputes such

as that involving guards on the London Overground and on the Docklands Light Railway, which were all kept isolated by the RMT.

The Socialist Party (SP) had members visiting one picket line after another in order to bolster the authority of the RMT bureaucracy and pronounce any criticism of the RMT as an attack on the strike itself. At an RMT rally at Euston station as the strikes began, the SP brought its trade union national executive members, Chris Baugh, Public and Commercial Services union assistant general secretary and Martin Powell-Davies of the National Union of Teachers, to speak.

Their presence was meant only to cover for the fact that no combined action is actually contemplated by these unions.

When SP supporter Steve Hedley was elected as the RMT's assistant general secretary, he promised a fight. In fact, he has at best remained silent on every act of treachery by the RMT.

In the Socialist Party's newspaper, the *Socialist*, National Shop Stewards Network Chair Rob Williams stated that the strikes were a "triumph" for the RMT and white-collar union TSSA. There was no mention of the RMT calling off the Docklands Light Railway strike, the LOROL conductor's betrayal or its holding back disputes on the rest of the network.

When it became known that RMT were in talks at the conciliation service ACAS, the SP claimed this expressed the will of the membership.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) also carefully passes over the efforts of the RMT to isolate LU workers by calling off the DLR strike or the efforts to secure a compromise agreement. As the 48-hour strike began they published a defence of Bob Crow.

Of all the attacks that LU workers have faced from Boris Johnson, the government, the employers and

business organisations, the SWP chose to rise up and defend Crow's £145,000 salary and a luxury South American cruise he took. The hypocrisy of super-rich media barons, multi-millionaire politicians and billionaire business leaders is self-evident to most workers, but why, when LU workers are threatened with the banning of strikes, did the SWP focus on defending Crow's salary and lifestyle? It reveals the basic impulse behind their own activity—a defence of the privileges many of their own members now receive as members of numerous trade unions' regional and national executives.

The newly-founded Left Unity has produced only one article, on January 24, on the strike. It was by Oliver New, who as well as being a member of West London Left Unity is also a former London Transport representative on the RMT's national executive. His article revealed how they would conduct themselves as a mouthpiece and provide foot soldiers for the RMT bureaucracy.

New urged Left Unity members to work in Hands off London Transport (HOLT), an RMT campaign in alliance with the Labour Party and the Greens. Its essential purpose is to provide a political smokescreen behind which the RMT works with Labour to push through the bulk of Transport for London (TfL) budget cuts and ticket office closures.

In the run-up to the strike, the pseudo-left have been rewriting and falsifying the experiences LU workers have gone through over the last 20 years with the RMT. New made his contribution to this campaign: "This looks like being a prolonged battle... RMT activists have some experience of this, notably through the fight against PPP privatisation on the tube. We eventually won that battle..."

This is a lie. The SEP wrote at the time, "Using the pretext of no compulsory redundancies, the RMT disarmed workers against privatisation and the transfer of jobs to different private-sector companies, driving a wedge between maintenance workers on the stations and train operations side. The result was that two new private companies were established in 2003. The 6,000 jobs threatened with transfer to the private sector were not protected, but committed the RMT to 'cooperat[ing] with the introduction of organisational change and new working arrangements.'

"In 2007, one of the companies, Metronet, collapsed,

with debts of £2 billion. TfL was forced to take over. The RMT claimed in 2009 to have secured undertakings to protect jobs, but LU simply reduced staffing levels by not covering vacancies. Up to a third of all jobs on the network may have been left vacant."

New also neglects to mention that former Metronet engineers are at present in dispute with LU management, where the union branch has declared a complete "breakdown in industrial relations." Rather than uniting this struggle with the fight to defend ticket office jobs, the RMT is engaged in discussions with management and, if these fail, it will then refer it to ACAS. There is no indication that New has opposed this.

This is also true of Workers Liberty (WL), whose representative on the RMT's national executive in 2010, Janine Booth, helped impose 800 ticket office job losses by calling off a series of strikes. The RMT's collaboration with LUL was a green light for the closure of all ticket offices.

Booth appeared on picket lines in East London on the first day of the strike, waving RMT banners as if 2010 had not happened. Only the SEP points this out. All the pseudo-left outfits have an unwritten agreement not to expose each other's acts of treachery.

In the dark distant past, the pseudo-left used to claim that they sought positions on the executives of trade unions as representatives of the rank-and-file to speak on their behalf. Now that they have captured these positions in many unions, they have become an essential part of that bureaucracy and speak solely in its interests. This is nowhere more true than in so called "left" unions like the RMT.



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