

Support the London Underground strikers!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (UK)

11 February 2014

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers throughout London and Britain to support the London Underground (LU) workers, fighting to defend their jobs and prevent the closure of every ticket office.

LU management is imposing the attacks as part of Transport for London (TfL) cuts, designed to save £50 million a year.

This programme is being rammed through with the full support of Conservative Party London mayor Boris Johnson, the government, media and the Labour Party opposition.

Management forced the strike by unilaterally seeking to impose the cuts. The action was then met with a tidal wave of vitriol, with Johnson denouncing tube workers for “holding a gun” to Londoners’ heads.

This is rich, coming from the multimillionaire representative of London’s financial oligarchy. His real complaint is that tube workers are interfering with the daily fleecing of the British and international working class by criminal speculators in the world’s most expensive city.

Even more sinister are the constant threats to ban strikes and impose a future “minimum service requirement” on LU workers, in the event of even legally sanctioned industrial action. Employees deemed to work in “essential services”, such as the London Underground, will be forced by law to maintain a level of service during any industrial action.

It will effectively make striking a criminal offence. Johnson has called for the Conservatives to include such proposals as part of a 2015 General Election manifesto.

Whatever anti-democratic measures are used against London Underground workers will then be used more broadly—against all workers who are fighting to defend their jobs, wages and conditions.

Such dictatorial legislation has already been used by a

number of European governments, as a critical tool to force through devastating austerity measures. In Greece, Spain and France, it has been employed against striking subway and metro staff, air traffic controllers, teachers, refuse workers and truck drivers. Riot police and the armed forces have been mobilised to smash up strikes. In December 2010, the military forced 2,200 striking Spanish air traffic controllers back to work at gunpoint.

The venom directed against London Underground workers follows years in which strikes have been systematically called off and sabotaged by the trade union bureaucracy.

When members of the Rail Maritime Transport union (RMT) and the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) brought the capital to a standstill, it reminded the ruling elite that despite their incessant propaganda to the contrary, there is still a powerful working class that is able to fight back. The strike demonstrated that there is nothing inevitable about the seeming ability of a satiated financial aristocracy to get away with murder.

As always, the message is that there is “no money” available and that LU workers must sacrifice their jobs, wages and benefits. This is a lie! There is plenty of money, but it is monopolised by the super-rich. Last year, the top 200 richest residents in Britain and Ireland increased their wealth to an incredible £320 billion.

The ruling class depends on the collaboration of the unions to push through savage cuts, with wages falling by more than £52 billion nationally since 2007, an overall 7.5 percent on average as a result.

Enough is enough!

Despite the militant and determined response by LU workers, the threats to ban strikes point inescapably to the need for a political response to the attacks of the ruling elite. A fight back based on an opposing political perspective must be formulated, involving the

mobilisation of the entire working class.

With their incessant appeals for negotiations, the RMT and TSSA are making clear that they want nothing more than an accommodation with TfL and Johnson that secures them a place at the table in imposing the cuts on a “manageable” basis. As RMT general secretary Bob Crow said on the first day of the two-day strike last week, “We have always had job cuts, it is the way you go about it.”

London Underground workers cannot fight alone. The provocative actions and statements of Johnson and his cohorts make clear that they are not going to back down. If this struggle is left isolated, tube workers will eventually be defeated, with the active connivance of the union bureaucracy. All those workers who have seen jobs and living standard decimated must come to the defence of LU workers as the urgent next step to defend their own livelihoods.

The problem is not the merely RMT and TSSA, or even the scabbing of the drivers’ union ASLEF. The working class must face up to the impossibility of allowing the continued political and organisational domination of the entire trade union apparatus, which works as a fifth column of management.

To be successful in their struggles, workers must begin to organise rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition the sabotage operations of the trade unions.

This can only be the beginning of a struggle. London Underground staff and other workers are not just involved in a strike against this or that employer. Behind London Underground stands the corporate and financial elite, politically represented by Johnson, David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Ed Miliband and their ilk. And behind them stands the full force of the state.

The answer to unending austerity and corporate dictatorship is socialism. Workers can defend their interests only through a direct attack on the wealth and privileges of the bankers and corporate executives who control the economy.

What is required is a new political party in, of and for the working class. This party must be based on a rejection of the entire austerity agenda and committed to a socialist programme and the formation of a workers’ government, which puts the interests of society before those of the financial aristocracy. The Socialist Equality Party is that party. Contact the

Socialist Equality Party today.

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