

Union calls off District line action prior to London Underground strike

Ross Mitchell
3 August 2015

A second 24-hour strike against the introduction of round the clock, night London Underground Limited (LUL) train services and the 2015 pay claim is scheduled for August 5.

Following a huge turnout and vote for action, the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and the drivers' union, ASLEF, were forced to call the first strike on July 5.

The bureaucracy is working behind the scenes to call off further action. On Friday, RMT union General Secretary Mick Cash informed members, "A new offer has been tabled today. Our London Underground reps will meet on Monday to look at the detail and we will take a response into the ACAS [arbitration service] talks following that meeting. RMT reiterates that next week's action remains on."

The trade union bureaucracy at LUL, hailed by the pseudo-left as the most militant section in the Trades Union Congress, has a proven history of negotiating away the conditions of their members to gain further privileges for themselves and integrate themselves into management structures.

The upper echelons of the bureaucracy are populated by members and close associates of the pseudo-left parties, who make demagogic statements in public, while capitulating at the first opportunity. Typical is RMT regional organiser and Socialist Party member, John Reid, who trumpets, "These attacks are politically inspired by the pro-austerity measures of the government, which wants to cut £4.2 billion from the transport budget. They also want to shackle our unions by making it harder to take strike action. We will resist this on London Underground—we have already built joint action with every union."

Likewise, fellow RMT regional organiser, John Leach, whose 2014 election campaign was promoted by

Workers Liberty, declared, "We have made the strong case for a decent deal for night tube and a reasonable pay offer for all staff."

That this talk of resistance is so much hot air was exposed by events on July 28, when seven drivers, members of ASLEF, were suspended by LUL management for refusing to take out trains.

Their action followed an instruction from the union, which can only be called a stunt and at worst a provocation, encouraging drivers to take individual action.

On July 16, the ASLEF Executive Committee had instructed General Secretary Mick Whelan "to advise HR Director LUL Operations that their failure to resolve matters relating to the 2015 Pay Claim and the introduction of all night services is not acceptable to ASLEF...and that all our Train Drivers/Instructor Operators employed by LUL will not be bringing trains into service that have not been prepared in the previous 23 hours by a Qualified Train Technician from 3.30 am on the 28th July 2015 until further notice."

Train preparation is a process where depot staff check train systems for safe passenger operation, such as doors, brakes, chimes and alerts, lights, and motors.

On July 24, LUL warned its employees, "ASLEF and RMT have notified us that they have asked their Instructor Operator and Train Operator members to take industrial action in relation to Train Preparation.

"Please be aware that should you choose to take part in this action and, as a consequence, refuse to operate a train or take a train out of service at any point prior to the end of your shift, you will forfeit your pay for the entire shift..."

At the allotted time, on July 28, seven District Line drivers complied with union instructions and refused to take out unchecked trains, which had been highlighted

on worksheets, presumably by lower management. Services on the District Line, London's busiest Tube line, were disrupted as a result. Reports suggest similar action took place on other lines.

LUL management retaliated by suspending the drivers and sending them home for the day without pay. They justified their action saying there was a loophole clause in the preparation time procedures allowing management to extend the time as far back as 48 hours, a longer period than is common practice at other metros internationally.

According to ASLEF, LUL had also threatened the union with legal action. This, and the fear they could not control the workforce over another attack inflicted by management, led to the trade union bureaucracy immediately stopping the industrial action. The next day, July 29, the drivers were back at work and their pay was reimbursed, according to a LUL statement, as a "gesture of good will."

This is not the victory for train workers that it is being portrayed as by the unions. Reports circulating in the depots suggest that LUL is considering individual lawsuits against each driver for breach of contract because the trains had complied with the 48-hour preparation loophole clause. This clause, it is now apparent, was part of the framework agreement negotiated by both ASLEF and RMT in the train driving grade in the past.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact