Further rail strikes announced amid UK Tory leadership contest

Chris Marsden
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Prime Minister Boris Johnson will personally move a confidence motion in his own government Monday, by which time the Conservatives want to have eliminated all but two candidates to replace him as party leader.

Nothing could better exemplify how the suppression of the class struggle by the trade unions and the Labour Party is giving the Tories precious time to reorder their government after a palace coup forced Johnson's resignation.

On Tuesday, a motion from Labour specifying no confidence in "Her Majesty's Government while [Johnson] remains Prime Minister" was rejected as not "a valuable use of parliamentary time" because Johnson has already resigned.

Labour's motion was framed with the two-fold intention of somehow "embarrassing" Tory MPs by forcing them to defend Johnson, while making clear to big business that Starmer and company were not opposing a Tory government in principle and would not unduly rock the boat. It was a more accurate reflection of Labour's aim of maintaining political stability at a time of heightened crisis than Starmer's occasional references to being "ready" for a snap general election if one is called.

Everything Labour does is to make sure that events continue to be determined by a hated and weakened government that went into meltdown last week. Monday's vote will see the Tories express confidence in themselves, while Labour and the Liberal Democrats propose amendments seeking to include Johnson's name so he can supposedly be forced to resign now rather than when his successor is announced on September 5.

It is certain, despite Labour's claims to the contrary, that its original motion would have failed even had it not been blocked. The Tories are not about to commit political suicide out of a sense of shame! If they are to be removed from office, then the working class must do it. Labour certainly won't do so.

The longer the parliamentary farce of semi-opposition led by Sir Keir Starmer continues, the more the dangers posed to workers are apparent.

Yesterday saw the completion of the first round of voting in the Tory leadership contest, with the bottom two of eight candidates eliminated. Jeremy Hunt, a widely despised former health secretary, fell because he is considered too left-wing by most Tories. Nadim Zahawi fell in part fell because he was seen as too openly disloyal to Johnson, after accepting his offer to become chancellor only to then demand the prime minister step down.

This leaves a contest between former chancellor and multi-millionaire Rishi Sunak, advancing himself as a "sensible Thatcherite", and the alternative right-wing candidates of former Defence Secretary Penny Mordaunt, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and some right-wing also-rans.

Sunak, the current favourite among MPs, is considered too reticent in his promises to slash taxes and would lose against Mordaunt and any other candidate in a poll of Tory party members.

Mordaunt is presently placed second and is a party favourite for good reason. A Brexiteer, she has been serving as minister of state for trade policy since 2021 after serving as Defence Secretary in 2019 before being removed by Johnson on his replacing Theresa May.

Daughter of a former paratrooper and a captain in the naval reserve, she is emphasising her military credentials. She worked for US president George W Bush between 2000 and 2004. An admirer of Donald Trump, she cited watching as a nine-year-old "the Falklands task force leave Portsmouth harbour" as the

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formative experience shaping her political beliefs.

Truss is so famously deranged as a warmonger that she needs no introduction and presently has the backing of Johnson's main sidekick Jacob Rees-Mogg. But she is matched in zealotry by Suella Braverman and Kemi Badenoch.

Former soldier and chair of the Defence Select Committee Tom Tugendhat has decried the "bean counters", meaning Sunak, for refusing to raise defence spending—which he wants to lift to 3 percent of GDP. "Security always comes before spreadsheets," he said.

This is the filthy cabal that still sits in Westminster when so many millions of workers want to see the back of them. The great task that must be resolved is to break through the political disenfranchisement and demobilisation of the working class by the combined forces of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy.

If it were not for the trade union leaders, then the Tory government's crisis would be playing out against a background of mass strikes by workers demanding an end to savage austerity. Only this week, the train drivers' union ASLEF announced massive votes to strike at eight train operating companies involving 21,000 workers. But ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan declared regarding the struggle waged by 40,000 Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union members, "There's no reason why we'd call them all out together…" ASLEF strike dates will be announced Thursday.

As the first round of the Tory leadership contest was concluding, the RMT announced it would hold a single day's strike on July 27, in response to a "final offer" by Network Rail which General Secretary Mick Lynch said "represents a real terms pay cut for our members and the paltry sum is conditional on RMT members agreeing to drastic changes in their working lives." He stressed that "We remain open for further talks."

If the trade union leaders were not suppressing strike action, then rail, post, telecoms, council, health and education workers numbering three million would already be in struggle, representing the basis for a general strike against the government. Instead, this prospect is never raised while the union leaders back Starmer in his efforts to neuter workers' opposition to the government. Lynch told the Durham Miners' Gala this weekend, "We don't have a great relationship with Keir Starmer," but "I want a Labour government and the Labour leader is Keir Starmer. If he can win that there will be a change and it will be in our interests."

This is said of a man who has threatened to expel his own MPs if they criticise NATO or attend RMT picket lines! And who last night whipped Labour peers in the House of Lords to abstain on an attempt to force the government to provide free school meals for all children in low-income families and receiving Universal Credit.

On Tuesday, Lynch called the passage of Tory legislation allowing the use of agency workers as a scab labour force to break strikes in essential services "unethical and morally reprehensible" and "totally impracticable." But he followed this with his now reflex call that the Tory government "should be unshackling Network Rail and the train operating companies so we can secure a negotiated settlement on the railways."

The necessary answer to the sabotage of the trade unions and the Labour Party is to demand an immediate general election, forced through by a unified offensive of the working class. The trade union bureaucracy must not be allowed to determine the struggle in the factories and workplaces and Labour must not be left to sabotage the political struggle against the Tories. This means building rank-and-file committees in every workplace to take the fight against the Tories out of the hands of the trade union bureaucrats and to immediately begin the building of a new socialist leadership in the working class to replace Labour.

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