

Wales agreement proposed by RMT union as template for betraying UK rail strike

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The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) is negotiating surrender terms to end the seven-month rail dispute.

Around 40,000 members of the RMT took an additional four days of strikes last week after voting by a larger percentage in October to continue their action. This followed eight days of strikes since June for a wage rise and against £2 billion cuts to pave the way for privatisation.

RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch is promoting the below inflation pay deal at Transport for Wales (TfW) with the Labour Party-controlled Welsh Assembly as an example to follow in ending the national rail strike.

TfW is owned by the Welsh government, and the deal of all unions in the rail sector has a “base line” wage rise of just 4.5 percent. TfW chief executive James Price, said, “We are extremely pleased to have reached a deal with all our partners in the industry trade unions – Aslef, RMT, TSSA and Unite. We’re continuing to work in collaboration with our trade unions as we build our social partnership model offering benefits for all.”

In a press release Saturday, the RMT said it “welcomed a pay deal with Transport for Wales (TfW) today.” It cited Lynch saying, “I congratulate members on securing a negotiated settlement on pay and conditions. RMT has now secured deals with the devolved governments in both Wales and Scotland.”

Boasting that the deal had been achieved with “no strike action”, it added that “RMT members won between a 6.6% and 9.5% pay rise.”

No explanation has yet been offered for the discrepancy between media reports of the wage rise and the RMT’s figures, but all percentages cited are massively below inflation. The CPI measure of inflation used by the government was 10.7 percent in November. The more accurate measure, RPI, was 14

percent.

The RMT’s hailing of such a rotten deal confirms that a sellout of a similar type is being negotiated in talks with the Conservative government in Westminster and the rail companies. Lynch complained that it was the Tories who were standing in the way of such an outcome. “The Westminster government is the odd one out and needs to create the conditions for RMT to secure a negotiated settlement with Network Rail and the train operators on working conditions, pay and job security,” he said.

The deals done in Wales and in Scotland point to how little the RMT is prepared to accept. On Friday, even as a two-day strike began, Lynch said that what he deemed an “acceptable” pay offer would depend on the conditions attached.

After long ago ditching talk of a “general strike”, as millions more workers entered a strike wave, Lynch now refers to a spirit of togetherness with the rail bosses and Tory government. “We need to work quickly, and we need a bit of goodwill from all parties,” he declared Friday. With no real “goodwill” for Lynch to point to, he cannot even say what the RMT is demanding or would accept as a pay settlement. Asked by the BBC what pay increase would be considered acceptable Lynch replied, “We’ll discuss that behind closed doors with the employers.”

He also made clear that he will accept speed-ups, job cuts and other attacks in return for some minimal percentage pay rise by Network Rail and the train operators. His was a pay rise paid for at the expense of rail workers, not the corporations or the government.

He explained, “The government is insisting that all this money is self-generated from our own members’ working practices so it depends what can be generated through the savings and efficiencies they’re

demanding. It's not as [simple] as me saying 'I'd like this amount of money' and them saying we'll see what we can do. Unfortunately it's very complex."

What a "self-generated" pay rise means in practice was indicated by the BBC, who reported that "the deal also depended on big changes to working practices in its maintenance teams, which would involve 1,900 job losses, though Network Rail has insisted this could be achieved by voluntary means.

"The company has said there would be a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies until the end of January 2025."

As well as the loss of almost 2,000 maintenance jobs, reducing scheduled maintenance by half, and extending Driver Operated Only trains—with all measures undermining safety—the closure of almost 1,000 ticket offices in England will mean thousands more job losses. Add to this mandatory Sunday working and a move towards a more casualised workforce through part-time contracts to maximise flexibility.

A spokesman for the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), representing the 14 train operating companies, said that negotiations had been "painstaking", but "constructive."

After three years in which many rail workers have suffered a pay freeze, the last pay offer proposed was just 9 percent over two years at Network Rail and 8 percent over two years from the 14 train operators. RMT members on Network Rail rejected the revised final offer from the arms-length government infrastructure company. But the deal was used as the basis for the TSSA and Unite unions to withdraw further strike action by controllers and other grades, leaving the signalling and maintenance workers faced with the cuts to jobs and terms isolated.

With the rail unions ending strikes in Scotland and now Wales, TSSA and Unite calling off action in England, and the RMT talking of a possible deal, last week's strike action took on a subdued character—despite taking place during a week in which a quarter of a million workers were on strike, including postal workers and nurses, and with the rail system reduced to 20 percent of its service.

As strikes by National Health Service nurses and ambulance staff begin, the unstated pitch of the RMT executive to the Sunak government is that they cannot afford to take on so many key battalions of workers all

at one time.

Workers must face harsh facts. The crisis-ridden Tory government, which has had three prime ministers since the summer and is hated by millions, is still in power and delivering savage attacks against the working class on behalf of the billionaire oligarchy and the major corporations.

This is entirely down to the trade union bureaucracy, which with its partner in the Labour Party is operating as a political ally of the Tories.

The government is mobilising 1,200 soldiers against Wednesday's ambulance strike and Friday's border force strike. But this is nowhere near enough to defeat over a million health NHS workers and hundreds of thousands of other workers fighting for better pay and to prevent the obliteration of their conditions, pensions and jobs.

The main regiment being employed by the state against the working class is the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and its affiliated unions. Without them, the Sunak government would be finished.

Rail workers are faced with a joint industrial and political struggle in their fight against the restructuring of the network for a further looting operation by the private operators and the shareholders. Together with postal workers, NHS workers, education workers and millions of others, they must turn to the building of rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatus and controlled by the workers themselves. This would enable the working class to unify its struggles throughout the UK and to reach out to their brothers and sisters all over the world through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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