

ASLEF and RMT unions announce joint strike by UK train drivers to pre-empt wider mobilisation

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The train drivers' union ASLEF and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) have announced joint strike action for February 1 and 3. The limited stoppages are a feint at unified action and a pale reflection of the opposition they both sit on.

ASLEF and the RMT have both been given renewed strike mandates for the longest running dispute in a strike wave that has gripped the UK since June. Throughout the seven-month action, they have prevented a united struggle against the £2 billion cost-cutting measures demanded by the Conservative government to boost the profits of the train companies in a revamped version of privatisation.

The first day of the action on February 1 coincides with the Trades Union Congress (TUC)'s official national protest over the government's Strikes Bill. But neither union made any direct reference in their announcements to the draconian measures to strip workers of the right to strike through enforced Minimum Service Levels. The rail strikes were one of the main targets of the law, singled out as one of the three sectors first affected.

The token character of the action is underlined by the fact that the RMT has only called out its train driver members, a few hundred workers rather than the 40,000 members covered by the same mandate. This includes 20,000 station and on-board train staff (including conductors) and 20,000 signallers and maintenance workers at Network Rail. They have taken up to 20 days of strike action but will not be included in the planned February stoppages by around 12,000 train drivers in ASLEF at 15 train operating companies (TOCs). The combined action would have brought the entire network to a standstill.

For the RMT Executive, the show of opposition in February is to preclude further action by 40,000 of its members which would cut across the closed-door talks with the employers in the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) and Network Rail. Talks have continued this week, with the RMT refusing to answer members' demands for red lines on jobs, terms and conditions.

In the same press release he announced the strikes, RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch stated, "Our negotiations will continue with the rail operators to create a package on jobs, conditions and pay that can be offered to our members."

Lynch, hailed as a militant workers' leader by the media and pseudo-left groups, is working intimately with the rail employers and the government on a sell-out deal while rank-and-file workers have been kept in the dark.

The entire framework of negotiations has been set by the government and accepted by Lynch, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned. Transport Secretary Mark Harper stated Monday that the government had given "permission" for a "revised mandate" to the TOCs to negotiate with the unions, insisting that "it is important that we get generational reform both on the maintenance side of the operation for Network Rail but also for the rail companies."

The results of this collusion have now been made clear. A summary of the new proposed settlement was provided by Lynch to the membership in a union circular.

Pay has only been revised upwards by 1 percent from the December negotiations, with 5 percent for last year and 4 percent for 2023—a staggering pay cut in real terms.

