

UK rail workers must organise to prevent the RMT's final sellout of their strike

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Rail workers struggle in Britain faces the imminent threat of betrayal and defeat at the hands of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) leadership.

Unless lessons are drawn, and a rank-and-file rebellion organised against General Secretary Mick Lynch and the RMT leadership, the dispute is going down to a devastating defeat.

40,000 workers were initially involved in the action—20,000 signallers and maintenance workers at Network Rail (NR) and 20,000 employed at 14 train operating companies (TOCs). The strike by Network Rail workers was ended on a rotten deal organised by the RMT last month.

The entire dispute has been organised based on the RMT exhausting its members over months in a series of limited and mostly separated strikes. Left to the leadership of the RMT, management will finalise their rout of the entire workforce, having completed half the job at Network Rail.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warned in March that the RMT's NR sell-out deal, if pushed through, would rapidly become the template for a similar betrayal of its members at the TOCs. In preparation for the Network Rail betrayal, on March 7 the RMT withdrew scheduled strike action by signallers and maintenance workers planned for March 16. A "referendum" of members would be held from March 9 to March 20 on a deal concocted with NR. It consisted of a miles below inflation agreement, with only an "additional 1.1 percent on basic earnings and increased backpay—a deal the RMT had previously rejected as a "dreadful offer".

The RMT executive did not formally recommend acceptance, but Eddie Dempsey, the Stalinist Assistant General Secretary, presented it positively as containing "extra money". After months of strikes had secured no concessions, and seeing no way forward, on March 20 Network Rail workers voted for the agreement by 76

percent to 24 percent in a 90 percent turnout.

A similar rout is being organised by the RMT with the TOCs. On March 22, the RMT national executive called off strikes at 14 TOCs due to take place on March 30 and April 1. Lynch announced they had received a new proposal from the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), formed in 2011 by the Tory government to lead the attack on rail workers and led by the CEOs of rail companies. The offer he said could lead to a resolution of the rail dispute begun last June—the longest running in the strike wave of the last nine months, through a new "Dispute Resolution Process."

Stage 1 consists of a pay increase for 2022 amounting to just 5 percent. In Stage 2 the 2023 pay settlement would be agreed if the RMT agree "Work Force Change" items dealt with via Company Council to be negotiated separately in each TOC. A pay deal for 2023 would be settled only if these issues are "successfully addressed."

The 2023 pay offer was so low Lynch re-entered negotiations for a slightly improved 4 percent, claiming he was seeking further "detail" on the RDG's "Workforce Change Agenda". The agenda is almost identical to the attacks that provoked the strikes last June.

The RMT secured its main priority that the Workforce Change Agenda will be negotiated via the existing collective bargaining process, i.e., with the union bureaucracy's privileges secured as the partners of management.

In a March 22 letter addressed to "Dear Mick," Chairman of Rail Delivery Group Steve Montgomery, outlined, "This Dispute Resolution Process contains three integral principles... which will be included within the respective TOCs detailed proposals on Workforce Reforms." These include a massive deskilling operation with the "Introduction of a New Multi-Skilled Stations Grade." Under the section "General Working Arrangements", everything else is being considered for

attack with seven day working to be standardised, including a “New Improving Attendance Policy; New Technology/Equipment; Rolling Sick Pay Entitlement; 7?day railway; Training, Briefing & Company Health Appointment Arrangement” and “Diagramming, Rostering Parameters for Traincrew Safety Critical Roles excluding Train Drivers.”

Montgomery notes “that TOCs are intending to bring forward staffing reviews and reorganisations covering stations, catering, administration, and fleet grades”.

The Network Rail deal allows a cull of thousands of jobs, including 1,900 maintenance workers.

For workers in the TOCs, there is a “guarantee” from the RDG of “No compulsory redundancies within the grades directly affected” but only through to December 31, 2024. Another “guarantee” the RDG and RMT are promoting is a “Voluntary Leavers Scheme for those employees who are affected by the workforce change programme”.

These are required to facilitate the companies’ plans to terminate thousands of guards’ jobs, making all rail services Driver Only Operation, along with thousands more redundancies with the closure of every single station ticket office nationwide. This is integral to the Tories’ overall plans for a Great British Railways re-privatisation programme, in which the rail network will be deskilled, destaffed and run by an entirely flexible workforce on rock bottom wages.

On Thursday, Lynch issued another briefing, confirming that acceptance of the paltry 5 percent pay offer for 2022—less than half the rate of CPI inflation “is dependent on the Dispute Resolution Process document being adopted by your union.”

When they had finished popping the champagne corks, Network Rail chief executive Andrew Haines said there must be no continued “warfare” as happened after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Having won the main battle, Haines has now said the RDG’s agenda is to be enforced by working with the trade union bureaucracy, not by “turning our backs on constructive union partnerships or demonising people.”

The comparison to the most one-sided war in the modern era—in which massive US/UK-led armies crushed Iraq while themselves suffering barely any casualties—is apt. The *Guardian* reported that after the RDG and government agreed that “no shabby compromise” was ever going to be accepted, “Haines said the strike had ended with a sub-inflation deal, one of the best from the employers’ view in many years, because ‘the

shareholder, the government was prepared to tolerate more pain than in the previous 14 years’ in terms of disruption and lost revenue.”

The RMT’s treachery explains the disappearing act of Mick Lynch, omnipresent on news bulletins and talk shows and profiled in every newspaper for months as he declared the RMT to be spearheading the “return of the trade unions”. For this he was hailed by the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party as the saviour of the working class. But behind Lynch’s rhetoric is just a run of the mill trade union bureaucrat, heading up a corporatist pro-business organisation.

Network Rail workers who voted against the deal spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* under condition of anonymity to prevent victimisation. They confirmed that attacks on working practices were already well advanced before the union held the referendum. They wanted to resist each attack, but were told by RMT officials to stick only to the few scheduled and intermittent strikes.

Workers in the TOCs must oppose the RMT’s sabotage of their struggle and mount a rebellion against Lynch and the RMT bureaucracy including reaching out to their brothers and sisters at Network Rail and proposing a renewed struggle

In recent weeks, over a hundred postal workers have contacted the WSWs detailing their opposition to the backbreaking conditions being imposed by Royal Mail and opposing the collusion of the Communication Workers Union bureaucracy. On April 2, a group of these workers established the Postal Workers Rank and File Committee, passing a resolution to “mobilise workers against Royal Mail’s attacks and lead a fight for an inflation-busting pay rise, a defence of terms and conditions, an end to all job cuts and the overturning of victimisations.”

The resolution continued, “We understand that this fight can only be waged in opposition to the Communication Workers Union leadership and apparatus, which is acting as Royal Mail’s partner.”

Rail workers must also work to take their struggle out of the hands of the RMT bureaucracy at this eleventh hour. We urge rail workers to contact the WSWs to discuss the formation of their own rank-and-file committee.



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