

UK: RMT rail union edges closer to final sellout of rail dispute

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Rail workers must reject the rotten deal the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union is cooking up, after months of talks with the Rail Delivery Group (RDG). The RDG represents the UK's 14 train operating companies (TOCs).

The RMT was the first union to strike in a wave of walkouts that began last summer, which the union bureaucracy has succeeded in whittling down to a few remaining national disputes. The initial rail strikes involved, albeit mainly in walkouts on separate days, 20,000 signallers and maintenance workers at Network Rail (NR) and 20,000 employed in the TOCs.

The Network Rail strike was ended by a rotten, below-inflation pay deal by the RMT last month.

The RMT is now seeking to conclude the betrayal of its members at the rail companies. Only two days of strikes—on March 16 and 18—have been held since December, and then only among workers employed at the TOCs. The RMT called off strikes by its Network Rail members on those two days as the precursor to its first sellout.

The union has dropped all the demands fought for by workers that triggered the dispute: an above inflation level wage rise, throwing out all the attacks demanded by the RDG, defeating the attacks on track safety and opposing further rail privatisation measures via the Conservative government's Great British Railways project.

What is being proposed by the RDG and balloted for by the union bureaucracy as the deal to end the TOCs strike is a two-stage process, consisting of a pay increase for 2022 of just 5 percent. In Stage 2 the 2023 pay settlement of just 4 percent would only be agreed if the RMT first accepts "Work Force Change" items dealt with via Company Council to be negotiated separately in each TOC.

Acceptance would mean an end to any future national rail strike as all negotiations would be on a company-by-

company basis. Amid a cost-of-living crisis without parallel in decades, the most accurate measure of inflation (RPI) was 13.5 percent for March 2023 and has not been below 5 percent since October 2021.

In a "TOC's Dispute Update" streamed on YouTube April 14, RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch and Assistant General Secretary John Leach tried desperately to justify the proposed deal.

Replying to a question as to how the updated offer differs from previously rejected offers—used to call off strikes—Leach said, "The fundamental change in this offer from the one that we previously looked at in the same way and rejected is it comes in two parts," before claiming that, while previously "In return we had to pre-agree to a number of workforce reforms, the closure of ticket offices, driver only operation, a fundamental review of all former British Rail terms and conditions of employment, and a whole range of other workforce reforms... What's changed is that the current proposal, the one that we've got this week, is not saying that."

This is all a ruse, as changes to working conditions will now be agreed at a later stage in negotiations with the RMT bureaucracy.

In full snake oil salesman mode, Leach claimed that "a number of those proposals that they put in the previous agreement, which were driver-only operation, closure of the ticket offices, the review of British Rail terms and conditions, have actually been pushed off the deal, they're no longer in the offer. So that is progress in that regard."

These changes are only not included in the proposed deal so the RMT can present it as a victory, but all of them will proceed thanks to the refusal of the union to mobilise a genuine fight by railworkers to defeat Network Rail, the TOCs and the Tories.

Regarding driver-only operated trains, 50 percent of the UK rail network is already DOO. Rail workers fought for

five years to prevent this, with the struggles systematically betrayed by the RMT.

Leach admitted that attacks on station grades were going ahead. The 964 planned ticket office closures will go through a consultation process, with the union only advising that rail workers and passengers lobby their MPs to halt closure. Similar ineffectual local campaigns were the centrepiece of the RMT's wholly unsuccessful campaign on London Underground to preserve all 265 offices from closure.

Lynch was unable to conceal how rotten the deal is, resorting to describing "the five percent increment in pay" as "in some ways... an instalment." Regarding the second measly "instalment", Lynch threatened that this was "completely conditional. You won't get the four percent, all the guarantees that come with it, the no compulsory redundancies... and all the other stuff that's in the document, unless we reach an agreement."

Lynch and Leach said that the union's strike mandate is up for renewal, as required by anti-strike legislation, with the ballot closing May 4. But talk of further industrial action has been shelved, with the vote presented only in terms of strengthening the RMT negotiators' hand in talks with the companies.

The trade unions are pro-business organisations, which draw ever closer to the state and function as partners of the corporations and governments. The nominal political sympathies of the bureaucrats in question, whether a trade union is categorised as "left-wing" like the RMT or "right-wing" like the GMB, makes no real difference.

Lynch, because he led the RMT and was able to effectively deal with various hysterical right-wing media pundits, became the face of the strike movement and what he himself described as "the return of the unions". The main forces hailing Lynch and the "Enough is Enough" campaign he fronted with a few other left-talking union leaders were the pseudo-left groups, with the *Socialist Worker* urging, "Every socialist and trade unionist should be at its rallies and the other activities it says it will organise such as picket line solidarity and actions against the energy companies."

In contrast, at the very outset of the rail strikes last June, the Socialist Equality Party wrote:

Lynch's appeal is that "any changes to structures, working practices, or conditions have to be agreed with our union, not imposed." Like its TUC counterparts, the RMT wants to retain its

corporatist partnership with the rail bosses and the government...

At the RMT's rally on Saturday, Lynch declared his support for Sir Keir Starmer, "That's what we've got. He must win. We've got to push him and persuade him to get into a position where he's in the front rank with you, all of you." He is trying to channel social discontent behind a pro-war party no less hostile to the working class than the Tories. Rupert Murdoch's *Times* joined the acclaim for Lynch for this reason, ascribing his popularity to his "picking reasonableness over revolution."

We countered:

The working class must intervene independently to assert its control over the dispute.

This means forming rank-and-file committees in every depot and workplace, opposing all attempts to restrict industrial action and expanding the strike to encompass all rail and transport workers and every section of the working class.

Conditions are emerging for a general strike to bring down the Johnson government and bring an end to pay cuts and deepening social inequality. But this means a political fight against the sabotage of the TUC and Labour who are de facto partners with the Tories.

A general strike in Britain will rapidly win the active support of workers across Europe and around the world. The answer of the working class to war, social inequality and the mounting attacks on democratic rights must be the fight for world socialism.



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