Trades Union Congress “Solidarity” rally a smokescreen for the RMT’s sabotage of London Underground strike

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The Trades Union Congress (TUC) “Solidarity” march and rally in London Wednesday took place immediately following the pulling of a strike by over 3,000 London Underground (LU) workers by Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union leader Mick Lynch.

The first of day of two 24-hour stoppages against the elimination of 600 station staff jobs had been scheduled for the day of the rally and was meant to occupy a central part of the event in which the capital’s transport system would have ground to a halt.

The London Eastern and South-East TUC event in Whitechapel in London’s East End was billed by Lynch in a letter to RMT members “as an opportunity to show the support for our strike action in London and to express solidarity with all the other workers also struggling for a better deal across the capital.”

In the event there was no strike to give support to. Lynch did not address the rally or even make an appearance after claiming that the RMT had won a “victory.”

A campaign of disinformation waged by the RMT over “winning concessions” to justify the strike cancellation after closed door talks at arbitration service ACAS had already begun to unravel. In the initial RMT press release it was claimed “key jobs” had been protected, only for Lynch to confirm in a letter to members that union negotiators had signed up to 300 job losses. The assurances from the RMT over preventing “detrimental changes to rosters and secure protection of earnings” are worthless.

Labour London Mayor Sadiq Khan welcomed the strike cancellation stating, “Despite the Government's onerous funding conditions, we've avoided strikes. This is what you can achieve when you work with, not against, unions.”

The hot air from keynote speakers came from the ranks of a union bureaucracy engaged in a similar war of attrition against militant opposition to smother and isolate action. The cover for Labour as an ally of Conservative government austerity was provided by former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who now sits as an independent MP, accompanied by Labour MP for Poplar and Limehouse, Apsana Begum. For all the verbiage about supporting workers standing up to the Tories, the local Labour council in Tower Hamlets rewarded its key workers with fire and rehire notices in 2020 to 4,000 staff to employ them on inferior terms.

The event drew an attendance of 600-700, made up of a large contingent of National Health Service workers from the Royal London Hospital striking in a long running dispute over unsafe staffing levels and pay. This involves the withholding of a £1,655 lump sum payment related to a rotten sub inflation pay deal struck to end the strike last year of the lowest paid hospital workers in one of Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham’s many “victories”.

There were no contingents of rail workers, even though it coincided with the second day of the latest national stoppage by 12,000 train drivers in ASLEF. LU workers had been instructed by Lynch to report to work after their 96 percent mandate was vetoed and before they had a chance to even see the RMT surrender terms.

The greetings brought by Noreen Hayes, President of the RMT Regional Transport Council were politically disgraceful. As a bureaucrat closely associated with National Shop Steward Network of the pseudo-left Socialist Party, she was clearly trusted to be on message.

After explaining that the RMT council represented 13,500 workers (10,000 on LU) she said, “Today 4,000 of them or just under should have been on strike from stations but at the very last minute we managed to make

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settlement with our management."

After pointing to never ending cost-cutting she stated, "But they are coming back to us at ACAS with more proposals." Hayes added that LU workers were being re-balloted for a fifth time, claiming that this had given the RMT two and a half years of rolling industrial action. "So any Tory guvnor or anyone else out there who is talking to you that strike action does not work you tell them bollocks, strike action works for workers, we are making a stand for ourselves."

Since last January one mandate after another of over 90 percent has been delivered, but only six days of action have taken place, the last in March. There has been no strike action under the most recent mandate. The RMT called off four days of action in July following ACAS talks, as did Unite and ASLEF over their two days of action. This was to promote the lie that "significant progress" had been made to protect jobs, pensions and working conditions.

ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan proclaimed the second day of the latest train drivers strikes on national rail, from "Land's End to John O'Groats". ASLEF has not even formulated a pay demand in the first national strike of train drivers in four decades, under conditions in which they have not received a wage increase since 2019.

Train drivers have delivered three major strikes mandates since the dispute began, but the ASLEF executive has restricted action to 14 days of staggered stoppages since last July and kept them apart from the RMT action of 33 days since June 2022.

Whelan congratulated the RMT on its "victory." Far from opposing a divide and conquer policy, in the ASLEF journal he describes "a face-saving way out" for the train companies and government based on a "significant pay increase across the board" to allow changes to terms and conditions and productivity increases to be negotiated on a company-by-company basis.

Corbyn's referred to a "sense of solidarity" against employers' "mistreatment" of workers and the toxic racism of the Tory government and ended with a call to join a trade union. His sermonising is saturated with hypocrisy to whitewash the central role of the union bureaucracy in sabotaging the struggles which had erupted since the summer, declaring, "And so what has happened over the past months, a year now, we have had all these strikes and disputes and marches and demonstrations, is that it has brought people together."

Corbyn avoided any concrete assessment of the strike wave after describing "a 20 percent drop in working class living standards over the last 12 years" and stating that "any pay rise which is less than the rate of inflation is a further pay cut."

This is precisely what has been enforced against hundred of thousands of rail and postal workers, nurses and educators by the trade union apparatus. In addition to further impoverishing workers, it has allowed the brutal restructuring to proceed and the continued gutting of the NHS and education.

As the WSWS article explained in relation to the fight against the sellout of the LU struggle, "The 'Enough is Enough' campaign Lynch led alongside Dave Ward of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) has not been a rebirth of the unions but has led to an escalation of union sellouts and attempts to present Labour's election as the only option for workers. [Sir Keir] Starmer heads a party of ultra-Blairites whose only commitment is to continued austerity, low taxes for the rich and nothing for essential services while backing to the hilt NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

"Rank-and-file committees are being formed by workers globally as they combat the treachery of the union bureaucracy, including by Royal Mail workers—who began the strike wave with rail workers last year—in opposition to the CWU's sellout and its surrender agreement based on brutal restructuring. Rail workers must now form their own committee, united in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and- File Committees, in opposition to their enemies in the RMT bureaucracy and the Labour Party, to take on and defeat the train companies and Tory government."

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