

UK rail workers should reject the RMT/train operators deal

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10 November 2023

The Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union has sprung a vote on a rotten deal for 20,000 rail workers at 14 train operators, which represents a complete sellout of their year-and-a-half long fight.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the RMT and train operators proposes a drastic real-terms pay cut and a commitment by the union to collude in restructuring based on a de facto no strike agreement.

RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch confirmed in a video to members that the deal negotiated with the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) would be voted on via an e-referendum, closing November 30. To vote, members will need to have provided an email address to the union.

The e-referendum is also organised on a divisive company-by-company basis continuing the RMT policy of voting for industrial action on a disaggregated basis. But because of the overwhelming mandates at each company 20,000 rail workers at the separate train operators have been on strike together against the plans to restructure the network in line with the Tory government's re-privatisation project, the Great British Railways. The RMT are doubling down in the attempt to break up the action.

According to Lynch the RMT referendum, with rail workers bounced into a vote using a more restrictive balloting system and with no scrutiny, is their "chance to decide."

The RMT National Executive Committee (NEC) is not putting forward "a proposal" from the train operators. It is what the RMT Press Office described as a "mutually agreed way forward."

RMT members returned a mandate only a month ago for another sixth months of strike action with an 89.3 percent majority on a 63 percent turnout. This was the fourth mandate in the long-running dispute, from last June, which launched the summer strike wave in the UK.

The MOU has been brought forward to quash renewed

strike action in favour of deepened collusion between the RMT-RDG on pay restraint, job losses and restructuring of terms and conditions.

The video address from Lynch was not a leader taking forward a fight against the Sunak government and private operators, but a man wanting to justify throwing in the towel as he pleaded there was "no need for industrial action". His comments on the three elements of the MOU could have been delivered by a representative of the RDG.

Even in relation to the MOU's supposed highlight—a backdated 5 percent pay award or a minimum of £1,750 for 2022/3—Lynch conceded this was still "below the rate of inflation." What an understatement! With no wage increase for two years prior to 2022, the pitiful amount is worth even less and represents a drastic reduction in living standards over three-years. This did not stop Lynch from making a backhanded recommendation, stating it was "without conditions" and a "stand alone" pay award.

After 33 days of national strike action, the RMT leadership's promotion of the below-inflation pay award, bumped up only through back pay, relies on the impact of Christmas on workers who have received no strike pay (only hardship payments) and endured the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation.

A "job security commitment" to no compulsory redundancies only runs until the end of 2024. The sellout the RMT pushed on 20,000 employees at the Network Rail infrastructure company in March shows this will not protect a single job. The government-run company achieved a drastic head count reduction of 1,900 jobs in maintenance despite a similar proviso as part of a two-year agreement of 9 percent, a real-terms pay cut for signalling and maintenance workers.

In relation to the MOU a miserable pay award for 2022/3 with no strings is being used to try and end all strike action, with the RMT stating that acceptance "will

terminate the national dispute mandate.”

Lynch’s description of this as a “pause” in the dispute over Christmas and into next spring is a contemptible lie. With the strike mandate vetoed, he made clear that the next round of talks between February and June will be based on a pay settlement for 2023/4 in which the “the companies want to link workplace reform to pay for that year.” This is under conditions, he added, in which the train companies “are still wanting to introduce changes to conditions and working practices.”

The RMT would conduct these discussions on a company-by-company basis that will prevent further joint action by rail workers.

Lynch has claimed that the MOU is based on “fresh approach”, but it is a repackaged version of the Dispute Resolution Agreement (DRA) signed by the RMT in January based on what the RDG said was its “best and final offer.” The below-inflation 5 percent pay offer made then remains for this year. The only change is that the original 4 percent for 2023/4 has been replaced by an unspecified figure conditional on “workforce changes”.

The 16-page document accepted the closure and repurposing of station ticket offices and inferior terms for new entrants of both station and train staff.

The RMT had to pull back from the DRA in April after the pre-condition was set that it could only be put to a ballot if all further strike action was ruled out. This would have destroyed whatever credibility Lynch and company had among rail workers, who voted to strike for a third time based on a 91 percent majority in May.

The RMT has now decided to directly block strike action in favour of working hand in glove with the RDG. They do so after the Tory government was forced at the end of October to instruct the train operators to withdraw plans for the closure of most of the 1,007 station ticket offices in England.

The basic reason for doing so is that they did not want to antagonise their own base of support, after a public consultation exercise in which 750,000 responded with 99 percent in opposition. But there is to be no retreat from the attacks on rail workers.

This week the government introduced new legislation, based on its Strikes Act minimum service level regulations, to ensure “certain priority routes” remain open during future rail strikes. This mandates that 40 percent of rail services must run during any industrial action, rendering all walkouts ineffective.

The Save Our Ticket Offices campaign by the RMT waged in support of the consultation exercise was used to

sideline any action by rail workers, with no strikes organised from September 2. The RMT hailed the government’s announcement as a “resounding victory” on October 31. But later that day Lynch issued a statement warning of “a stitch up behind closed doors which still paves the way for ticket office closures.”

Rail workers should vote to reject the MOU sellout as a vote of no confidence in its architects, Lynch and the National Executive Committee of the RMT. This must begin a fight to transfer control of the dispute to the rank and file. As part of this struggle workers must demand the right to scrutinise the e-referendum and reject the RMT’s balloting on a company by company basis.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warned from the outset of the rail dispute that staggered and disconnected stoppages by the RMT and train drivers’ union ASLEF were a means of waging a war of attrition against their members, not a genuine fight against the Tory government and the train operators.

The rank and file must now draw up a list of non-negotiable demands for joint national action.

The role of Lynch proves that trade union leaders, even those hailed as “lefts”, will sell their members out when the opportunity presents itself and protect their privileged role within the corporate set up.

Their suppression of the class struggle cannot be viewed in isolation from their providing the Sunak Tory government and the Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer with a free hand in backing the genocidal war by the Israeli state against the Palestinians in Gaza.

Lynch and other RMT officials may speak at protests in London and call for a ceasefire, but they have done nothing to mobilise their members in solidarity action as asked for by the Palestinian unions. They have not even lifted a finger to prevent RMT members being sent on Royal Auxiliary Fleet vessels to accompany British and US warships to the Middle East.

The fight against the war on the working class must be joined with a mobilisation against the war criminals in the Sunak government and their Labour partners through a general strike to put an end to Israel’s mass murder and ethnic cleansing.



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