

# Unite UK rail workers! Defeat the de-escalation and sellout strategy by RMT-ASLEF officials!

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The Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) announced yesterday that its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) drawn up with train operating companies in the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) has been accepted by the membership in an e-referendum.

The vote was sprung on 20,000 RMT members at the start of November on a company-by-company basis, with a yes vote carried by majorities at all 14 train operators. But the implications of the MOU—as previously reported by the *World Socialist Web Site*—were deliberately concealed by Mick Lynch and the RMT National Executive Committee.

The Sunak government and train operating companies (TOCs) have responded triumphantly to the ending of an 18-month dispute on terms established in the MOU. They have been given everything they wanted. The RMT leadership has plunged a dagger into rail workers' determined fight at the TOCs as they did earlier at Network Rail.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper immediately called on drivers' union ASLEF to “follow the RMT's lead” and to call off its next round of industrial action which began today. Train drivers were offered just 4 percent in April tied to changes in terms and conditions, having gone without a pay rise for four and a half years.

The MOU includes a well below inflation pay award in 2022/3 and pushes back pay negotiations for 2023/4 until next year, conditional on “Workforce Reforms”, the favoured euphemism for the tearing-up of terms and conditions resulting in mass job losses.

RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch has stated, “Our members have spoken in huge numbers to accept this unconditional pay offer and no compulsory redundancies until the end of 2024.”

In October, the RMT's membership across all TOCs

voted by a majority of 89.3 percent to renew strike action, the fourth such overwhelming strike mandate since the dispute began in May 2022. But Lynch and the NEC ignored their vote, hatching a sellout blueprint drawn up in closed door meetings with the RDG.

Lynch has used his unearned reputation, provided by the media and pseudo-left groups, as a supposed “militant union leader” to wear down and betray a strategically important strike movement. When Lynch announced the e-referendum in a video he insisted there was “no need for industrial action.”

He ruled this out based on a pay award for 2022/23 of just 5 percent or £1,750, well below inflation, after RMT members had not received a pay increase for two years. It was cynically timed to coincide with Christmas, with a back-pay lump sum of around 20 months used to bump up the RDG's miserly offer.

The commitment of no compulsory redundancies until the end of 2024 will not protect a single job. A similar deal pushed through by the RMT at Network Rail saw 1,900 maintenance jobs axed after workers voted with their feet, leaving the industry due to poor pay and onerous new working conditions.

Mixed messaging to RMT members about the implications of a vote to accept the MOU is designed to sow confusion. Lynch has spoken of a “pause” in the dispute over Christmas and the New Year, but the RMT has confirmed the vote to accept “will terminate the national dispute mandate”, echoing the MOU's wording.

The RMT's hyped claims that the current paltry pay award is “unconditional” barely veils its abject surrender.

The RMT has agreed that pay for 2023/4 will be linked to an overhaul of terms and conditions negotiated company-by-company from next February to the end of April. The MOU is a blank cheque for “workforce

reforms”, including a new multi-skilled station grade and new grade structure. Under “General Working Arrangements” it lists 7-day working, attendance policy, sick pay and new technology among a hit-list of sweeping changes. In its press release the RDG states: “reforms are needed to meet the tough financial challenge.”

For the first time since the dispute began, RMT members will not have the weapon of collective action across the 14 train operators, courtesy of the union leadership’s “understanding” with the RDG and the Sunak government.

The official government U-turn last month over the mass closure of 1,000+ station ticket offices in England followed emphatic public opposition with 750,000 submissions opposing the closures. But the public consultation process was used by the RMT to stand down strike action by its members. After claiming “victory”, Lynch was obliged to warn against a “a stitch-up behind closed doors which still paves the way for ticket office closures.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* called for a No vote in the e-referendum and for rail workers to remove its joint architects. The need for a rank-and-file movement will be driven home in the months ahead.

It was rail workers who spearheaded the mass strike wave that erupted in the summer of 2022, prompting the Tory government to adopt laws dictating that 40 percent of rail services will remain operational during all future industrial action. Instead of mobilising their members to defeat the anti-strike laws, RMT and ASLEF officials worked to prevent a unified challenge to the crisis-ridden Johnson-Truss-Sunak governments.

Through its MOU with the RDG, the RMT is offering its services to bury the rail dispute and help enforce the government’s Great British Railways agenda, which enjoys the backing of the Labour Party.

The potential exists to overturn the unions’ corporatist agreements with the government and the RDG. ASLEF train drivers began their latest round of industrial action against 16 train operators in England on Friday with an overtime ban in effect from December 1-9 and strike action on a piecemeal basis from Saturday.

ASLEF stated, “Members will walk out at EMR and LNER on Saturday 2 December; at Avanti West Coast, Chiltern, Great Northern Thameslink, and WMT on Sunday 3 December; at C2C and Greater Anglia on Tuesday 5 December; at Southeastern, Southern/Gatwick Express, SWR main line, SWR depot drivers, and Island Line on Wednesday 6 December; at CrossCountry and

GWR on Thursday 7 December; and at Northern and TPT on Friday 8 December.”

ASLEF’s press release claimed, “We have, in the past, called everyone out on the same day: by spreading the strike action, for which members voted overwhelmingly, coupled with our ban on overtime across the week, the ramifications for the rail industry will be greater.”

But this is a blatant de-escalation of the dispute even compared with the 14 one-day stoppages across the network strung out since last July.

ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan has attacked the “risible” pay offer in April by the RDG, saying it was “a land grab for all our terms and conditions”. But Whelan has repeated his call for “uncoupling the carriages” which he states would give the train operators and government “a way out.”

He has called for “a significant across the board (pay) increase for all drivers” giving the TOCs any “changes and productivity they want” negotiated on a company-by-company basis. Whelan’s reference to a pay increase should be taken with more than a pinch of salt. At ScotRail this involved a pay deal with the Scottish National Party government of just 6 percent.

ASLEF is seeking the same exit ramp from the dispute as the RMT’s sell out MOU with the government. The two unions have been enmeshed in discussions and planning with the RDG and the government since December 2021 and have already committed in principle to the agenda of “workplace reform”.

A week is a long time in politics but 18 months of struggle is time enough to draw conclusions about where the determined fight of rail workers has been led. A fight against the government’s restructuring agenda, centred on slashing jobs, pay and conditions and delivering a profit bonanza to the private train operators rests with the organisation of a rank-and-file rebellion against the pro-company union bureaucracy.



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