

RMT cancels London tube strikes: A far-reaching betrayal in the making

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With less than 20 minutes' notice, the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) called off strike action Sunday night by their 10,000 members on the London Underground, citing a "significant improvement in funding" for a pay settlement.

RMT members across all grades, including drivers, engineers, maintenance workers, signalling and station staff were due to walk out together for the first time in a week-long rolling strike which started on Friday in support of an overdue cost-of-living pay claim.

Hailed as "frontline heroes" during the pandemic, tube workers have suffered a year-on-year decline in pay against inflation. At the end of last year, they rejected a "full and final" pay offer from Transport for London (TfL) of just 5 percent for 2023-4, backdated to April 2023 when inflation was 14.1 percent RPI.

Shortly after 5pm Sunday, less than 20 minutes before strike action was due to begin, the RMT announced it was cancelled.

RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch claimed in a letter to members that "a fresh development has been confirmed in writing to your Union which will enable a more constructive negotiation to be developed. This includes a significant improvement in the funding available for a pay settlement.

"In order to enter into fresh negotiations on this improved position, your union's National Executive Committee has decided to suspend the scheduled forthcoming strike action and all members are instructed to report for work as normal from their next shift until further notice with immediate effect."

Neither Lynch nor the NEC provided any information to their 10,000 members about the content of this "improved position". But BBC Transport Correspondent Tom Edwards reported Sunday night that the extra money amounted to a paltry £30

million—nowhere near enough to raise pay in line with inflation across London Underground's 16,000-strong workforce.

But the RMT's strike cancellation—overturning a 90 percent strike vote on December 19—goes beyond the imposition of what will undoubtedly be an inferior pay deal. None of the issues which led to the strike vote have been resolved. This includes pay freezes for those near the top pay band, and above all the gutting of tube workers' pensions.

The RMT has handed a blank cheque to TfL, London Mayor Sadiq Khan of the Labour Party and the Conservative government to proceed with their scorched earth policy of cost-cutting and austerity across London's transport network. TfL's 2024 Business Plan commits to £650 million of *recurring* operating cost savings by 2025/26, a large part of which will be achieved by eliminating the current pension scheme.

The Department for Transport's (DfT) Director General for Roads and Local Group, Emma Ward, wrote to TfL Commissioner Andy Lord last July, stating the government's intention to legislate "in order to transfer TfL scheme members into the LGPS [Local Government Pension Scheme]". The DfT's pension reform would see TfL's "commencement of a thorough consultation process to start as quickly as possible, and no later than 1 July 2024, with an implementation date for reform not before 30 September 2026."

Labour Party intervention: a warning

The RMT's impending sellout must be stopped in its

tracks. Workers across the London Underground must demand the reinstatement of industrial action and a joint offensive by members of train drivers' union ASLEF and RMT members to defeat the government's plans for billions more in cuts across the London transport network.

This means rejecting the efforts of Mick Lynch and the RMT executive who are working to subordinate the working class to the demands of an incoming Labour government. A new axis of struggle must be forged by the rank-and-file.

The RMT called off the strike after crisis talks over the weekend with Sadiq Khan, who reportedly intervened over the heads of TfL negotiators, finding an additional £30 million to reach a deal with senior RMT officials.

Khan's intervention and Lynch's role in backing it was undoubtedly discussed at the highest levels of the Labour Party, including with leader Sir Keir Starmer and his senior advisors.

Ending the dispute was viewed as essential in winding down an industrial dispute that was pivotal in launching last year's summer strike wave and winter of discontent. That dispute began with denunciations of striking workers as "the enemy underground" and "Putin's stooges", with the implication that industrial action is an act of treason against the British state.

Such accusations pointed to fears within the British ruling class over their capacity to simultaneously wage imperialist wars against Russia in Ukraine and war against the working class at home.

Khan's intervention against this week's strike takes place as Britain's armed forces are being deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean and wider Middle East to back Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, and attacks into Lebanon and Iran.

On Sunday, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson (Khan's predecessor as London Mayor) told the *Telegraph* that Khan's intervention to reach a deal with the RMT was an "epic show of apathy" and that his "failure to deal with the unions, is only a foretaste of what the nation could expect under Labour."

Susan Hall, the Conservative Party's mayoral candidate had stated in recent days, "It is outrageous that Sadiq Khan is still refusing to use the minimum service levels powers to reduce the impact of these unnecessary strikes, because he is too scared of his

party's union paymasters."

But Khan has ridiculed the Tories' "adversarial approach" towards the unions, stating that the government's Minimum Service laws would not be effective in "averting" industrial action.

On Sunday night, Khan said of his deal with the RMT, "This shows what can be achieved by engaging and working with trade unions and transport staff, rather than working against them."

While the Conservative government has adopted a battery of repressive measures against the right to strike and protest, it has only survived repeated political meltdowns and crisis thanks to the services of the trade union bureaucracy. The RMT has played a central role in saving the government, dividing and politically derailing a movement encompassing tens of thousands of transport workers across the train operating companies, Network Rail, London Underground and on the docks.

Heading up the Enough is Enough campaign group in 2023, Lynch worked openly with Labour MPs to present an incoming Labour government under Starmer as a lesser evil to the Tories.

The result is open strike-breaking to enforce an agenda backed by the Tories and Labour against London Underground workers and aimed at preparing the road for the most right-wing Labour government in history.

A warning must be issued about the role of RMT officials from various pseudo-left organisations who have played a key role in dressing up the RMT's sabotage as a victory. RMT regional organiser Jared Wood, a member of the Socialist Party who was elected to the union's NEC in 2019, told the *Socialist Worker* that Khan's offer was "a significant increase that will allow us to address the key issues raised by RMT. We will now seek to conclude negotiations as soon as possible."

The SWP's article was headlined "RMT union leaders are wrong to halt Tube strikes", yet they cited Wood's blatant treachery without a word of criticism.



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