

London Underground strike: No more RMT sellouts, build rank and file committees to unite all Tube workers

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The Rail, Maritime Transport Workers (RMT) union has announced that its 10,000 members on London Underground Limited (LUL) will stage rolling strike action between November 1-8. This comes after a ballot returning a 96 percent mandate to strike last month against the derisory pay offer of 4.6 percent this year and 1.6/2 percent for 2025.

They join ASLEF's drivers on LUL who voted to strike by a massive 98.8 percent mandate rejecting an even more miserable 3.8 percent offer.

For a seventh consecutive time RMT members on LUL have voted to return a strike mandate in a protracted dispute which includes major attacks on pensions, jobs and working conditions.

A July 17 RMT circular reported that RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch sat through a Transport for London (TfL) presentation laying out plans to smash collective bargaining, with management demanding a blank cheque to exclude different grades from a consolidated pay award. It outlined proposals on "pay management and job families affecting all grades" and "employees who are paid within a pay range who exceed the maximum of that range will receive the relevant portion of the award in excess of the maximum as a non-consolidated lump sum."

This is one of the gravest threats to pay and conditions tube workers have ever faced.

The strike action on London Underground pits one of the most powerful sections of transport workers in the first major showdown with Sir Keir Starmer's right-wing pro-business Labour government.

But the plan of industrial action laid out by RMT and ASLEF bureaucracies is not designed to pursue a serious unified struggle for a genuine, no strings pay rise. On November 1 and 2 Engineering Vehicles Operations and Maintenance workers will strike; November 3 and 4 Track Access Controllers, Control centre and Power Control staff; November 4 Emergency Response Unit staff will strike; November 5 Fleet, engineering, Stations and Trains staff

(except ERU and Engineering Vehicles Operations and Maintenance). On November 6 Signaller and Service Controllers; November 7 Fleet, Engineering, Stations and Train staff (not ERU and Engineering Vehicles Operations and Maintenance); and November 8 Signaller and Service Controllers.

Sustained joint strike action is being carefully avoided. ASLEF drivers will strike on November 7 and 12 with an overtime ban by ASLEF managers operating between November 3 and 16. On November 1, Engineers will strike for 24 hours and the drivers strike on November 7 is the only example of joint action between RMT and ASLEF. The effect is to make it easier for LUL management to mount strike breaking operations. More damaging is workers in both unions and between grades within the RMT will be forced to cross each other's picket lines.

London Underground workers are not faced with simply an industrial struggle but a political fight. The Labour government already plans to make £22 billion of recurring cuts in public spending over the next four years. Spending on health, social needs and critical infrastructure is to be bled dry to fund the war escalation in Gaza, Lebanon and against Iran, as well as the NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Starmer has promised to rip up regulations and guarantee corporate tax breaks to guarantee the profits of the corporate and financial oligarchy.

Lynch cannot be entrusted with this fight. He is one of the most craven defenders of the Starmer government in a declared partnership.

RMT and ASLEF press releases are full of desperate appeals to management and London Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan to enter open ended talks so they can prevent the Labour government facing a renewal of the widespread strike movement of 2022-23.

RMT members face a reckoning with the union bureaucracy. The rolling strike action in February this year on London Underground over the 2023/4 pay award was

ditched by the RMT executive after three days, at the very point when for the first time all 10,000 RMT members were due to strike together. This was to pave the way for a sub-standard deal of consolidated lump sums in addition to the 5 percent already rejected and backdated to April 2023, when RPI inflation stood at 11.4 percent.

The £30 million extra provided by the Labour Mayor was not a “victory” but established the precedent for capping pay among LUL grades that is now being extended. It was to show-case the corporatist relations between Labour and the unions as a more effective weapon to suppress workers’ struggles than the Tories ahead of the General Election. The Starmer government is now taking forward this agenda.

The *World Socialist Web Site* warned that the sellout would embolden management: “The deal freezes pay bands for workers at the top pay bands. They will receive a lump sum increase instead, with consolidated pay capped. This divisive outcome sets a precedent that TfL will seek to press against all grades.”

The deal was never even put to a vote of the membership. The RMT executive instead relied on the services of regional and local reps to provide the fake rubber stamp of consent.

A leading role was played by the Socialist Party’s (SP) Jared Wood, London Transport Regional Organiser. Wood described the deal as “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.” By which he meant calling off action, accepting the deal and imposing it on members, denying them a ballot.

The SP are still passing off last year’s sellout as a victory. On October 10 the SP published, in a personal capacity, an article by Gary Harbord, Secretary of London Underground Train Grades. He describes having “won an extra £30 million in the last pay round”. But he then acknowledges that with “a Labour London mayor, Sadiq Khan, and a new Labour government” LUL’s latest offer falls way below “our members’ aspirations” and is less than has been offered on Network Rail and the train operating companies.

Harbord indicates that small percentage increase will serve as a pretext for the bureaucracy to call off strike action. Workers at train operating companies accepted 4.75 percent for 2023-24 and 4.5 percent for 2024-25. At state run Network Rail infrastructure workers accepted a one-year deal of 4.5 percent.

Rail workers accepted these deals because they no longer believe the RMT will pursue any serious struggle after the divisive sell out of the 2022-2023 national rail strikes. Prior to the launching the 2022-23 rail strikes Lynch said his members would strike together and settle together. Instead separate deals were used to undermine national strikes and facilitate strike breaking operations.

The small pay rise at Network Rail is designed to prevent national rail workers striking with London Underground workers, while the union bureaucracy in alliance with Starmer government pushes ahead with the former Conservative government’s Great British Rail project. GBR involves a vast increase in productivity at the expense of hard-earned historic gains in working conditions, pay, pensions and jobs.

London Underground workers must reach out to other transport workers and the working class. The conditions exist for an offensive, which could not only win workers’ demands on pay, working conditions and pensions against Labour’s savage cuts but also block the actions of Starmer’s war mongering cabinet.

RMT members at the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (logistical ships supporting the British Navy) have taken sporadic 24 hour strikes against pay decline of up to 36 percent over 14 years. Rather than mounting a struggle for a major pay increase and improved working conditions, Lynch is ensuring that nothing interferes with Labour’s war escalation in alliance with Israel and the US.

The demand for a cost-of-living increase is not negotiable, it is a social right. This is the case regardless of grade or union affiliation and must be fought for by a maximum mobilisation of the entire LUL workforce. But to pursue a unified struggle over pay, jobs and pension, the conduct of the strikes and negotiations must first be taken out of the hands of sabotage apparatus that is the union bureaucracy through building democratically elected rank-and-file committees in every workplace.



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