

# London Underground workers speak from picket lines: “We don’t do this lightly, we need change”

Our reporters  
9 September 2025

London Underground workers interviewed on the picket lines have spoken up against Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan, government funding cuts to Transport for London (TfL), and the devastating impact of job losses, rostering practices, and de-staffing on their conditions and passenger safety. They also defended colleagues targeted by the Starmer government’s expanding dragnet of anti-immigrant measures and deportations

The week-long rolling strike by more than 11,000 Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) members on the Tube and Docklands Light Railway (DLR) began on Friday. The DLR was shut down entirely today, with trains idled in stabling sidings. The following comments are from striking train drivers, station and revenue staff at stations on the Northern and Jubilee Lines.

## Defence of immigrant colleagues, opposition to Labour’s pro-business agenda

Several workers condemned the threat of deportations facing more than 60 of their colleagues due to the Starmer government’s changes in visa sponsorship rules, moving them to the “medium skilled” category making them ineligible to remain in the UK. One worker, reflecting on the September 4 RMT protest outside Parliament, said:

“It would have been great if the London Mayor Sadiq Khan was there. He wasn’t. Effectively, he is our boss. He likes to pander about being the son of a bus conductor. Where are you in this fight for the working class who actually need you? Where are you when a lot of these people look like you, just like your father?”

Workers criticised Khan over cuts to TfL and the pro-market model for London Underground:

“TfL has had a very awkward relationship with the

government. Before, we could have three- or four-year deals; now we don’t. People forget he is technically our boss. He doesn’t get involved. He’s a massive disappointment—he’s hung us out to dry. He needed to sort out how we’re funded and perceived in the media, but he hasn’t.”

A third worker, who had voted for Khan three times, said he felt let down:

“It would be nice if he said, as Mayor, I’m going to rip up everything and make you a public service again. Right now, we rely on tenants and advertisers, whereas metro systems worldwide are government-funded. London Underground is one of the most expensive systems in the world. Public transport should be free and properly funded.”

## Gambling with safety through cuts to station staff

Workers described the impact of 2,000 job losses on the London Underground system, leaving large parts of the network unstaffed:

“We now cover zones one to nine. We see how many stations are unstaffed. Revenue officers have no place of safety from assault. If you go to the west end of the Jubilee line now, most stations between Finchley Road and beyond are unstaffed. More stations are unstaffed than ever before.”

Another explained: “If something goes wrong at an unstaffed station, there is no one to help. For customers with additional needs, visually impaired or mobility impaired, there’s no one to assist. If there’s an issue with the train service, there is no supervisor to support the train operator or emergency services. It’s a much less safe network. TfL’s approach is to wait until something goes wrong, until there’s an uproar.”

Lone working was raised as a major danger:

“We do work alone on the gate line (ticket barriers) for an extended period, and you don’t feel safe, especially late at night. I’ve been assaulted several times.”

A colleague added, “Staff numbers are constantly being run down. In zone one (central London) I’ve not had it as bad, but for those further out it’s much worse. You see people drunk late at night and think what it must be like for colleagues working alone. It impacts everyone’s safety.”

### **Exhaustion with no work-life balance**

Workers repeatedly raised the strain of gruelling rosters:

“Some rosters are a disgrace. You come off seven nights to two rest days, then straight onto seven lates or another seven or eight nights. Station assistants start at 4:30am then finish at 1:30am. People can’t have work-life balance or work safely.

“Merging areas means fewer staff and exhausting days. I have no energy left for my family. Fatigue is extreme. One week you’re up at 3am, the next finishing at 1am. It’s unmanageable.”

A younger worker said:

“The biggest thing is fatigue. After cuts and reorganisation, rosters are worse than ever. You can be on dead earlys, up at 3am seven days in a row, or finishing at 1am for a week. The body clock doesn’t know what’s going on—it feels like jet lag. Something’s got to give.”

A long-serving train driver added:

“I’ve driven almost 20 years. It affects you physically and mentally and messes up your social life. Management offers so-called four-day weeks, but these are compressed 9½-hour days, pushing 45–50 hours a week. That means job losses. All we need is fewer hours on the same terms.”

### **Tube workers call for class unity against media smears**

Workers rejected right-wing media attacks portraying them as privileged:

“The media vilify TfL and London Underground for everything. We’re not the bad guys. We’re fighting for our own pay and conditions like everyone should. Obviously, we don’t come out here to lose a day’s pay. I’m losing two days’ pay this week to stand on picket lines. We don’t do that lightly. We’re not doing this for the good of our health. We’re doing it because we need change. We’ve talked

about fatigue and safety and all the other issues in which TfL could make our lives better and have the money to do so, but they deny that they can do it.”

Another said: “The way we talk about class has changed in this country. TfL jobs are seen as middle-class when they are working-class jobs. We’re vilified and told we’re greedy when all workers should be fighting for their rights. The government and media pit workers against each other. I’m losing two days’ pay this week. We don’t do this lightly. But we’re painted as villains for asking for more than a 3.4 percent pay rise and better rostering, while billionaires hoard wealth untaxed.”

Several stressed the need for solidarity action:

“With DLR staff striking, it’s positive. We need coordinated action with them and the buses. We should show solidarity with other workers like nurses.”

Another concluded:

“I’m proud of everyone on the picket line. We’re standing up together against fatigue, cuts, attacks on colleagues’ visas, and for proper funding of public transport. That’s what this strike is about.”

The WSWS article circulated by the reporting team during the discussion called on Tube and DLR workers to form strike committees to take full control of the dispute, ensuring members oversee all negotiations between the RMT and TfL on pay, conditions, staffing, and pensions:

“Workers must reject all claims that there is “no money” to fund their demands. Billions must be allocated to upgrade and expand the Tube, DLR and national rail system, improving pay, conditions and pensions for staff and making public transport affordable. This means a political struggle against the Starmer government, which is funnelling billions to military rearmament and war, with workers footing the bill through brutal austerity.”



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