

# London Underground drivers speak from the picket lines against imposed “condensed” four-day week

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**Our reporters**  
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WSWS reporters visited picket lines and spoke with striking London Underground drivers.

The 1,800 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) are striking against Transport for London (TfL)—overseen by London’s Labour Party Mayor Sadiq Khan—who plan to impose a four-day week. This would increase shift lengths to eight hours and 45 minutes, risking greater fatigue and compromising safety.

Strikes were held this week from Tuesday to Wednesday and Thursday/Friday with further action planned in May and June.

The RMT represents half of all drivers on the Underground. The Aslef union already agreed to the changes earlier, significantly affecting the impact of the strikes.

A driver at Seven Sisters on the Victoria Line said, “We want a four-day week with reduced hours, 32 hours a week, which makes sense. But we don’t want any four-day week where you have longer hours to work because the fatigue will kick in. We don’t agree with the offer that is being imposed on us. We want better conditions, that is what we are striking for.

“If you combined the two votes on the deal by RMT and Aslef, a clear majority of drivers across the whole Underground had voted against the deal.”

“Fatigue will go through the roof. Union members doing the longer shifts will be prone to making mistakes and that causes accidents. They had a trial run on the Jubilee line a few years ago and it wasn’t successful. I heard that there was a lot of sickness and those who opted in for that trial, they were saying: ‘No, it’s not that

great’. It would have a huge impact on people’s well-being, mental health and everything.

On Aslef accepting the deal, he added, “Obviously it is weakening our staff. We see that we will have difficulty to push back. Mt, they like it, it’s divide and rule isn’t it? Even though we are like 50-50, membership on the trains, overall, we have more members than Aslef, if you include all the grades. It will make things harder for other unions if one union agrees to it and they are scheming with management and talking behind closed doors.”

On the picket line at Barking depot, Socialist Equality Party members raised that management’s proposals—originally pushed in 2021—were a Trojan horse for the destruction of hard-won working conditions. A striker, Malcolm, replied, “The action today is essentially about freedom of choice. We have fought for decades to get the terms and conditions we have—through our actions and through our union affiliation. To have those stripped away at a whim for a token gesture, a half-hour paid meal relief is what we are getting, sweeping everything else away is simply not worth it.

“Everybody would like a four-day week, but not at this cost. This is not the four-day week we wanted. Management are selling the lie that it’s optional, which it absolutely is not, it will be imposed. That is why we’re standing here today.”

Asked what the impact of these longer shifts would be, Malcolm said, “Well, it will be starting an hour earlier, finishing later, doing longer shifts, more fatigue. Having the option of knowing what your shift will be the next day will be either not at all, or in some areas by a two-hour

window either way. So, you think you are starting now at eight o'clock in the morning? Oh no, you now start at 10 a.m. and you will get 24 hours' notice if you're awake and you check your electronic iPad device they are going to issue you with to see it at 4.30 a.m. that morning, so you know the next day. So, you don't even really get 24 hours' notice.

“How do you plan any life outside of work not knowing what time you are going to start and what time you are going to finish? You might have arranged childminding. And to think that people now would be forced to get up at half past two in the morning, for a half past three start. And finishing even later at half past one, which we currently do. It's just laughable, and there are even worse aspects in the way that some of the newer people will be treated.

“They are offering such onerous conditions that I personally believe that you would be forced into a breakdown and you would be sacked for poor attendance, or you would be looking for other employment.”

Asked about Aslef accepting the offer, Malcolm said, “Well, it's difficult to speak about another so-called union's position, but they seem to me to be completely in cahoots and aligning themselves with management against the common worker. So yeah, I've got nothing but disdain for them unfortunately.

“They are selling their own members down the river for a one-off payment, a small token against the rest of your working life for years to come, including the earnings that you would gain on your hard-fought terms and conditions and for your pension. And it's lasting so you are not only selling out today, this week, next week, next year; it's forever for your working life and that's certainly not a price I would be prepared to pay.”

On the RMT calling off the last set of strikes in March, he said, “It proved in the end that this latest pause in our action has been nothing but a delaying tactic for management.”



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