

“We're giving away all of our terms and conditions for nothing”

London Underground Train Operators speak on TfL's compressed "four-day week"

Our reporters
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London Underground Train Operators and other grades from across the network spoke with reporters from the *World Socialist Website* on Thursday about Transport for London (TfL's) “Train operators’ four-day week”.

The overwhelming consensus was that TfL's compressed work week is a Trojan horse for a historic attack on terms and conditions secured through decades of struggle.

The new schedules were first outlined in a TfL document published in March 2025 and were openly embraced by the leadership of train drivers' union ASLEF which rammed through the changes in a ballot back in April.

RMT drivers have demanded strike action to oppose the changes. But Eddie Dempsey, Rail Maritime and Transport Workers Union (RMT) General Secretary, cancelled two days of strike action by 1,800 RMT London Underground train operator members earlier this week. The “concession” cited by the RMT—that TfL's plans will be introduced “voluntarily”—is a fraud.

Dempsey's strike cancellation and the RMT's claim that TfL had “shifted” their stance are clear signals that the RMT's national executive is preparing a sellout.

A leaflet distributed among drivers by WSWs reporters was warmly received by train operators. It insisted: “The unity of London Underground workers must be asserted against the union apparatus and the sectional divisions it sows. United action is needed to win workers' demands for pay restoration, adequate staffing, decent hours and safe working conditions.”

Drivers expressed anger toward the leadership of train drivers' union ASLEF (with around 2,000 members),

who pushed through acceptance of the deal despite significant opposition.

But RMT's top officials are trying to accommodate and push through the same deal against their members.

A driver told WSWs, “We're giving away all of our terms and conditions for nothing, barely a shorter working week, with longer days, and that's just awful.” He added, “I think ASLEF are sellouts and that's why I left it.”

Another driver spoke in a similar vein, “I am in ASLEF, and I voted against the deal. I do not like it, especially the hours, and I'm fearful of the shift lengths. I went on strike with the RMT drivers, and I am leaving ASLEF.

“At the minute, we are being asked to apply for the tablet voluntarily, but I would not be surprised if they turned around and said it was compulsory. I have a friend who works on the railway. He says everything is done on the tablet. Again, I fear it.

“What [ASLEF] drivers saw of the deal was a few pages. I know there is much more detail that we did not know about, and ASLEF are now sat down negotiating the points of the deal! We should have known this in advance.”

A young driver told WSWs, “I'm against this deal. Nothing management come up with is done to benefit us. It is an attack on all our hard-won terms and conditions going back 50 years when they were won.

“On holidays, it proposes going from block weeks to one week. You can't have a proper holiday with your family. From what I can see, there are also fewer holidays.”

He explained a significant change in what drivers call “step of time” (i.e., minor breaks during the shift to

prevent the effects of non-stop driving), “At the minute we have ‘step of time’ where we terminate and another driver takes over. This is the case from Monday to Friday. On Sunday, there is no ‘step of time.’ With this deal, it will be like Sunday all the time. Non-stop driving with only the basic break. Also, notice for any change on your next shift will go from 24 hours [to] 12 hours. Any work-life balance is completely gone.”

Drivers warned that TfL’s new schedules would increase exhaustion and impact passenger safety. The effects on family life would also be devastating. One driver said, “I am against the 4-day week because the days are too long, 10 hours a day. I would have agreed to a 4-day week if there were 32 hours in total.”

Speaking to the impact of the deal on 10,000 RMT members across the LUL, a member of the station staff said, “If they get the four-day week through for the drivers, then it will be us next.”

The resignations from ASLEF reflect broader opposition among ASLEF drivers to the union’s sellout deal. But instead of denouncing Finn Brennan and ASLEF’s leadership and issuing the call for a united fight across the London Underground to defeat TfL’s plans, Dempsey and the national executive are using ASLEF’s agreement to drive acceptance of TfL’s plans by RMT drivers on a “voluntary” basis. Every driver knows where this will lead.

An article published by *WSWS* on Thursday night warned that the RMT leadership is collaborating with Labour Mayor Sadiq Khan to facilitate TfL’s assault on jobs, working conditions and safety. Explaining the RMT’s de facto partnership with Labour, the article warned:

“Time and again, London Underground workers have mounted, or voted to mount, determined strike action, only for their struggles to be demobilised by a bureaucracy falsely claiming “left” credentials.

“The RMT’s ability to maintain a militant posture has been greatly undermined by its role in defusing a struggle against the Starmer government—through repeated closed-door meetings with TfL and strike cancellations. Dempsey’s tub-thumping has given way to demands for ‘industrial peace’”.

RMT members should demand a resumption of strike action, complete oversight of all negotiations with TfL and full control over the dispute by the rank-and-file to renew the fight for a shorter working week abandoned

by Dempsey. This means forming rank-and-file committees to link up all grades, appealing to ASLEF train operators to oppose their leadership and join a united struggle.



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