

London Underground



In an unprecedented show of unity, all four Tube unions (RMT, ASLEF, TSSA, and Unite) have declared disputes with London Underground over the 2015 pay

settlement and the implementation of "Night Tube" (24-hour running). Ballots are due back around 30 June, with the potential for a joint strike.

LU has offered a 0.75% pay increase (meagre compared to the 2%+ figures won on DLR, Network Rail, Southern, and elsewhere), and wants to impose "Night Tube" without proper consultation and agreements.

RMT is concurrently reballoting station staff for further action in the dispute against job cuts, displacements, ticket office closures, and the imposition of anti-social rosters.

Supporters of *Tubeworker*, *Off The Rails*' sister bulletin on LU, have argued that the latter dispute should retain an all-grades focus, and not narrow down to a station-grades-only fight.

Unions must make sure the pay campaign is fought with their positive demands front and centre - a shorter working week, and a pay award that reflects increases in the cost of living, particularly for the lowest-paid grades.

If any union shows signs of settling on their own and peeling away from the fight, activists in the other unions should appeal to their rank-and-file to mobilise against a sell-out. Joint meetings and reps' committees could help with that.

For regular updates, see the *Tubeworker* blog at workersliberty.org/twblog

off the rails...

- is a quarterly pamphlet, plus bulletins as needed for particular campaigns or disputes.
- **is written by railway workers - all our reports are from the front line. Names are left off so that writers can tell their stories and express their views without fear of victimisation.**
- is for all rail workers, whatever your grade, location or employer, whatever trade union you are in.
- aims to provide information to rail workers, support to our struggles, and a forum to discuss strategies. welcomes and will publish reports, comments and opinions from all rail workers.
- **is fiercely pro-union, but is independent of the union head offices, so is not chauvinist about any particular union, and is free to criticise the unions' leadership when we feel it is necessary.**
- has a statement of aims called 'Fantasy Union of Rail and Transport Workers': get a copy when you subscribe.
- **is published by the socialist group Workers' Liberty, but aims to be a platform and an organising tool for all activists who share our basic outlook.**
- can be sent to you in the post - send a fiver to the address below, or phone us to arrange subs for multiple copies.
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off the rails

A platform for rank-and-file rail workers

Summer 2015 - 30p where sold

Tories re-elected...



Regroup and fight back!

- **Resist new anti-union laws**
- **Back Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader**

In this issue: What five more years of the Tories means for us; **Jeremy Corbyn's campaign;** East Midlands Trains; **London Underground;** Northern Rail; **Network Rail pay fight;** Southern Rail; **Marxism at Work:** Shift work explained; **and more!**

Network Rail

As *Off The Rails* went to press, RMT members on Network Rail were balloting on whether to accept the company's latest pay offer.

Strikes, involving RMT and TSSA, were initially planned for 24-25 May, but both unions suspended the strikes after Network Rail made a revised pay offer.

Consultation with reps and members in RMT returned overwhelming opposition to the new deal, and the union named new strike dates, for 4-5 and 9-11 June.

The company's second improved offer involved a 2% increase in year one, RPI in year two, and some very ambiguous language about whether the pay increase would be tied to (i.e., funded) by "efficiencies" such as potential job cuts.

Off The Rails supporters on Network Rail will be voting against the deal. With such a solid initial mandate for action, more could have been won.

We spoke to a Network Rail worker about the dispute:

"There's a lot of dissatisfaction at the decision to suspend the strikes. There was a feeling from many in RMT that the leadership had failed to lead by suspending the strike for such a paltry offer. I feel the leadership misread the situation and missed the chance to have a big impact by affecting Bank Holiday engineering works. The second offer is not much of an improvement. 2% is still not a substantial increase, and pegging the increase in year two to RPI is very risky. Hopefully we can reinstate action and push for a better deal, but it may now be difficult to remobilise people after strikes have been suspended twice.

"The leadership's claim is that they were acting democratically and accountably by suspending the strike in order to consult members on the new

offer, but there's no reason why the strike had to be suspended for that consultation to take place. The democratic mandate for strikes has already been provided by the overwhelming votes, on large turnouts, to reject the first offer and then to strike.

"Part of the problem is that we don't have a specific demand that we're fighting for. There's a problem with demanding a "substantial increase in the rates of pay", rather than a specific flat-rate increase, as it's vague and leaves a lot open to interpretation. If we had a specific demand, we'd know that any improved offer would have to come up to that for us to consider suspending strikes. There are problems and limitations with making specific demands too, but it's an approach that needs to be considered.

"The dissatisfaction needs to be channelled into union structures and we need a productive debate about how disputes are conducted."



Solidarity

Members of Workers' Liberty, the socialist group which publishes *Off The Rails*, helped organise a statement in solidarity with the Network Rail dispute, which attracted hundreds of signatories. See supportnetworkrailstrike.wordpress.com

Northern Rail



Northern Rail is famous for its crap traction. The state of its rolling stock has been the subject of much comment in this publication, the national press, industry publications, social media and communications from the rail unions.

Off The Rails readers will probably be aware that the next Northern franchise is one of the likely destinations for the 'new' DEMUs currently being developed by the chancers at Vivarail.

These units will actually be re-furnished ex-District Line trains, retired from service on the Tube because they are outdated and not up to scratch safety-wise. In its coverage of a recent crash test of a prototype Vivarail "D-Train", the Railway Gazette website reports that it survived a crash into a 3-ton water tank. At 36km/h.

Off The Rails believes that a train that is destined to run at up to 60mph and could potentially collide with other trains or road vehicles should be tested for crashworthiness in realistic conditions!

Vivarail and its shoddy trains are a menace, RMT and ASLEF should refuse to operate them whenever and wherever the employers try to bring them in - at least until they have been proven under realistic conditions.

Jeremy Corbyn for Labour leader!



Socialist MP Jeremy Corbyn has made it onto the ballot for the Labour leadership election.

Jeremy is a member of the RMT's Parliamentary Group, and has been a consistent supporter of rail workers' struggles.

All rail unions must throw their weight behind his campaign, as the only consistently pro-union and pro-rail-renationalisation candidate in the election. Our representatives on Labour Party committees must back Corbyn's campaign.

His candidacy is an excellent opportunity to discuss how to refound genuine working-class political representation in a context in which the Labour Party is hurtling to the right.

Off The Rails supporters plan to set up a "Railworkers4Corbyn" network to coordinate activity in rail unions and our workplaces.

All the other Labour leadership candidates want to reinforce the austerity consensus: only Corbyn wants to put socialism back on the agenda.

For more on Jeremy's campaign, see facebook.com/corbyn4leader

A lesson from across the Channel...

By a French correspondent

Since the beginning of the year, there has been an increasing number of assaults on customer service staff in the Lyon area. This is due to low staff numbers, both on board trains and at stations.

On 6 February, at around 7pm, a worker on a commuter train confronted three young passengers (who were drinking, and smoking cannabis) who were harassing other passengers. They did this at the request of other passengers, and were helped by another off-duty railway worker.

In response, the young passengers attacked the workers. One had a glass bottle smashed in his face, and the other had a rib broken.

As news of the attack spread across social media, and became widely known by other customer service staff, a wildcat strike was launched. Almost 90% of on-duty customer service staff in the company stopped working.

French labour law contains provisions that allow workers to stop work when

they feel their bodily safety is threatened; but the emotional response to assault was so strong that whether or not the strike complied with this law seemed irrelevant.

For nine hours, our bosses ignored the situation, despite phone calls from our local union reps. Finally, at 11am on 7 February, managers met with local reps. But the bosses walked out of the meeting a few hours later, leaving both workers and commuters in the dark without information.

This illustrates the contempt of the bourgeoisie for the working-class: "your bodies, your safety, your lives don't matter - only profits."

Eventually, alarmed by the growing number of strikers, our bosses agreed to resume the meeting later that afternoon. Their stubbornness was finally broken when local unions threatened to spread the dispute nationally. On 8 February, our bosses agreed to create 16 additional jobs. The grassroots strike gave us the upper hand over management.

The lesson? Direct action gets the goods!

Ideas for Freedom 2015: Imagining The Future

A festival of socialist ideas

2-5 July, Birkbeck College, Central London

For more information, including info on booking tickets, see workersliberty.org/ideas



Solidarity with Ukrainian workers

The recent ASLEF Annual Assembly of Delegates (AAD) voted to affiliate to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, a network which raises awareness and builds support for the efforts of independent unions in Ukraine to struggle for workers' rights against both Western and Russian imperialism, as well as domestic Ukrainian oligarchs and capitalists.

RMT AGM will also vote on a motion to affiliate to the campaign. Here, we reprint an address to ASLEF from the leader of the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine (VPZU) to extend fraternal greetings to the Annual Assembly of Delegates of ASLEF. Our trade union was established in 1994, and belongs to the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, which like the British Trade Union Congress is an affiliate to the European TUC and International Trade Union Confederation.

Ukraine has been in deep and tragic crisis since the defeat of the authoritarian government of our former President Yanukovich last year. Ukraine has been squeezed between an aggressive power in our East and neo-liberal economic policies from the West.

As railway workers we have been in the epicentre of this tragic situation, during which our trade union has continued to struggle for peace, unity and social justice. It should be also mentioned that our oligarch politicians have been trying for a long time to privatize the most profitable sectors of railway, as a result today on the 12th of May the technical default was

announced. To our mind, this is made purposely for selling the whole railway at a cheap rate.

In this situation we write to you as fellow railway workers to appeal to you for solidarity, we wish to establish direct links between VPZU and ASLEF, to be able to exchange experience and new ideas as trade unionists in our struggles. It is only through the international solidarity and co-operation of our labour movements that the full truth of the situation in our two countries can be fully known to us.

As such we wish to invite ASLEF to send a fact-finding mission to Ukraine to meet with fellow train drivers and members Ukrainian labour movement. Our sister union the Independent Trade Union of Miners has recently hosted two delegations from your National Union of Mineworkers who have been warmly received in Ukraine.

Your NUM participated in a national congress of mineworkers and a national protest against mine closures in Kiev. We would very much welcome the possibility of developing such solidarity between railway workers of Ukraine and the UK. I wish you every success in your conference and victories for ASLEF in your struggles ahead.

Yours in solidarity,
Volodymyr Kozelskyi
Head of Free Trade Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine (VPZU)



For more on the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, see ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org

Regroup and

The election of a Tory government is a big blow for railworkers, and all working-class people. Here are five fronts we'll have to fight on in the next five years, and beyond...

Take on the anti-strike laws

The Tories were just elected into government by just 24% of the electorate (36% of those who voted), yet they want to change the law so over 50% of us have to vote yes before a strike can be considered legal.

This is a serious threat: it is important that we defend ourselves against it and refuse to be cowed by it.

A good start would be for all the rail

unions to engage us in preparing a strategy - one that does not include shying away from strikes for fear of provoking the Tories. If it comes down to it, our unions should break the laws rather than fail to fight for members' interests. (See box)

Fight low pay

Cameron kept boasting that two million jobs had been created under the last government. But most of these were bogus self-employed, zero-hours or minimum-waged jobs.

The Tories have used the economic crisis to engineer a low-wage economy to maximise companies' profits.

NEW TORY GOVERNMENT, NEW ANTI-UNION LAWS: LABOUR MOVEMENT MUST FIGHT BACK!

Off The Rails supporters in RMT branches submitted this Emergency Resolution to RMT AGM. Could your branch discuss a similar text?

This AGM notes that the Conservative government, elected on 7 May by the votes of 24% of the electorate (36% of those voting), used its first Queen's Speech to announce further restrictions country's already-repressive anti-trade union laws. The "Trade Unions Bill" includes the introduction of a minimum 50% turnout threshold in strike ballots, and a requirement that 40% of those entitled to vote must vote in favour of industrial action in "certain essential public services (health, education, fire, transport)" for a strike to be legal.

This AGM believes that our ability to defend jobs, pay, conditions and pensions depends on a strong, active fight by the whole trade union movement to defend our right to

strike. This fight will be most effective if it is proactive, starting immediately rather than waiting for specific attacks to be announced.

This AGM therefore resolves that RMT will:

1. work with other union branches, national unions, the National Shop Stewards Network, the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, and others to organise a national demonstration against the imposition of new anti-union laws, and for the repeal of existing ones, within the next three months, and a labour-movement conference by the end of the year.
2. produce and distribute leaflets and other materials making the case for repealing, rather than strengthening, anti-union legislation
3. when we take strike action, respond to media and political attacks in defence of our right to do so
4. work with other trade unions and relevant campaigning bodies in pursuing this campaign
5. submit a resolution to TUC Congress on this issue

fight back!

Right across the railway industry, we're seeing more contracting out to contractors and agencies who pay low wages, and increasing casualisation and wage cuts for directly-employed workers.

We need our unions to turn outwards and organise the unorganised with more determination and resources. Success will require belligerent struggle, backed by all grades across the railway.

Fight McNulty, fight private ownership

The Tories will accelerate the implementation of the McNulty Report. We can expect more TOCs to move towards "Driver-Only Operation" (DOO), de-skilling and downgrading guards or slashing jobs altogether. Station ticket offices may come under threat as the Tories look to move towards a more automated, de-staffed railway system.

Our unions' "Action for Rail" campaign needs to be turned into a vibrant, grassroots movement for public ownership of the railways, with meetings, rallies, and other direct actions. Wherever TOCs try to cut jobs or close ticket office, they must be met with strong campaigns of industrial and political resistance.

Fight divide-and-rule and racism with solidarity

With UKIP gaining over 12% of the vote, and the Tories promising a referendum on EU membership, we can expect months of racism in the press, directing anger at migrants rather than those responsible for social problems.

This climate will intensify the racism that our workmates from other countries are already facing.



As well as migrants, we can expect tirades against benefit claimants, disabled people, young people, and other groups - all in an attempt to get working-class people to direct our anger against other working-class people. Don't fall for it!

When relatively-better-paid railway workers, such as drivers, strike over pensions or pay, we will be told that that we are greedy, that this is a privilege that we should be stripped of because others are even worse off.

We need to use every opportunity to explain the cause of social ills: a capitalist system, backed by a government that serves to benefit the rich. We need to challenge racism and other prejudices with solidarity.

Make our unions fit to fight

In the face of all this, how can our unions become more effective?

First off, it would be better if we were all in one union - and while we remain in different ones, that they work together to organise action.

Beyond this, unions will be more successful in defending us if they are outgoing and imaginative, and welcome new members and encourage them to get involved - and most importantly, if they refused to be overwhelmed by the threat from the Tories and lead a determined, well-thought-through, rank-and-file-led resistance.



Marxism At Work

Shift work explained

Our bodies have evolved so that we're awake by day and asleep at night. The brain's 'circadian clock' monitors light levels and releases a chemical, melatonin, to prompt us to sleep when it's dark; it releases other chemicals that keep us awake during the day.

This gives our bodies their 'circadian rhythm', which affects temperature, digestion, heart rate and blood pressure.

In the rail industry, many of us work shifts: outside regular 9 to 5 hours, especially nights, early starts and late finishes. In doing this, we're defying our natural rhythm and incurring the risk of health problems. We're also depriving ourselves of sleep; shift workers get around two to three hours' less sleep a night than other workers.

Research shows that shift work is associated with an increased risk of heart problems, digestive complaints, type two

diabetes and some forms of cancer.

Studies suggest that shift work is associated with increased mortality risk, i.e. we die younger!

A brief Marxist history of shift work.

Some forms of shift work can be traced back to Roman times. But shift work took off during the industrial revolution when capitalists invested a lot of money in factory machinery to increase productivity.

They didn't want their investments standing idle at night! As Marx puts it in *Capital*, time in which machinery 'lies fallow represents a useless advance for the capitalists'. Capitalists got round this problem by developing the shift system: different groups of workers to keep their machinery going by day and by night.

This history of shift work tells us something about how bosses view and use workers in the capitalist system. It shows us how the hours that our bosses buy from us for wages are just a means of keeping their machinery moving, creating value and producing profit. To the capitalists, our energy is like fuel to burn in the production process. We know that in sweatshops in Bangladesh today, just as in 19th Century Britain, bosses will make workers keep working until they die from exhaustion. That is the capitalists' view on the value and the purpose of human life.



This explains why, knowing the unhealthy and life-shortening effects of shift work, our bosses do very little to promote our health and well-being. They do the legal minimum, such as giving us 12 hours' rest between shifts. We have organised and fought for other improvements, such as the 35 hour week on many Train Operating Companies. But it's a constant battle: our right to a healthy life vs. their fight to keep the railway running on as few staff as possible.

We've got to keep the fight up!

Our trade union and socialist movement can challenge management's domination and theft of our lives through shift work, starting with:

- An early retirement with a pension to enjoy life! If shift work means we'll die younger than other workers, we should retire younger. We're entitled to a life after work, especially as so much of our working life is compromised by shifts in the first place.

- Many, many more staff. If we must do unhealthy shifts, we should do as few as possible. We need to renew the call for a shorter working week with no loss of pay, accompanied by the call for recruiting more staff. One night shift a month, with a week off either side, wouldn't be too bad!

- Workers' control. One of the greatest sources of shift work stress is our lack of control over when we get our rest periods with the resulting loss of family and social life. We should be able to work less, but also control when we work too.

- On the level of wider social transformation, shift work would be hugely reduced if production was motivated by need instead of profit. A socialist, democratically-planned society would alleviate many of the requirements for shift work. We wouldn't need workers in Starbucks at 5.30am to sell coffee to railway workers who are on their way to drive trains so that thousands of workers in banking, marketing and other socially useless industries can commute to their pointless jobs every day.

We could all have a lie in!

STOP PRESS: DBS JOB CUTS



DB Schenker management have apparently announced depot closures and potential

redundancies of 118 drivers and other staff.

This looks to have been precipitated by the sudden drop in business moving coal to the UK's many coal-fired power stations.

If there is less work, there should simply be more time off. Once again, we see the need to bring the railway back

into public ownership - DBS workers should not be in a more precarious position than TOC employees just because of market forces. Is there no room for a fight to keep these workers in their jobs, keep the depots open and find other work for them?

There is limited information available on this at the time of going to press. It's important that all grades stick together and unions don't settle for deals with privilege one grade over another.

Do you work at DB Schenker? Off The Rails wants to hear what you think!

Southern drivers' pay campaign

As *Off The Rails* went to press, Southern drivers voted to accept a new and improved pay offer resulting from negotiations which began in October 2014.

But the offer is much worse than what we could expect with a bolder strategy on the part of ASLEF.

Southern initially offered 2.65% to drivers, and claimed any more would be completely impossible as the franchise was coming to an end and they were legally unable to offer more. They used the same reasoning to argue they would be unable to offer anything more than a one year deal. This did not sit well with the majority of drivers as the new franchise has been won by Govia – the same company that run Southern. The name plate above the door is changing, but the people in charge making the money and the decisions are not. Despite ASLEF recommending acceptance, members rejected the deal

After months of back and forth, it became clear the company would not budge from 2.65% without industrial pressure. We were balloted, and voted 92% in favour of striking, on an 85% turnout.

Those are absolutely incredible numbers, especially when you consider ASLEF had done virtually no work to build up a yes vote and the large majority of Southern drivers have never taken official industrial action.

Immediately new negotiations happened and the company offered 2.65% for the first year, then two rises of about 3% over the course of 2015-2016. Both the company and the union spun this as an almost-10% pay rise over two



years. The union put the offer to a referendum and recommended accepting. The offer was this time accepted by a large majority.

However the deal is not quite as good as it seems. The pay rise for October 2014 is still 2.65%. This is the figure members twice before overwhelmingly rejected. The "10% rise" would leave Southern drivers still earning less than drivers at many other London based TOCs, even assuming the other TOCs would not award pay rises in the meantime. It should also be noted that Southern operate over some of the busiest routes in the country, largely without Guards. Shifts are long and intense.

Many drivers felt they had been lied to by the company. Southern initially said no more than 2.65% could be offered, but has now offered more. They initially said they could not do a two year deal, but have now offered a two year deal. Two year deals are generally not good ideas: they tie unions' hands and leave us unable to put annual pressure on the company as circumstances change. However, the fact that Southern initially said a two year deal was out of the question and have now offered one has

made it clear to most drivers that Southern have not been negotiating in good faith for the entire process. The talk in the mess room has often focussed on this, and the general feeling is that the company could certainly afford to give more, and we could afford to make them.

So why was the deal accepted by such a large margin? At every turn since October 2014, ASLEF Company Council has tried to de-escalate the situation and avoid action. After a 92% ballot, the recommendation to accept the first offer suggests a blunt refusal to push for more. It was clear ASLEF Company Council had no desire to call a strike even with a 92% mandate to do so.

By refusing to articulate a strategy or any key demands of our own ASLEF Company Council have been able to remove any momentum from the dispute. The dispute has been conducted throughout by considering the offers put forward by the company, not by putting forward our own demands. As a result when the company slightly improved their

offer after the strike ballot this could be painted as a victory, despite the fact that the improvements were meagre.

The strike vote, and the precarious position of the company as we enter a new franchise, clearly show we could have achieved almost any demands we might have wanted to put forward.

This was a real opportunity to redress the pay gap between Southern and other London based TOCs. However ASLEF were not willing to do that, and the membership were not sufficiently organised to be able to. A grass roots campaign of meetings to discuss demands and communicate them to other union members would almost certainly have led to great gains in this instance.

In the wider political context of anti-union rhetoric the failure to use this mandate for something significant is a huge abdication of responsibility by one of the strongest sections of the working class.

East Midlands Trains



Off The Rails supporters working for East Midlands Trains recently launched

Nottingham Railworker, a new monthly bulletin for EMT workers. Here, we print some extracts from the first issue:

We all make mistakes, the important thing is how we react to them. On that score then it would appear that EMT has failed dismally.

After a 158 entered service in early February with a dangerous defect you might have expected an immediate inspection of the fleet to check that other units weren't suffering from the same

problem. Railworker believes that didn't happen with key staff being left in the dark.

Hopefully EMT will have learnt from this episode, especially as they move from 48 hour "B" exams to completing them in 24 with all the attendant risks that such a speed up will entail.

In other news, rumour has it that management aren't happy with a fall in revenue on the Worksop line, blaming it on guards not working hard enough. So, nothing to do with laying off those ATEs?

Funny then that EMT were quick to respond to a similar fall on the gateline last year when they came out of revenue protection by employing more staff.