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CHRISTMAS IN LONDON: A TALE OF TWO CITIES



It'll be a merry Christmas for some, with city bonuses due to rise 21% in 2015.

There are 13 million people living in poverty in the UK. 93,000 children will be homeless this Christmas. Food banks are expecting record demand to combat hunger. Meanwhile, bonuses for senior city bosses will rise by 21% in 2015.

And poverty is directly on London Underground's doorstep. One London Underground cleaner described Christmas as "lonely" and "scary". He said, "living on the low wage of an LU cleaner, Christmas can be a sad time of year. You can't afford to eat five a day, let alone a proper Christmas dinner. In the middle of winter, we're worrying whether we should put the heating on. You're struggling to pay astronomical rents already and if you fall sick and lose a week's pay, you're hoping you won't end up on the street".

The most immediate answer to this is higher pay! The bosses will say that they "can't afford it," meaning they don't want to dent their profit margins. But we make their profits for them.

MERRY BROWNMAS

The company claims it's skint, and is closing every ticket office and cutting nearly 1,000 jobs to make savings.

But apparently not too skint to send each of us, personally, a Christmas card from top boss Mike Brown.

Tubeworker thinks the money might be better spent elsewhere. Of course, in the new-think propaganda world of LU senior managers this is a lovely gesture; Christmas card in one hand, P45 in the other.

Thanks, but no thanks.

We just need to force money from their hands by strikes and protests, like cinema workers at Lambeth's Ritz cinema did when they won the London Living Wage this year.

We also need to reduce living costs. We need lower rents. For this, we need more social housing to be built, with rents affordable to working class people.

"Living on the low wage of an LU cleaner, Christmas can be a sad time of year. You can't afford to eat five a day, let alone a proper Christmas dinner. In the middle of winter, we're worrying whether we should put the heating on." - a London Underground cleaner

We need lower energy prices, and public ownership of the energy companies.

Poverty is a problem with a straightforward solution. While so many of us are suffering, the richest 100 people in the UK have as much wealth as the poorest 19 million. It's not that there is too little money: it's about who controls it. We should!

To eradicate poverty within the London Underground workforce, our unions need to do more. As one cleaner said, "The unions need to understand more about the situation of the low paid worker, how much it takes out of you to go up against these companies constantly, trying to win".

And our unions need to gear themselves up to take part in the fight for social housing, publicly-owned essentials like transport and energy, because that's what it will take to drive down living costs.

For more on LU cleaners' fightback, see "Cleaners' Column", overleaf.

REINSTATE VICKY, NOEL, AND ALEX!

Vicky Hayward, Noel Roberts, and Alex McGuigan - Tube workers and RMT members - remain sacked.

Vicky Hayward is accused of faking an injury at work, despite having a doctor's note for the four days she had off work, and despite LU having no evidence against her apart from managers' testimony about what they saw on old CCTV footage (that neither Vicky nor her union rep was allowed to see). Noel has been "medically-terminated", despite not having a day off sick in 10 months. Alex was sacked after failing a breathalyser test which failed to take his Type-2 diabetes into account.

A strike by Northern Line drivers on 1 December was impacting, with management having to put on rail replacement buses. Now some union reps are discussing escalating that strike to include all drivers; this doesn't go far enough. We need all-grades action. Management do a good job of trying to divide us, we shouldn't divide ourselves.

RMT branches including Central Line East, East Ham, Finsbury Park, and Camden 3 have passed policy for all-grades strike ballot on the issue of abuse of procedures. Other unions should support the campaigns too; if LU get away with sacking Alex, Vicky, and Noel, none of us - including TSSA and ASLEF members - is safe.

Reps should support Alex, Vicky, and Noel in conducting workplace visits to tell their stories and build the campaigns. Face-to-face interaction is vital to building solidarity.

CLEANERS' COLUMN

RMT is balloting its members working for Interserve on the Bakerloo, Central, and Victoria (BCV) contract for strikes against management bullying, short pay, and other issues.

Cleaning workers face some of the lowest pay and worst conditions of any grade on the Tube, but are often seen as the poor relations of the workforce, even within the union. The union needs a proper organising drive amongst cleaners to build strength and prepare the ballot.

It is also imperative that the union explores possibilities for involving workers employed by AGS and other agencies in the dispute, including by declaring a dispute with AGS as well as with Interserve, as well as campaigning for as many cleaners as possible to be taken on full-time/in-house. Agency workers at a warehouse in Swindon have unionised and fought back; *it is possible for agency workers to fight!*

There are also laws in place to stop employers using agencies to undermine industrial disputes.

The Central Line East branch of the RMT has agreed a 2015 branch plan which includes a focused drive to organise cleaners. Other branches should produce similar plans, and make sure they're organising cleaning workers in their workplaces.

ROLL YOUR SLEEVES UP

When the cleaning contract for Bakerloo, Central, and Victoria lines passed from Initial to Interserve, cleaners were left waiting long into winter for their new winter coat with "Interserve" embazoned across it.

Corporate branding was more important than its workforce's comfort.

The long-awaited coats are now here. But Interserve has supplied them in just two sizes: "medium" and "extra large". The "medium" comes down below the knees and your hands are where your elbows should be. You can't use a litter picker to do your job without rolling your sleeves up.

When Interserve bought Initial facilities services, it had its eye on the London Underground cleaning contract; LU was Initial's largest customer with a contract worth £50 million per year. And how does Interserve spend its £50 million? On cheap uniform that looks like it's come from the back of a lorry!

Tubeworker reminds all readers that workers have the right to refuse to work on safety grounds, including if your uniform or equipment is unsafe.

KEEP UP FIGHT TO SAVE TICKET OFFICES

LU has now announced its timetable for closing all ticket offices during 2015.

Around the same time, independent watchdog London TravelWatch published the results of its survey on the issue, clearly showing passengers don't want ticket offices to close. Our experience at work also suggests the new software on the POMs is far from user friendly.

The unions have missed a trick by not making more of this public opposition.

RMT Central Line East and the Hands Off London Transport campaign organised a well-supported action at Bethnal Green station on 17 December; other branches should do likewise.

WATERLOO & CITY STRIKE THREAT FORCES MANAGEMENT TO TALK PAY RISE

For nearly two years, Waterloo & City line service control staff have been refusing overtime in pursuit of their claim for higher pay to reflect the complexity of their work. Nothing doing. Management didn't care.

So they stepped it up. Balloted for strike action. Got a 100% Yes vote. Put on a 48-hour strike.

And guess what? Management came running to ACAS and have now agreed a review which should lead to a pay enhancement.

The lesson is obvious: if we want to win, we must show willing to take action.

It is essential that the momentum is maintained and that management understand that unless the review delivers what we want, that strike action will be back on.

WOT NO PART-TIMERS?

The relocation "preferencing" forms have been sent to full-timers only, with preferencing for part-timers still to come at a later date.

Part-timers are left wondering whether they will just be fitted into the gaps. Some could end up spending more time travelling than working!

Moreover, weekday part-time SAMFs and SCRA's being denied a promotion opportunity, as the CSS1 applications only include full-time and weekend part-time posts.

For more on the unfair "preferencing" process, see column above right.

OUR "PREFERENCE"? MORE STRIKES.

London Underground has sent station staff a

"preferencing"

form. It says

this is our "opportunity to have our say" on where we work in LU's post-cuts world.

The system is totally unfair. A CSA "preferencing" Camden is given 96 potential relocations, including Walthamstow and Tooting! Oxford Circus gives 136, including Morden and Harlesden.

We have no real choice here. LU's guidance is incomprehensible, and the form itself is illogical.

Certain groups of workers will be hit hardest. LU has hinted that it will make provision for carers of people with disabilities. But moving 30+ minutes further from home will affect all people with caring responsibilities; LU should assist all carers. Women still do most of the care work in society, so LU's women workers are likely to be hit hardest. Women are only 18% of LU's workforce. Is LU trying to push more of us out of the door?

There are a lot of women and carers in part time roles. Will part time staff have to choose from the full timers' leftover positions?

LU is messing around with our lives. The company isn't listening to us. It's time to build for more strikes.



What is Tubeworker?

Tubeworker is a rank-and-file socialist bulletin, published at least monthly, written by Tube workers, for Tube workers. It is published by the socialist group Workers' Liberty, but is produced in editorial meetings open to all workers. Supporters from outside London Underground can help with public distribution.

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