

tubeworker

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To respond to Covid-19 pandemic: Fight for workers' control

With the government facing criticism for its approach to the Covid-19 outbreak, our safety depends on us putting forward our own emergency plan to protect our and our passengers' health.

LU has already taken some steps to reduce the service, including the suspension of Night Tube and the closure of certain stations. We need to ensure workers affected by the service reduction are not pressured to work outside of their contractual hours. Basic frameworks and agreements must be upheld.

We also demand:

- increase cleaning standards to the level necessary to minimise risk
- take control of all TfL operations, including cancelling private contracts and bringing services, especially cleaning, in-house
- guarantee that all staff, whether directly or indirectly employed, can stay off work if following government guidance, with no threat of disciplinary action or loss of pay
- take serious measures to reduce unnecessary social contact, including shutting multi-use touchscreen devices such as ticket machines (and therefore allowing

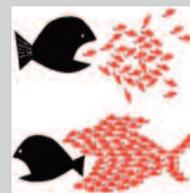
people to travel without tickets); congestion control; allowing staff to work from home where possible. We strongly encourage staff on the frontline to implement these measures themselves wherever possible.

- demand the restoration of the government grant to TfL, plus emergency funding to deal with the crisis and associated loss of income
- establish a monitoring committee, including representatives of passenger groups and trade unions, to sit in permanent session during this crisis to scrutinise information and recommend necessary actions.

The last is particularly important, as it allows us to keep up with a rapidly-changing situation and to assert the right of working people - workers and passengers - to scrutinise and drive the policies that directly affect us.

We want our unions to put these demands to the employers - and ultimately, the Mayor. But this is an issue for everyone, so we can build support for it among the travelling public, and the wider labour movement.

No class peace in the crisis!



A working-class desire for everyone to pull together comes from a good place, usually informed by a spirit of social solidarity.

But that should not involve writing blank cheques for the bosses, whose interests remain irreconcilably opposed to ours.

The boss class will not be suspending the class struggle from its side. On LU, the company has used the crisis to force through a shoddy pay deal. On a local level, some managers are trying to force workers who are self-isolating back to work. Elsewhere, Virgin Airlines is asking staff to take unpaid leave... apparently with agreement from the Unite and Balpa unions! RMT put its name to a joint statement with the Department for Transport, along with eight other unions, which wasn't seen or ratified by any democratic committee within the union. That's precisely the sort of thing we shouldn't be doing.

A crisis like this will require emergency measures. It will require all of us who are able to make extraordinary efforts to help society through.

What it does not require is the suspension of our basic struggles; of democracy in our movement; nor of our fundamental understanding that bosses and workers have opposing interests. No class peace in the crisis!

Win on cleaners' sick pay

Any cleaner who self-isolates during the Covid-19 crisis will be paid at their full shift rate.

Previously, cleaners were only being paid Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), less than £100 per week.

This is a major concession, and one that would not have been secured without RMT pressure.

RMT, hopefully with the support of other unions, must now keep that

pressure up to ensure any cleaner who develops Covid-19 symptoms beyond an initial period of self-isolation continues to receive full pay, and that the policy is made permanent once the crisis is over.

SSP is not enough to live on, and no worker should have to choose between their health and putting food on the table.

STEPS INTO SUPPORT?

Steps Into Work students have been told that the scheme is now on hold until September, due to the Covid-19 crisis.

Steps Into Work students are autistic and/or learning-disabled, and many rely greatly on a stable routine. The disruption to their routine may cause great distress to them and difficulty for their families. The suspension may also delay opportunities to take up jobs and earn a wage (SiW is unpaid).

It is good that RMT has written to the company asking for support for SiW students during this time.

FIGHT ROGUE MANAGERS

Word reaches *Tubeworker* HQ of rogue managers throwing their weight around.

Staff who are self-isolating have had messages from managers telling them they “don’t meet the criteria”, and pressuring them to come back to work.

These managers need to back off. All workers must be able to follow public health advice in full.

SHOULD THE TUBE SHUT DOWN?

Some workers are now arguing the Tube should shut down altogether, to maximise social distancing.

We think that’d be the wrong move, for now. Without an alternative transport infrastructure to move health workers and other key workers around, a total shutdown could do more harm than good.

Workers’ control of planning, and passengers stopping non-essential travel, can ensure that a critical service is maintained in as safe a way as possible.

CLEANERS ARE “KEY WORKERS” TOO

LU staff have been designated “key workers” during the pandemic, meaning, among other things, they’ll be able to keep kids in school.

Cleaners and other contractors are also part of the core Tube workforce. They need “key worker” status too.

SAFE STAFFING DURING CLOSURES

Certain managers are trying to cut corners during the current closures.

We’ve heard stories of AMs trying to babysit closed Section 12 stations with CSAs, or remove staff from them entirely.

If trains are running, even closed stations need properly-licensed staff.

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

Instructors operators on a number of lines are refusing to take anyone else in their cab at the current time. *Tubeworker* thinks they are right to refuse.

Social distancing has to be upheld. If that means sending trainees home on full pay then the company should do it.

If a single member of any training group goes into self isolation, there should be a guarantee that any training that is suspended or deferred with no loss of pay, particularly for workers who are not existing LU employees and so cannot be expected to work operationally before their training is complete.

KEEP OUR UNIONS GOING

Our trade unions don’t need to shut down during the crisis.

Video conferencing technology like Zoom can enable meetings to continue. RMT Neasden branch has already successfully experimented with this. Other branches should follow suit.

WFH?

Most offices have been shut down, with staff asked to work from home.

This is putting strain on the remote access network. Things are a bit less clear for staff who don’t have their own laptop or PC at home. We should demand the company provide laptops for those who need them.

There are also rumours that TfL visitor centre staff have been told to work on stations, work for which they are not adequately trained or paid. Don’t do it!

BOSSSES EXPLOIT CRISIS TO PINCH PENNIES ON PAY

LU bosses have cynically exploited the coronavirus crisis to pressure unions into accepting a shoddy pay settlement that three out of four had previously rejected.

RMT, Unite, and TSSA have accepted LU’s RPI+0.2% (2019-2023) offer, after senior manager Peter McNaught issued unions with an ultimatum that, if they didn’t accept, it would be withdrawn and replaced with a worse offer. At the time of *Tubeworker* going to press, Aslef had not formally accepted, but we understand they are likely to. LU has used a global pandemic to avoid making further concessions on pay/conditions, showing again that the bosses are not suspending their side of the class struggle.

While we acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, and that refusing to accept the offer would’ve been a gamble, *Tubeworker* thinks acceptance was wrong, and would’ve preferred our unions to hold firm in the face of management blackmail. Now we need to use our anger at management’s cynical conduct to prepare new battles.

The deal runs to 2023, but we should not give the bosses three years of peace. We should prepare new, offensive disputes for the demands in our pay claims, ideally combine-wide, but function-specific if necessary.

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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