

tubeworker

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DEFEND ANDY LITTLECHILD: DEFEND ALL TUBE WORKERS

Metronet is victimising leading RMT rep Andy Littlechild, and has its sights on several other reps too. Andy faces a disciplinary for four charges of gross misconduct. The company's intention is to clear the decks of assertive, effective union reps so as to attack working conditions unchallenged. That's why must all rally round Andy and the others.

RMT is balloting all its members on Metronet for strikes to defend Andy; and also balloting Metronet signal staff for strike action against new anti-social rosters and reduced maintenance frequency. Both ballots close on 15 October, and it is essential that we get the biggest possible Yes vote. Activists are already organising leafleting and workplace meetings.

The root of the action against Andy lies in a row over PPE. After decades of fighting to the right to adequate PPE, in recent years the unions have had to demand a rational approach to it, preventing employers lading workers down with excessive, unnecessary kit. So Andy and other reps successfully fought for a policy of PPE appropriate for the specific job - after all, a blanket policy is a lazy policy.

For a particular job that Andy was working on, the risk assessment agreed between management and unions reps was that hard hats were not required. Then a manager decided to change this unilaterally and insist that everyone wear a hard hat. Andy rightly refused to do so, as two principles were at stake: not having to wear unnecessary kit; and the right for union reps to be involved in risk assessments.

So Metronet management hauled Andy in for a fact-finding interview, tried to stop his rep speaking, issued him with a suspension letter that read more like a charge sheet, then kicked him out onto the streets at 3am.

Meanwhile, LUL management are throwing attacks at us too.

The Special Requirements Team is being used to cover duties, when they should only be used for special events. Station staff are

under threat of forcible displacement, and drivers too: those at Leytonstone face displacement having already been displaced there from the East London Line.

Staff have been unjustly sacked, for 'crimes' including self-defence when attacked, returning a ticket to a customer, pregnancy-related issues and having asthma.

Management are bullying sick people back to work. For both drivers and station staff, a maximum 26-week warning for a first sickness is completely standard.

Management are not negotiating with the unions in good faith about what they have planned.

Management are attacking us bit by bit. The union can either let each attack slip by, or we can be wise, see the bigger picture and form a strategy to fight it.

With each attack, management are testing our strength to undermine the union. They do not want a strong union to contend with in the run-up to 2012. They want a pliant workforce, who will work anywhere at a moment's notice to put on the 'biggest show on earth'.

So how do we fight this? Rickmansworth shows it's not possible to defeat a corporate issue with a local strike. These issues affect the whole company, and all grades should fight them. A lack of solidarity between drivers and station staff has built up, but we need to work to overcome that, through emphasising common ground and increasing contact between grades.

A good step in this direction would be for RMT's meeting on 13 October to elect a cross-grades disputes committee to have detailed and meaningful discussions about strategy.

US ELECTION: WHAT CHOICE FOR WORKERS?



America will elect the 'world's most powerful person' in November. George Bush has become a hate figure for the big money and world-conquering ambitions of the US. John McCain, the Republican candidate, promises more of the same but with an older, friendlier face.

This week, both the Republican and Democratic candidates have pledged to shelve their political differences to save capitalism from its own inbuilt crisis. American politics is dominated by big money parties, who do not represent working-class people.

People see hope in the Democratic Party candidate, Barak Obama, whose election to President will bring the liberation the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King fought for. But oppression of black people is built into American society. Black unemployment is double white unemployment, black people are twice as likely not to have health insurance as whites and they work for less money. In 2006, 8.2% of whites were in poverty, but 24.2% of African Americans. Can a President pledged to run the capitalist system efficiently through crisis eradicate the problems faced by working-class black Americans?

The same choice that they have in America between two big money parties will soon confront us here. New Labour is now structured an the same way as the American Democrat party; trade unions fund the party but do not have a say in its policies. With no public healthcare, with an enormous gap between rich and poor, America is a sign of what happens when working-class people have no voice in politics.

www.workersliberty.org/usa2008

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London Workers' Liberty forum

Capitalism In Crisis

Thursday 23 October 7:30pm

Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross

All welcome

STEVE HEDLEY FOR RMT REGIONAL ORGANISER

Tubeworker backs Steve Hedley in the RMT Regional Organiser election. Here, we continue our interview with him about the key issues.

Q. RMT is no longer affiliated to the Labour Party. The New Labour project has left a gaping hole in working-class democracy. What should RMT in London concretely do to build working-class political representation?

A. RMT policy is that the region should identify candidates that are worthy of working class support in elections. We need to implement this vigorously in the region. We should have a list of demands that are a minimum platform for anyone we would agree to support. As a union, we need to develop working class politicians. Now, politicians are an elite; politics is almost entirely a middle class or upper middle class occupation, whereas years ago train drivers would become politicians.

Q. Although RMT has a lot of members in London, the number of members who are active in their workplace or attend their local branches is quite small. What would you do to build a culture of active involvement in the RMT, where every member feels a part?

A. We need to start by analysing where we are – all RMT members are not getting the same representation. This unofficial hierarchy needs to be broken down. Active involvement needs to be facilitated. Take the young members, for example. If people aren't going to branches, we need to go to workplaces to build the union. We need to have a two-way discussion, rather than reps turning up and delivering a speech and disappearing. We need to turn up and ask what would get people involved in the union – like the young members have been doing.

Tubeworker is produced by tubeworkers in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy.

We want one democratic, fighting union for all railworkers. We reject artificial divisions between workers of different grades. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all prejudice that divides us. Only our bosses benefit from a divided workforce.

SRT: NOT A GOOD START

SRT (Special Requirements Team) staff are mucked around, not given time to make friends with other staff, sent to the worst places and treated with hostility. Many have nominated to get out already. LUL now sends new staff into the SRT.

Station Supervisors are given little guidance about what to do with SRT staff. Some managers say the SRT can be used to do any job, but really they should only do extra work made necessary by the special event they are covering. How long before management try to use the SRT to cover strike days?

Familiarised on 40 stations, how can SRT staff understand the workings of them all? The SRT covers big events where overtime would have been on offer: *Tubeworker* does not support overtime (it helps keep stations de-staffed) but some people will miss the extra pay.

Having skilled, motivated staff is clearly not what our managers care about. An easily manipulated and exploited group of workers used to casualise the whole workforce is more their interest. It is essential to get SRT staff unionised and organised. Management know the importance of this – which must be why they have refused to recognise reps unless the unions give them away elsewhere.

www.workersliberty.org/srt

KINGS CROSS WALK OUT

Kings Cross ticket office staff walked out when management used an SRT member to cover a duty. The SRT provides *extra* staff to meet special needs; it must *not* cover duties that should be done by rostered or reserve station staff.

Management removed the SRT member, but then interviewed the ticket office staff (minus union representation) and docked them all 40 minutes pay! We should all defend these staff: management can call it 'unofficial action' if they like, but their 'unofficial' use of the SRT caused the problem.

www.workersliberty.org/handc

COLLAPSING CAB SEAT

Tip to Central Line trains management.

When a union health & safety rep repeatedly tells you that the new cab seats are not securely fixed, take notice. If not, don't be surprised when the seat collapses, injuring the driver - who just happened to be that very same health & safety rep.

We need more power in the workplace for staff and our reps - and less for useless managers who don't care about our safety.

www.workersliberty.org/central

CLEANERS' WIN STALLED

Cleaners employed by ICS and Initial are not receiving the London Living Wage, even though they are contracted by Metronet, who promised it. In talks, the full London Living Wage to be paid on TubeLines may not be forthcoming, so RMT will give an ultimatum to put the strike back on.

With staff turnover and people being stopped from work over their national insurance numbers, a huge amount of work needs to be done to recruit all cleaners and build the dispute back up.

www.workersliberty.org/tubecleaners

DEFEND KARL NILES

Karl Niles worked for LUL for 19 years. Then LUL sacked him cos he needed time off to recover from asthma attacks.

It may turn out that this sacking was, legally, unfair and discriminatory. But that takes months to establish, and even if you win in court, it doesn't get you your job back. So Karl's workmates need to rally round him and prepare to strike - on Brixton group, and the rest of the line if possible.

www.workersliberty.org/victoria

'SPEAK UP'!

Managers are making their presence felt with unusual enthusiasm as this year's 'Speak up!' survey is due. They tell us that the company values our opinions, and also that the group gets points for how many booklets are returned. It doesn't take a genius to see through to the source of their enthusiasm - extra brownie points for them or a genuine care for our well-being?

They will tell you that they value the job we do, but also use the opportunity to tell you that your customer satisfaction scores could be better and how you need to buck up your ideas if you're going to get your bonus next year.

FORCED OFF YOUR GROUP

CSA's on several groups have been sent letters warning they could be moved from their current group. Management have shown callous disregard for the lives of staff with another attempt to undermine job stability, after their recent success in forcing staff to move from Rickmansworth group.

The letter begins, 'As you may or may not be aware, you were placed as a Customer Service Assistant on x Group to cover a project'. They know there was no chance they 'may be aware' as nobody told them!

Many of these CSAs have worked at their location for several months and have built up attachments, never thinking they would go anywhere except by their own choice.

This comes from higher management and shows a bigger agenda. They want to create a job where we do not expect stability; a workforce they can shuffle around to suit their needs. If we are too weak to defend our stability, it will be gone. This will not be the only grade affected in the long-run.

www.workersliberty.org/reserves