

# tubeworker

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## FREE OUR UNIONS

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), which represents workers in the civil service, recently balloted its members for strikes to win better pay.

Although the ballot returned an 86% majority for strikes, the union cannot call legal action, because the turnout was only 41%. This falls below the 50% minimum required by the 2016 “Trade Union Act”, the latest in a long line of laws that shackle our unions.

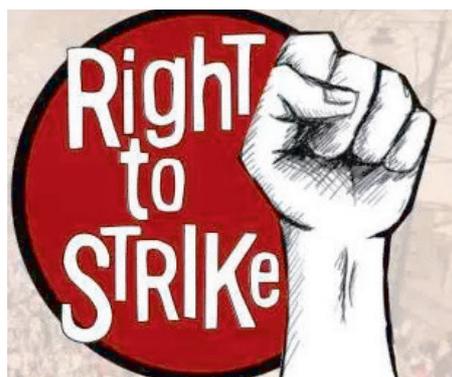
We have had a similar recent experience on LU stations; in 2017, our ballot for strikes to defend the “London Bridge 3” from harsh disciplinary action also fell short of the turnout threshold. More recently, an Aslef ballot for strikes against abuse of procedures at Earl’s Court depot was scuppered by the same laws. Unions in “essential services”, including transport, face an additional hurdle, which requires that, as well as a minimum 50% turnout, at least 40% of all those balloted must vote yes for strikes to be sanctioned.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

The “Free Our Unions” statement, along with model motions for union branches and local Labour Parties, are online at: [bit.ly/fou-statement](http://bit.ly/fou-statement)

The link also includes suggestions and materials for follow-up activities, including suggestions for discussions in branches.

For more info, email the *Clarion* magazine, which is hosting the statement, on [theclarionmag@gmail.com](mailto:theclarionmag@gmail.com)



Laws imposed by Tory governments in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s (and kept on the statute books throughout 13 years of Labour government) effectively criminalise much basic trade union organising.

### ONE RULE FOR THEM...

**When the bosses want to make cuts, or restructure some aspect of the job, do they have to hold a postal ballot in order to do it? Do we get a vote?**

No: employers are given wide scope by the law to do more-or-less whatever they want. But if we want to have our say, if we want to exercise our human right to withdraw our labour, we have to jump through a million hoops that don’t exist in any other sphere of democratic life. The 2016 Act was implemented by a government elected by just 24% of the electorate, and yet they impose turnout thresholds on us!

Anti-union laws show that, although we live in a democracy, that democracy is severely limited when it comes to the economy and the workplace. On that terrain, the bosses are given immense power by the state, and we’re fighting with one hand tied behind our back.

But these laws can be beaten. In 2017, a superb campaign by the Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) saw them beat the thresholds and win a national ballot in the postal

service. RMT has consistently hit thresholds in ballots for strikes to defend the role of the guard on the mainline. And many local disputes on the Tube clear the hurdles.

But we shouldn’t just work hard to make sure we conform to the laws, we should be actively campaigning against them and finding ways to beat them.

With a left-led Labour government now a real possibility, our unions can use their links to Labour to make sure all anti-union laws, not just the most recent, are repealed as soon as Labour comes to power. If you’re a member of the Labour Party, see the links on this page for a motion you can propose to your local party.

We should also demand a positive charter of workplace and union rights, including the right to hold workplace votes, where people vote collectively after discussion, rather than atomising postal ballots where people vote alone, away from the solidarity of our workmates.

Tubeworker supports the “Free Our Unions” statement, which has been backed by several RMT branches and the London Transport Regional Council, as well as several branches of other unions. Why not propose support for this initiative in your branch, and check the links in the box for ideas for follow-up activity?

Ultimately, these laws will have to be confronted and broken. The right to withdraw one’s labour is a fundamental human right, and our aim should be to build up the confidence and organisation to take action whether or not we hit ballot thresholds.

**To do that, we need to empower ourselves with knowledge about what the anti-union laws are and why they’ve been imposed. Discuss this article at work!**

## STRIKE TO DEFEND GRUB!

Drivers on the Metropolitan Line are due to be balloted for strikes to protest the removal of the staff canteen at Harrow depot.

The canteen is being demolished to allow a lift shaft to be installed. It's absolutely right for LU to invest in making stations more accessible; it also needs to ensure facilities for staff. These things shouldn't be in competition. We want step-free stations and staff canteens.

The timetable for the ballot has yet to be announced; when it is, vote yes for strikes!

## STRIKE FOR CAB SECURITY!

Five members of the public got into a female driver's cab on a Northern Line train at Kings Cross.

London Underground played down the threat and questioned her version of events!

This is just the latest of many incidents. Drivers feel vulnerable. The cab can be accessed from the train too easily. Drivers are demanding a secure magnetic lock but London Underground refuses.

So we will strike for our demands. Aslef members will vote between 4 and 19 September. *Tubeworker* hopes RMT drivers will be balloted too or join the strike action.

## AWARD SEASON

The "Make A Difference" award is out, and "You Matter" is in.

It's an ironic title: we didn't matter much to the bosses when they cut loads of jobs and closed ticket offices.

If we really matter, employ more of us and increase our wages, especially for the lowest earners amongst us.

## ACTION LATEST!

**WATERLOO & CITY LINE DRIVERS: FROM 9 SEPTEMBER, DON'T REVERSE UNTIL THE TRAIN HAS BEEN PHYSICALLY CHECKED**

**RUISLIP DEPOT WORKERS: STRIKE FROM 22-24 AND 24-26 AUGUST TO WIN PAY PARITY.**

## DOMESTIC LEAVE IS A RIGHT

*Tubeworker* hears that LU managers are monitoring staff under the Attendance at Work procedure for taking unpaid domestic leave.

Parental leave and time off to care for dependents in emergencies is a legal right.

It cannot be used against us, or form part of disciplinary action under the attendance procedure.

## NIGHT TUBE BRINGS IN £1.5bn

Night Tube is now apparently going to bring an extra £1.5bn to London's night time economy.

That wealth will come from the labour and skills of numerous workers, but will mainly end up in the pockets of the wealthy few.

It may take strikes to redistribute that wealth, and no doubt the Tories will complain about how much we're "costing the economy".

In fact, we'll just be demonstrating how much wealth our labour generates.

## DIRECT EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL CLEANERS

ABM is reducing the amount of agency labour on the cleaning contract, but in a decidedly dodgy way.

Allocating permanent jobs on the basis of seniority is the surely the fairest system: instead, *Tubeworker* hears stories of nepotism and patronage from supervisors and managers.

The hiring process needs to be transparent.

## COMMERCIAL HELL

LU are planning to trial the use of station PAs to play commercials.

This poses a serious risk to safety, as it could cause passengers to zone out yet further from safety announcements.

We can only assume this ludicrous idea is driven by financial desperation. Why not fight the funding cut instead?



## FIGHT BACK ON FUNDING

Due to Tory cuts, London Underground now runs without any government subsidy at all.

Management and the Mayor would evidently rather implement these cuts than resist them. As ever, it is down to us to fight in our own interests.

So come on, comrades - let's step up this battle!

## WOT NO COVERAGE?

Uncovered duties on stations are now a daily reality across much of the combine.

One particular station on the District Line closed multiple times recently for short periods as staff refused to do the bosses favours by staying on or coming in on rest days.

That's the spirit we need everywhere: if the company won't hire the staff to run the service, why should we help them paper over the cracks?

### MENTAL HEALTH: BOSSES' APPROACHES AND OURS

There's a big gap between glossy charity campaigns our bosses tokenistically endorse, and the real changes we need to make our workplaces more mental-health friendly.

Read more online at [bit.ly/mh-at-w](http://bit.ly/mh-at-w)

### 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.

Email: [tubeworker@workersliberty.org](mailto:tubeworker@workersliberty.org)

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