



tubeworker

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HOUSING IS A RIGHT



According to housing charity Shelter, one in every 200 people in the UK is homeless. In London, that figure shoots up to one in 59.

We see the evidence of this in and around our stations with increased numbers of rough sleepers and people forced to beg. Several homeless people died during the recent winter storms, including one next to Westminster station.

There were 8,108 rough sleepers in London in 2016-2017, according to official figures. A London Assembly report suggested that as many as 13 times that number could be amongst the “hidden homeless”, individuals or families with no fixed residence but who weren’t receiving official support from homelessness charities or services.

The image of homelessness as consisting of individuals living on the streets and sleeping on park benches can be misleading. London’s homeless population includes entire families without any fixed accommodation, having to live between shelters, hostels, and boarding houses.

Homelessness is part of a wider housing crisis in London. In late 2017, the average rent for a two-bedroom home in London was £1,985 per month. Remarkably this was the lowest level since 2013! One set of figures found that the lowest average rent for a one bedroom flat in London was £256 per week, in Anerley, SE20. That’s more than 50% of a CSA1’s take-home pay.

With these prices, it’s little wonder many people struggle to keep up with rent and end up on the street. Cuts to healthcare and social services, particularly mental health services, mean that people who may also be struggling with mental health issues or addiction have had support mechanisms and safety nets taken away from them, making them more vulnerable.

To solve the housing crisis, corporate development of luxury flats needs to give way to a mass council house building programme to provide affordable accommodation for working-class people. Cuts to services need to be reversed. An the obscenity of tens of thousands of homes standing empty in London - either because developers have been unable to find buyers, or because the homes are simply traded as financial collateral by owners who never intend to live in them, or because they are second, third, or fourth homes for the super rich - must end. Housing should be socialised.

Instead of looking at the root causes of homelessness and taking steps to address the lack of affordable housing, the Tories and the right-wing press prefer to demonise the homeless and encourage us to treat them as vagrants who need to be moved on by the police.

For those of us who work on stations, homeless people are a visible presence in our workplaces. *Tubeworker* encourages readers not to join in with heartless campaigns of demonisation. We wouldn’t move on someone dressed in a suit talking on their phone for ages, so why move on someone who is just sitting in our station to get warm, minding their own business?

It is not our job to “clamp down” on homeless people; if there are issues with anti-social behaviour whereby passengers are being harassed or potentially stolen from, these obviously need to be addressed, but is a homeless person sitting silently in a corridor with a cardboard cup and a sign saying “Hungry, Please Help” really harming anyone? The need to ensure the safety of everyone using our stations is paramount, but this does not require us to treat homeless people like criminals.

Charities do some important work, but some, like St. Mungos, have been known to report homeless migrants who attempt to access their services to the border agency, leading to deportations.

Tubeworker recommends the work of campaigning groups like Focus E15, the Radical Housing Network, and the London Renters Union, which are all aiming to develop radical solutions to the housing crisis.

LU PLANS TO GUT STATIONS ADMIN GRADE

LU plans to cut stations admin (AG1) jobs from 77 to 53, splitting the role into “coverage” and “core”.

Coverage staff will be centralised at Palestra at Southwark, with “core” jobs split across seven central hubs. There won’t be a hub east of Stratford or west of Hammersmith.

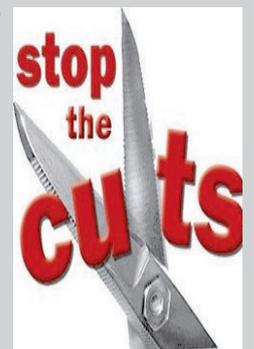
There is now immense uncertainty for admin workers. We don’t know if we’ll have a job at the end of this process. We don’t know if we may have to travel increased distances.

LU is forcing us to compete against our colleagues for the new positions when we really need to unite against LU to defeat these plans. The mood amongst admin staff is angry but it is hard for us to see a way forward to defeat the cuts. LU would not cope if we took industrial action. Our work is extremely important for making sure stations function. But we have some catching up to do if we are to get organised enough to take action in time to defeat these plans. Our unions need to start an urgent organising drive to this end.

Station staff will be affected badly. Imagine having no relationship with the person who is sorting out coverage, one of the most important things in the life of station staff. It will be an impersonal service, more like phoning a call centre. Station staff need to organise against these plans too.

None of these changes would be on the cards if the government had not cut its funding to TfL from this year.

The Labour Mayor, the Labour Party, Londoners and our unions need to mount a high profile campaign to restore government funding to TfL.



CLEANERS' COLUMN

ON THE MOVE SPIN

LU in-house staff magazine *On The Move* claims this month the new ABM contract "ensures our cleaning team gets a fair deal".

LU say they have "secure[d] entitlements", including "fixed contracts, London's living wage, and holiday entitlement."

In fact, all Tube cleaners have been paid the London living wage since 2010, when TubeLines (as was) became the last cleaning contractor to agree to pay it.

This was won by determined action, including strikes, by cleaners from 2007 onwards. To pretend otherwise is an insult to the sacrifices of the cleaners who struck to win the living wage.

ABM cleaners receive only the statutory minimum holiday entitlement, and although ABM has committed to reduce the use of agency labour and guarantee fixed employment over the life of its contract, this is happening painfully slowly, with many cleaners still working as "self-employed contractors" or "limited liability companies" through labour supply agencies like AGS People.

Despite the unjustifiably self-congratulatory tone, the article represents a tacit admission by LU that it is aware that cleaners' conditions are unacceptable.

If it really wants to sort them out, it should reverse outsourcing and put cleaners on proper LU pay and pension rates along with all other staff.

RMT needs to keep the pressure on the company by organising cleaners to fight back against both ABM and LU.

SICK PAY ROBBERY REVERSED

RMT's Regional Organiser announced recently that ex-Vinci cleaners transferred onto the new ABM contract will retain their rights to contractual sick pay.

This had been removed in their new ABM contracts, in direct contravention of "TUPE" regulations (the laws governing workers being transferred from one employer to another), which stipulate that existing rights must be retained.

The fast work of cleaners' union reps in identifying the problem and demanding meetings with management and the Mayor's office ensured its resolution. If these cleaners hadn't had a union, ABM would probably have gotten away with this attack.

Let's push on and fight for more!

FIGHT FOR ONE CSA GRADE!

A document on CSA2s "accidentally" uploaded to Yammer showed LU's hand when it comes to the grade.

It included an expanded list of tasks they could perform, indicating a desire from LU to bring the grades closer.

We want to bring the grades closer too, but by consolidating them upwards, not by levelling down.

The document was withdrawn after union reps kicked off, but it's surely a taste of things to come.

OVERGROUND NIGHTMARES

Spare a thought for the staff and passengers of Highbury and Islington station, which is now served by the Night Overground service as well as Night Tube.

Promised extra staff have not materialised; there is inadequate cleaning coverage; and there has been at least one violent assault on staff.

What a way to run a railway.

THREE SIX MAFIA

Victoria Line stations bosses are keen that CSAs "do more" to track insufficient fare error codes (code 36) on the gates.

With ticket office closed and gatelines short-staffed, there's very little we can actually do. And if LU wanted to maximise revenue, how about ensuring all stations are staffed so gates aren't frequently left open?

These policies will put us at greater risk.

ASLEF TO STRIKE AT ACTON IN APRIL

Aslef drivers at Acton depot have announced a strike for 11 April, in protest at the misapplication of policies and procedures (particularly the SPAD policy) and the dipping of a driver to a stations role.

Aslef members at Earl's Court are also balloting.

With RMT pushing for renewed talks at conciliation service Acas over issues including similar instances of abuse of procedure on the Piccadilly Line, *Tubeworker* reckons there must be some potential for some joined-up thinking and coordination between the two unions.

JOBS SAVED AT NORTH GREENWICH

The Area Manager at North Greenwich has been trying their hardest recently to cut CSA jobs at the station and even reduce minimum numbers.

After staunch resistance from local and full-time reps, the plans have been rebuffed and the numbers will be remaining as they are. *Tubeworker* salutes the work of the reps, which just goes to show that when a stand is made, we can push the bosses back.

UNION BUSTING ON YAMMER?

A Yammer user was recently censored for posting an RMT leaflet, which was summarily deleted.

So the bosses can pump out as much of their spin as they want, but union literature is taken down? Further proof that it's just a platform for giving the company line.

SOLIDARITY NOT SNITCHING

With the creation of the CSM grade, operational station staff are now disciplining each other.

This has led to a culture whereby many staff seem to take it upon themselves to police each other and grass their colleagues up to management for minor performance issues.

If your colleagues have performance issues, try to support them rather than grassing them up. Remember that we're all on the same side - the enemy is the real bosses!

BONFIRE OF THE PROCEDURES?

Rumours abound that LU plans to merge various procedures. This could include merging CDI and LDI processes, merging the grievance and harassment and bullying processes, and more.

This is bad news if true. The bosses won't do this to make things better for us!

In many cases, the status quo is pretty wretched too. We should use any fight to "defend" existing procedures as a springboard to fight for improvements.

More online: support your union's political fund! - bit.ly/tu-polfunds

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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