

Time to Step Up the Action!

Aslef is striking on 1 and 5 October, RMT on 1 and 8 October, and TSSA a mixture of dates on different companies. 1 October will see RMT and Aslef strike together for the first time in the current national disputes.

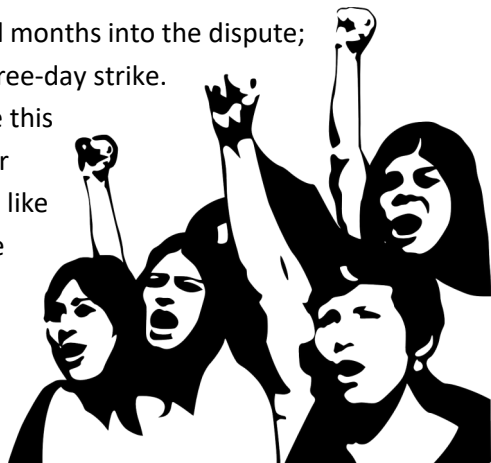
That's a big step forward. Locally, union reps are organising joint picketing. A picket line is the best place to discuss ongoing unity.

1 October will also see strikes by postal workers in the CWU, and dock workers at Felixstowe and Liverpool in Unite. It's the most significant coordinated action of the current strike wave, and is a model going forward. With more groups of workers balloting, unions with live mandates can coordinate their action to maximise impact. Demonstrations and rallies across the country are opportunities for rank-and-file reps from different unions to link and form ongoing committees and forums to discuss our strikes.

But it is unfortunate that RMT members will be expected to work on 5 October when people they were picketing alongside just a few days before are back on strike. There is no logic to 'two unions, two separate disputes'. Don't cross any picket line.

We need to escalate our action. We're several months into the dispute; RMT started with a bang, with an excellent three-day strike. But since then, action has de-escalated. Inside this issue of Off The Rails, we put forward ideas for how we can step up the fight. If members feel like strikes have become token protests, with little chance of forcing concessions from the employer, demoralisation could creep in.

There is only one aim here: winning the dispute. We have to do whatever it takes.



National dispute: What next?

RMT members at Network Rail and TOCs have struck six times so far; Aslef members at eight TOCs have struck twice; TSSA and Unite members have joined some of those strikes. Meanwhile, RMT members at Arriva Rail London and London Underground have also taken action, has have outsourced cleaners on various contracts.

It's been an incredible summer of action across our industry, the first national strike since 1994. Our strikes have been extremely impactful, shutting down or massively reducing the service on every strike day. But the employers are digging in. So we're faced with two choices: **give up or step up**. And *Off the Rails* has yet to hear from anyone, in any station or depot across the country, who wants to surrender. So we need to discuss what effective escalation looks like. Here are some ideas:

Longer strikes

If 48-hour strikes aren't working, the simplest form of escalation is to strike for longer. The Felixstowe dockers have set a good example by striking for eight days. Rail workers

might not be ready for that level of action yet, but let's have our next strikes for at least three days. RMT started with that, and we have not heard a convincing reason for having dialed back to 48 or 24 hours since.

Striking for longer means losing more pay, and with the cost of living rising, people may balk at that. So union hardship funds are vital. RMT made a positive move by allocating £500k to branches to distribute to members. Further payments will be needed.

A calendar of action

So far, the pattern has been that the unions announce strikes, then wait several weeks before announcing the next set. The dispute is dragging on, and we all expect more strikes to be called. Why not call a programme of action over several months, with three days one month, four the next, etc?

That has the effect of signaling to the employers and workers that we're in the fight for the long haul. Now, the bosses probably believe that, as long as they ride out 48-hour strikes every six weeks or so (our current pattern), we'll tire before they do. But if we call an escalating programme of action, it

makes clear that's not the case, and so may shorten the dispute overall.

Coordinate action

Sadly, Aslef seems committed to pursuing its own course and not coordinating with other unions. Aslef members who see the folly of this must press their leaders to change course. RMT, TSSA and Unite must continue to coordinate strikes.

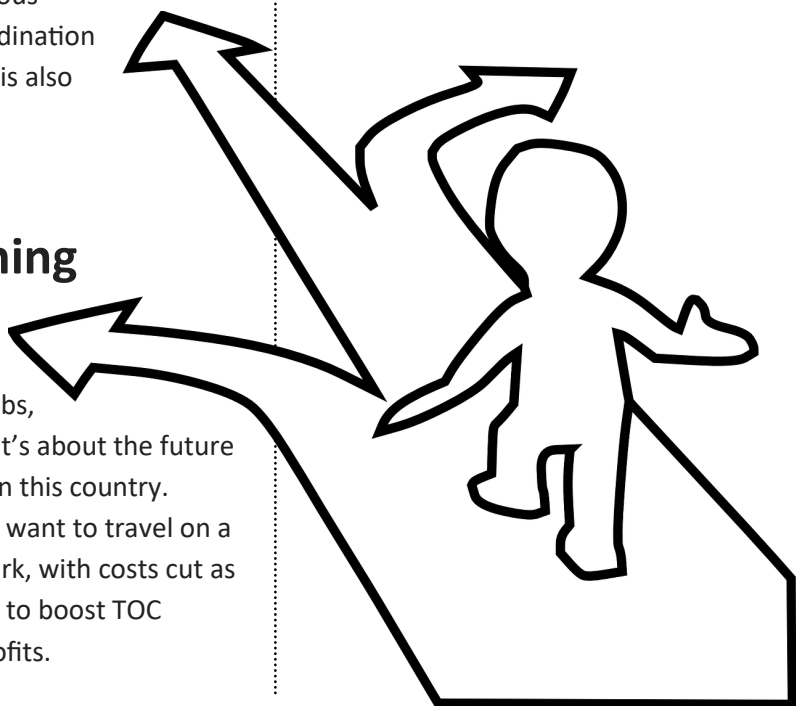
With the 'Hot Strike Summer' spreading to many other sectors and workplaces, we can also coordinate with other unions. CWU postal workers have called 19 days of strike over coming months. Unite is also in dispute with various companies. Coordination with their action is also obviously logical.

Public campaigning

Our fight is not just about our pay, jobs, and conditions - it's about the future of rail transport in this country. Passengers don't want to travel on a de-staffed network, with costs cut as much as possible to boost TOC shareholders' profits.

RMT's day of action against ticket office closures on 23 August was a good start. Similar days of action held between strike days could each focus on an aspect of how planned cuts will impact passengers. RMT needs to enact the policy passed at its AGM to equip local branches to run stalls in town centres. The Save London's Public Transport rally on 31 August was also a welcome step, as are the Enough is Enough rallies held elsewhere.

If reps and activists contact our unions' Executive members, we can ensure that our views are heard. We haven't gone on strike just to register a protest ... We've gone on strike to win. Winning requires escalation. Let's do it.



Revenue Strike?

Whenever transport workers strike, someone raises the issue of a 'revenue strike', where we all go to work, but open ticket barriers and refuse to check tickets, so letting passengers travel for free.

The thinking is, we hit the companies' revenue without inconveniencing passengers. It's a tactic used by transport workers around the world.

RMT's public response has been to state that it would be illegal, but this is only because our current ballot mandate does not include it. In fact, RMT called this type of action on London Underground in 2014, with mixed results but no legal repercussions.

There are reasons why the action might not be viable in a dispute like ours. But let's at least talk about it.

ScotRail strikes again

ScotRail workers are back on the picket lines after rejecting the company's pay offer by 866-580.

Some union officials had prematurely bigged up ScotRail's below-inflation offer as a possible model for the industry. The union leadership saw sense and recommended rejection, but remained, as a ScotRail worker writing on the *Off The Rails* blog put it, 'equivocal'.

With the offer in the bin where it belongs, ScotRail workers can join other rail workers in fighting for a pay settlement that reflects the rising cost of living.

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Off The Rails' blog: up-to-date reports + views on union issues.

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