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Halting the cuts express

Barely a day passes without another firm announcing major lay-offs.

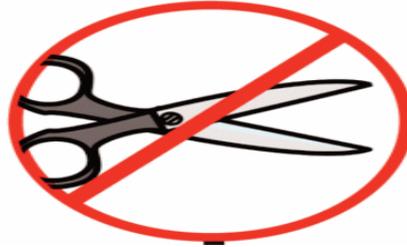
The rail and transport sectors are no exception: the Wabtec rail refurbishment plant in Doncaster has announced plans to cut 450 jobs, half its workforce; Heathrow Express is threatening to cut over a hundred posts; and Select Service Partners, which runs fast food concessions at train stations, has announced 5,000 job cuts.

On TfL and LU, the Tories have ordered a financial audit, conducted by notoriously cuts-happy accountancy firm KPMG.

There's widespread, and understandable, speculation on the job at the moment about where the axe might fall. While it would clearly be helpful, in terms of preparing a fightback, to know as many of the details of any proposed cuts plan as far in advance as possible, such speculation can only take us so far, and can be counterproductive. Much better to spend this time building determination in our workplaces to fight *any* and *all* cuts, including "voluntary" redundancies, wherever they are proposed, and whether or not they affect our particular part of LU directly.

Most importantly, we need to decide to fight the attacks on our jobs and conditions! In a traumatised world with a damaged economy, it can be difficult to feel confident and belligerent about defending ourselves, but defend ourselves we must.

And we need to fight to win, not just to limit the damage. If our unions respond to redundancies



by arguing about the terms, then we have already lost. Instead, let's unite the whole workforce against any cuts in jobs: those whose jobs are under threat, and also those who stand to keep their job but with greater workload and worse conditions because their workmates have been sacked.

We need imaginative and militant industrial action – occupations, strikes, "action short of strikes" – in a coherent strategy drawn up by rank-and-file workers through democratic discussions in the unions.

ALTERNATIVE

Our resistance will be more effective if we put forward an alternative.

The law allows unions to formally propose alternatives to redundancies. If our unions do this – proposing to save jobs and instead cut bosses' pay, end outsourcing, and demand government funding – we can win support from the wider labour movement and community by publicising our positive vision for transport services. For example, if post-Covid austerity leads to accessibility improvement projects being scrapped, then disabled people's organisations will support our fight against this, defend our jobs as well as their access rights.

All the localised and company-specific fights will be stronger if

we fight them as part of a national campaign. Such a campaign can make the political case against job cuts.

We can make the case for public transport. It is not a service just to passengers, but also to employers. We take their workers to work and their customers to their outlets every day. We literally help deliver their profits – it is only right that those profits be taxed to fund public transport, which in turn must be publicly-owned. In France, employers pay a "payroll tax" towards public transport provision. Why not here?

Whenever there is a crisis, there is a struggle between the capitalist class and the working class as to which will pay for it. We don't need to start a class war, as it is already brewing and will soon start to boil: we need to fight our side of it. The cost of Coronavirus needs to be borne by the broadest shoulders. The rich and big business can pay.

Instead, if the Tories and employers get their way, rail and transport workers, who they lauded as key workers and heroes at the peak of the pandemic, will be discarded as collateral damage afterwards. And while it is unusual for us to express any sympathy with the rail companies, there is a bitter irony in transport providers now being penalised for doing the right thing and telling people not to travel.

If they had refused to do so, they would have drawn more revenue and suffered less financially – but thousands more people would be dead.

UNIONS RALLY AGAINST CUTS: NOW BUILD THE CAMPAIGN!

The main four unions organising across Transport for London - RMT, Aslef, TSSA, and Unite - held a joint rally against cuts, via Zoom, on 15 July.

Officials from all unions spoke in favour of industrial action to resist cuts, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis and enthusiasm. Exactly how to build that action, what forms of action will be most effective, and, crucially, what its demands should be must now be discussed in workplaces and via union branches across the job.

A cross-union public campaign on this issue has to take a clear stance against any and all frontline cuts, including redundancies, whether "voluntary" or "compulsory". The campaign should also articulate its own positive programme for TfL funding and governance, arguing for things like cuts to the senior management pay, and for ring-fenced taxation of big business in London to fund public transport.

At this early stage of the campaign, the very fact of the rally, the first time all four unions have formally collaborated on any public activity, was perhaps more significant than the contents.

It was, however, unfortunate that there was only one rank-and-file transport worker on the platform; future events must make voices from the workplace, including from outsourced workers, much more prominent.

EZRA CHRISTIAN REINSTATED

Ezra Christian, a Bakerloo driver unfairly sacked after an incident for which others involved only received corrective action plans, has been reinstated as a CSA.

This is a big win, not only for Ezra but for his workmates and union branch. It shows the power of solidarity. Bakerloo drivers resolved to ballot for strikes should Ezra not be reinstated, and after February's successful strike over timetables, the bosses knew they could deliver the action.

The campaign is not over, as Ezra's reinstatement to CSA represents a significant pay cut, but to get him back on the job, with a regular income, is a big step forward.

DEFEND SAFETY MEASURES

Passenger levels are expected to rise after Boris Johnson's reckless announcement that people should resume using public transport.

We must ensure safety measures remain and are strengthened, including queuing systems to regulate passenger flow; maintaining staff "safe zones" to ensure distancing; having station staff work from behind glass wherever possible; maintaining revised staffing arrangements; and more.

The bottom line has to be: if we can't work safely, we shouldn't work at all.

PROGRESS IN BAKERLOO STAFFING FIGHT

Bakerloo North stations bosses imposed a return to pre-pandemic rosters on 17 May, breaching a network-wide agreement in the process.

Local reps from RMT and TSSA kept up the pressure, and the issue was discussed in the RMT Bakerloo branch. A new local arrangement has now been ratified, which ensures reduced hours and shifts.

It'll be kept under review, with reps continuing to press for improvements. Overall, it's a good lesson in not giving up, and how sustained pressure can bear fruit.

JOHNSON POSTURES OVER DRIVERLESS TRAINS

Boris Johnson has suggested the introduction of driverless trains be a condition for future funding of TfL/LU.

He says this is necessary to stop London being a "prisoner of the unions."

His agenda is clear: it's not safety or efficiency, it's breaking our unions.

CHARTER CHECKLIST

The RMT's "Covid-19 Charter" is a useful document, collating the demands for safety measures RMT has been pressing for throughout the pandemic.

We need to be prepared to take action around it. That means using the charter like a checklist, ticking off the measures that have been won in your workplace, and seeing which ones we need more pressure on.

If there are more crosses than ticks, we need to make dynamic assessments about whether it's safe to continue working.

CLEANERS PUSHED AROUND

Cleaners report being moved from their usual location, because ABM doesn't want to fill vacancies or cover sickness.

This is unacceptable. Cleaners deserve the same stability as other staff.

CEILING TROUBLE

Staff and passengers got a shock at Hainault on 30 June when ceiling tiles fell out and smashed. Fortunately no-one was hurt.

Reps are pressuring management to ensure a full investigation. With LU now pinching every penny, we have to ensure that essential maintenance and refurbishment works don't fall by the wayside, putting staff and passengers alike at risk.

HEADCOUNT REVIEW

In Stations Structural Maintenance, a "headcount review" of the entire department has been announced.

Is this a taste of things to come across the combine? No doubt Tory-appointed auditors KPMG will be recommending similar reviews elsewhere.

Let's get ready to fight the cuts.

NEW MASKS, UNREASONABLE ASKS

The management bulletin announcing the new face covering for staff was clearly discriminatory.

It said they would be compulsory for staff with medical conditions, but optional for others, meaning disabled staff could be disciplined for something non-disabled workers wouldn't be!

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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