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www.workersliberty.org/tubeworker • tubeworker@workersliberty.org • @Tube_Worker

Rail privateers rob £25 million:

Fight for Public Ownership!

Yet again a private rail franchise, this time Southeastern, has been shown to have its hands in the till, as “errors” meant that £25 million of public money was not returned to the government... seven years after it was due.

As a result of this “serious breach” of the franchise agreement, the government has handed the franchise back to the state-owned “operator of last resort”. This is the first time a franchise has been stripped for unashamedly trying to rip off us off.

Tubeworker has heard of many people who misplace their Oyster card or lose some money in a POM, but to forget about £25 million resting in your account somewhere seems a bit far fetched even for the most ruthless of bosses. It seems certain that Southeastern are not the only ones playing dirty, they are just the first to be found out.

The rail network - like the NHS, utilities and the post - are all socially necessary and useful public services. A green and publicly run transport system is essential to efforts to halt the climate crisis. While it is run by privateers more interested in profits than running an efficient and accessible service, we all suffer. And nationalisation of the entire network is an increasingly popular demand, with polls showing around 75% of the public support it. The Labour Party is, on paper, committed to public ownership of the railway but Labour leaders make clear they only support taking franchises back into public ownership on a franchise-by-franchise basis when their contracts expire, not renationalising



the whole lot all at once. And there is little word from them about the outsourcing (i.e., privatisation) of maintenance, cleaning, and other services.

Although the government has taken over Southeastern, parent company Go-Ahead is still allowed to operate the Thameslink services, and remains the largest bus operator in London. Years of railway privatisation has seen billions roll in for shareholders and fat cat bosses while services, safety, jobs, and conditions are under constant attack.

London Underground remains a publicly-owned railway, but there is plenty of privatisation under the TfL aegis.

London Overground, DLR, the buses, and services like cleaning, catering, security, and track protection are all run by private companies. And the Tories' current demands for cuts on TfL could well be a mirror of its policies for the NHS... running down the service to soften it up for privatisation.

All the rail unions are united in favour of a nationalised rail network, but that must mean more than a

press release each time a major failing gets media attention. It has to mean an ongoing, active campaign. Unions occasionally organise leafleting and petitioning activities outside train stations; we must step such activity up. And, whilst Britain's restrictive anti-union laws prohibit explicitly political strikes, we must discuss ways of challenging the logic of privatisation via industrial action.

While the current system sees franchises compete with each other for services, routes, and ever-increasing ticket prices, railway workers can offer an alternative. A wholly publicly-owned system could deliver a cheaper, greener, and integrated transport system. A system that puts service, and the conditions and safety of its workers and passengers, at the forefront, rather than profit. A system where workers and passengers help to run the railway together.

Unlike the government we don't want this idea to be the “operator of last resort”. But to get there, we will need to fight.

KHAN GRILLED ON TUBE CLEANING

As *Tubeworker* goes to press, the Labour Party's annual conference is still ongoing.

We were pleased to see that, on Monday 27 September, London Mayor Sadiq Khan was directly questioned by conference delegate and RMT activist Janine Booth, who demanded he commit to bringing Tube cleaning back in house.

We await his response!

TSSA AND THE BOILERMAKERS

TSSA has announced plans to merge with another union, The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB).

The IBB is an American union. Yes, unity is strength, and of course our class is international, but it is strength and unity of workers in the workplace and the picket line that wins, not a bureaucratic merging of organisations based on opposite sides of the world.

It is hard to see how the merger will work logistically. TSSA say they need to do this to cut costs, but how? Would there be a single general secretary straddling continents? Will the merged union have a single, time-zone busting admin team? Maybe a regional organiser could do one week in Manchester, UK and the next in Massachusetts, US?

Not only is the merger geographically illogical, it's industrially illogical too. If TSSA wants to look at standing in solidarity with other workers, they should be looking to the workers across the mess room table, RMT members, rather than those who work in different industries on the opposite side of the world. There are also democratic questions: will TSSA members (and, for that matter, IBB members) have a say in any of this, or will the merger be cooked up between the unions' respective bureaucracies and presented to members as a fait accompli?

TSSA must instead organise to fight the cuts facing us. If TSSA member want to make the union stronger, they should take action to build it into a militant and progressive one. If there is to be a merger, or closer working, with another union, look to the union that already operates in the same workplaces as TSSA: RMT.

Surely that is a better option than to suggest massive cuts are inevitable and instead focus on merging with a union that operates over 4,000 miles away?

BUSHY PLATFORMS

Staff have been reporting that bushes and grass have been growing through the cracks on many platforms, including through the yellow lines and near the platform edge.

This is a serious hazard - especially when wet. Unions have raised it with management, who expressed surprise as they apparently thought it was dealt with routinely.

If you see this, snap some photos and tell your rep. We have to weed out safety hazards!

CUTTING THROUGH NLE FANFARE

Reps for both station staff and drivers have raised several concerns about the new Northern Line stations.

For example, the extremely complex emergency escape routes at Nine Elms could pose a safety risk. And the mess room appears to have been fitted with only one spare plug socket, making it difficult for staff to charge work iPads.

It's easy to get swayed by the cacophony of a new thing but workers must not be afraid to ask questions and make challenges. How these new stations operate really matters and staff must feel at the centre of that; if you have concerns about your workplace, speak up! Speak to a rep and get active in your local union branch.

STATIONS LEFT UNSTAFFED

It seems that stations are being left unstaffed through deliberate choice by management.

On several occasions, staff were willing to work overtime to ensure the station was staffed, only for management to turn them down.

The dangers of this are obvious: operational incidents uncovered, passengers without assistance, reduced access for disabled people, increased vulnerability to assault.

It is also a serious breach of agreements reached post Fit for the Future with LU directors.

Whilst overtime should be used and all avenues explored to ensure stations are staffed, this actually proves the need for more staff not fewer.

NO HANDLAMP, NO TRAIN

It seems that the company is struggling to maintain drivers' handlamps adequately, perhaps because it is a somewhat, er, niche piece of kit.

Management's answer? Suggest to drivers that they break the rules and drive without one. No thanks.

There are some pieces of equipment that we don't use often, but which we might need at a moment's notice. The driver's handlamp is one.

If management can't manage to keep an adequate stock of working handlamps, then they need to sort that out rather than expect drivers to take risks. When we break rules, we get the book thrown at us - unless, it seems, it suits management to allow us to break rules to cover their own failures.

If any manager asks *Tubeworker* to do this, the reply will be "No handlamp, no train."

TAXIS FAIR?

With the company insistent it is strapped for cash, Tubeworker wonders how much is being wasted on special taxis to ferry workers around during shifts?

During recent engineering works on the Picc, some drivers were ferried from one end of the line to the other just to carry out a single rounder. At £65 a go, was that really worth it?

Meanwhile, taxi firm Gett claims it can no longer guarantee a full staff taxi service due to the fuel crisis. Staff safety must come first: if safe and reliable staff transport cannot be guaranteed, staff must be allowed to catch first or last trains.

If stations need to close, or open late, so be it.

RMT ELECTIONS



VOTE SEAN HOYLE (PRESIDENT) AND ALAN POTTAGE (ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY)

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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