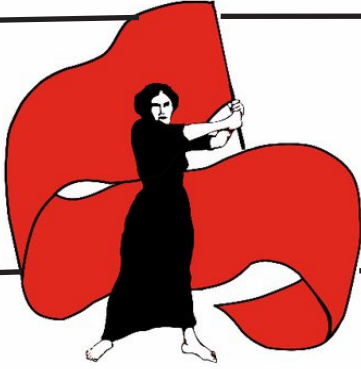




tubeworker

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

Make the bosses feel the heat!

The past two months have seen major heatwaves, in which the Met Office issued amber and red warnings.

The heatwaves are the result of climate change. This, in turn, is caused by capitalism — the organisation of our economies around the drive for profit, meaning environmentally-destructive practices such as the burning of fossil fuels continue.

The solution is a drive to push back the profit motive and the logic of the market, and ultimately to reorganise economic production around human need and environmental sustainability. We also need immediate adaptations to protect our wellbeing at work in a warming world.

It's unlikely we've seen the last of the summer heatwaves. As we approach the next one, we'll get reminders to drink water. There may be added bromides like "Look out for each other!" Some local managers might encourage us to "Take regular breaks", but that's harder to do with a staffing level reduced by cuts, so there's fewer of us on stations in the first place.

LUL's Hot Weather Plan talks about "balancing" staff welfare against other concerns. We think staff welfare should be paramount. If staff aren't safe, we can't keep our passengers safe.

Workers in every part of the job, including on outsourced contracts, need to be pressing management to

improve welfare and safety measures. Demands might include:

- Sufficient staffing levels to ensure regular rotation and breaks in air-conditioned facilities
- Ensure all water points are working, with new ones installed wherever possible
- Sun cream to be provided by the employer, especially for workers mostly working outside, such as cleaners at open section stations
- Additional maintenance to ensure cab AC units are working — no driver should come under pressure from line controllers if they return a train with defective AC to the depot.

SECTION 44

Under Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Right Act, every worker has the right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions, and is protected from detrimental treatment as a consequence.

Railway workers, especially those in certain roles like train driver or station supervisor, may have statutory responsibilities regarding the operation of the railway, so it's not straightforward for us to invoke these rights to simply walk off the job. But we can use them to protect us if we refuse to carry specific work tasks that we deem unsafe.

Tubeworker has heard reports of the air conditioning facilities in

some station control rooms and mess rooms failing in the recent heat waves. Is it safe for CSAs to carry out security checks, which in some stations walking for several kilometres, underground, if there's no air conditioned facility to cool down in afterwards? What about cleaners, who have to work in areas without cleaning or ventilation, often lugging heavy sacks of rubbish?

Individual refusals can put workers in a vulnerable position, if overbearing managers decide to haul us over the coals as to whether the work we were refusing was "really" unsafe. But collective refusals carry much more potential weight.

We don't need to walk off the job entirely — simply refuse unsafe work until our employer takes steps to guarantee our welfare and safety. Given how important security checks are to LU fulfilling its security responsibilities, mandated by the Department for Transport, we wonder how quickly the air con might get fixed if station staff started invoking Section 44.

Drivers don't even have to "go that far": the company's own defect instructions stipulate clearly that, if in-cab AC is malfunctioning, the train can be taken to the depot to be fixed.

Don't leave trains with dodgy AC running around. If the cab's not cool, put the train away!

ARE OUR JOBS SHORTENING OUR LIVES?

A study from Imperial College shows higher mortality rates amongst bus workers and LU workers, compared to office-based staff.

Soon after its publication, the *Guardian* published an exposé by an ex-LU worker attesting to the dreadful air quality in tunnels, and the often negligent management practises which exacerbate it.

According to Imperial study, “Bus [...] and LU [...] workers had significantly higher risks of all-cause [mortality], as well as respiratory, cardiovascular, and cancer mortality when compared to office workers.”

In particular, it indicates a 73% higher mortality risk from respiratory conditions for frontline Tube workers. This certainly seems to corroborate the account in the *Guardian*!

An obvious improvement to demand is a meaningful reduction in working time — not a fake, compressed “four-day-week” like the one LUL is currently trying to force through on Trains, but a reduction in contractual working hours facilitated by an increased staffing level.

Other mitigations might include a minimum of three days off following a week of night shifts. We also need infrastructural improvements, such as better workplace ventilation to improve air quality.

The study is a grim reflection of the position of the worker in capitalist society — even in an industry like ours, where we’re not directly producing private profits. Our bodies are equipment for our employers, used up during our working lives — and when we finally retire, many of our lives are cut short due to the detrimental health impacts forced on us by work.

We need to fight for a different kind of society, in which human and ecological need, rather than the “needs” of the bosses’ budgets, revenue generation, or the markets, come first.

DRIVERS: VOTE TO RENEW MANDATE

RMT is re-balloting LUL drivers, in order to renew the mandate for industrial action against Trains Modernisation 2.0.

LUL is refusing to make meaningful improvements to its proposal. To force concessions, we need further action. Renewing our mandate is vital. Vote yes for action by 11 August!

BROKEN BOLLO

A recent FOI request reveals almost 10,000 outstanding faults on TfL-run premises through the end of June.

Nowhere is this less surprising than still-to-be-knocked-down Bollo House, depot of Picc line drivers in Acton. Stairs to platforms were condemned, re-opened and remain of questionable standard. Air con has failed across several rooms. There was no hot water; the main entrance gate broke (again); the pedestrian gate broke (again). And the building experiences frequent power cuts.

This managed decline is made worse by how long it takes to fix the faults, or to find out they have been recorded under the wrong reference number.

With little sign the new depot will be built any time soon, LUL needs to fix the existing one!

TRACK WORKER JOB CUTS RISK SAFETY

LUL had been supplementing track patrol staffing levels on the Vic line with 12 outsourced contractors.

If additional work needs doing, workers should be employed in-house. But now LUL has cut those numbers in half.

This means faults are likelier to be missed, leading to safety issues for passengers and staff. LUL must restore staffing levels, with directly-employed workers.

IN-HOUSE CLEANING TRIAL

TfL has announced the launch of a trial whereby Vic line cleaners will be seconded to in-house roles.

This is a step forward, but we need to push for more.

Cleaners are remaining on their Mitie terms and conditions, rather than transferring onto TfL conditions. And there is a risk that TfL may ultimately fudge the issue by creating an “in-house subsidiary” to handle the cleaning contract, rather than simply employing cleaners directly.

RMT must continue campaigning, and consider industrial action, to demand real insourcing.

TACs AND PCR WORKERS BALLOT

LU Track Access Controllers (TACs) and Power Control Room (PCR) workers in RMT are balloting for industrial action.

LUL has failed to engage in meaningful discussions about “spot salary” arrangements. The ballot closes on 28 July. With drivers considering further action in their dispute to defend terms and conditions, this could open up the possibility of coordinated action.

TO IMPROVE SECURITY, STAFF OUR STATIONS

Station staff are coming under pressure due to an apparent increase in “failed” security checks.

But a once-an-hour sweep of the station is no substitute for adequate staff presence. To meaningfully improve security, LUL must increase the staffing level.

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 who support the bulletin’s approach.

Supporters from outside London Underground can help with distribution.

tubeworker@workersliberty.org

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Join our monthly meetings



Tubeworker holds meetings on the third Thursday of the month, 15:00. We discuss a current political issue, as well as talking about

what’s going on at work and deciding what to put in the bulletin.

Scan the QR code to join us via Zoom.

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