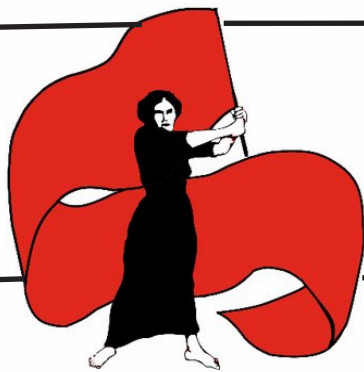




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After 7 May elections: Labour movement must confront the far right

The heavy losses suffered by the Labour Party in the 7 May elections indicate a variety of political trends.

In some areas, gains by the Green Party indicate support for a more progressive policy programme. But the biggest winners were Reform, confirming the ongoing threat of the far right.

Labour has responded to the rise of Reform by pandering to them, offering voters watered-down versions of Reform's policies and rhetoric on immigration. This is a self-defeating strategy. Voters who are convinced by right-wing narratives about immigration are far more likely to vote for the "fully-leaded" version than a paler version offered by Labour. Meanwhile, voters who don't want to endorse anti-migrant policies will also look elsewhere.

New campaign materials from the RMT highlight some of Reform's anti-worker and anti-union policies, including support for banning strikes and privatisation. Highlighting these policies is essential. But the labour movement must also confront Reform head on over the question of immigration.

We have direct experience of this in our own workplaces. As well as the large contingent of migrant and migrant-heritage workers amongst the directly-employed workforce, sections of the job such as cleaning, catering, security, and track protection are overwhelmingly carried out by migrant workers. Would conditions be better, wages higher, if those migrants had been prevented from coming to this country? In fact, the history of workers' struggle within TfL shows that, far from undercutting wages, migrant workers' struggles help drive them up. Strikes by cleaners in 2008-9 won a commitment to write the London

Living Wage into the cleaning contract. More recently, union campaigning has secured a sick pay agreement for cleaners. This shows what's possible when migrant workers unionise and fight as part of the labour movement.

We've also seen the devastating effects of Labour's pandering to Reform on the lives of workmates who've had to leave the country as a result of changes to visa sponsorship regulations.

Our unions, and the Labour Party, should say, clearly: immigration is not the problem. Lack of housing, crumbling services, low pay, and other social problems are not caused by immigrants, they are caused by exploitative employers and government policies which embolden them.

We need stronger, more combative unions — not more restrictive border controls. Our unions need to take the fight to Reform, in the workplace and on the streets.

Labour was founded to provide a voice in politics for the industrial labour movement. For much of its history, especially its recent history, it has been led by factions hostile to that purpose. Whilst the current Labour government has legislated to improve workers' and union rights, it has moved slowly and with much watering down of commitments.

The labour movement as a whole, including Labour-affiliated unions and unaffiliated unions like RMT, must renew efforts to develop our own social programme.

This means mobilising workers to fight for better pay and conditions in the workplace, combined with pro-working-class legislation we demand from the government.

Trains dispute: Escalate to win!

Drivers in RMT are due to strike again on 19-20 and 21-22 May.

Our April strikes saw services disrupted across every line, and at some points, the entire job was suspended entirely. TfL's initially claimed 51% of services ran, which would map pretty much exactly onto the relative membership levels of Aslef and RMT. But we believe that figure is an underestimate, with reports from picket lines indicating higher-than-expected levels of support for the strike from Aslef members. We think the real figures probably map closely onto the 58% of drivers, across both unions, who rejected Trains Modernisation 2.0 in referendums a year ago.

At the time of writing, no concessions were on the table, but RMT had missed the 10-day notice period for escalating our strikes. That means round two will be a repeat of round one.

The immediate task is to build for the strikes, maximise participation, and ensure maximum attendance at picket lines. Beyond this, we need to escalate. Having not budged them after our April strikes, it's unlikely doing the same thing in May will shift the employer. We need to add additional days onto strikes planned in June.

If the employer comes to the table with an offer, then must be subject to rigorous democratic scrutiny and, if necessary, a referendum. But it must entail meaningful, material concessions — not merely a promise of further talks.

DO WE WANT "INDUSTRIAL PEACE"?

A recent press release by RMT stated that the approach of the employer in the ongoing dispute over Tube drivers' working conditions is "not one which leads to industrial peace".

On its own terms, it's true enough. LUL's determination to impose Trains Modernisation 2.0 has certainly inflamed tensions and provoked the recent strikes. But the press release implies "industrial peace" is a good thing, something we should aim for.

Tubeworker disagrees. In fact, we don't think there's any such thing as "industrial peace". "Normal" conditions, the periods in between strikes and industrial disputes, are not "peace", but permanent exploitation of labour by the employers. Workers with lower pay and worse conditions, such as outsourced cleaners, feel that exploitation more sharply in day-to-day life, but all workers are engaged in a relation whereby bosses exploit our labour power to generate revenue or profit.

This isn't because our bosses are personally greedy or immoral, it's simply the reality of a society structured around one class employing the labour of another.

We might not always "notice" the exploitation. The fact that our bosses are paid vastly more than we are, for doing vastly less, or that people in distant offices can delete a line on a spreadsheet, leading to the deletion of jobs on the shop floor, or that whole sections of the job can be privatised and outsourced... all of these things seem "normal" to us, simply "the way things are". So during the 99% of the time when we're not on strike, and these processes are ongoing, we can come to think of that as "peace", the default equilibrium that we should aspire to.

Of course we don't want to be on strike all the time; of course we want disputes to be settled, ideally with victories! But let's remember that "industrial peace" is invariably a peace on the employers' terms.

Their default mode is to seek to impose measures to make fewer of us work harder for less. Our default mode has to be to resist.

REMEMBERING LEON BRUMANT

22 April marked the 10-year anniversary of the death of Leon Brumant, Tube worker, RMT rep, anti-racist and socialist activist.

It's fitting that we were on strike on the date. The best way to honour Leon's memory is to continue the struggles he was dedicated to.

For more on Leon's work in the labour movement, see bit.ly/remembering-leon

TUBE WORKERS VS. "THE PUBLIC"? NO: WORKERS VS. BOSSES! **Whenever we strike, the overwhelming majority of media coverage focuses on the impact our action has on passengers, rather than what we're striking about.**

Union officials get the opportunity of short interviews to put our case across, but the questions they're asked invariably include some variation of "Would you like to apologise to the people you're impacting?"

We don't relish the disruption and inconvenience our strikes cause to other working-class people who need to use the transport system. We sympathise with the difficulties they face. But the scale of the disruption is a reminder of the vital role we play in keeping London moving. It's a shame that the only time the value of our labour is widely acknowledged is when we're being berated for withdrawing it.

For more on these arguments, see bit.ly/workersvbosses

OWFM FIGHT GOES ON **Union reps recently met with LUL management as part of the dispute against the imposition of OWFM software.**

We reiterated demands that new software must not be used to track or surveil staff. We want the disabling of geolocation features, and agreed limits on data storage and commitments to data deletion.

The company is now considering its response. If the bosses insist on pursuing their Big Brother plans, we'll need to take action.

DISPUTE BREWING ON STATIONS?

LUL may be reneging on commitments about CSA2 promotions.

Several years ago, a station dispute was settled when LUL made an offer that entailed reinstating some jobs that had been cut, and giving a guarantee that CSA2s would be offered a CSA1 position within 12 months.

Now, the company has told unions they may extend that to 24 months.

This is unacceptable. The CSA2 grade is practically redundant, with trainees leaving Ashfield House with CSA1 licenses as standard. The only reason for extending the 12-month guarantee would be to allow the employer to save money by covering CSA1 roles with CSA2s on higher grade working, rather than giving them the role permanently and increasing their substantive salary.

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.

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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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