



tubeworker

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DEFENDING OURSELVES FROM ECONOMIC CRISIS

workers shouldn't pay for capitalists' crisis <><><> fight for a decent pay rise

To see CBS poster workers and TubeLines standing up for inflation-plus pay rises last month showed the way forward for workers in LUL, TfL and others as we build towards a fight over next year's pay rise.

But some in the wider public argued, 'it's not right to strike when we're going into a recession'. As if the fact that everyone is suffering means that the kindest thing we can do is suffer with them? As if our sacrifice will help everyone else? Will it get laid-off workers their jobs back? Or bring energy prices down? We must believe that we are right to put up a strong fight over pay now. Now is precisely the time to fight if we want to not harm but help working-class people suffering the economic crisis.

Self-sacrifice will not help us out of this crisis because our actions did not cause the crisis. The causes are rooted in capitalism: its inbuilt cycles of booms and busts, where things produced for profit not need suddenly do not find a market and production grinds to a halt; where speculation boosts unsustainable investment: things collapse and leave people without jobs or wage rises, and with homes repossessed.

This economic crisis is new. But the basic battle we fight for our wages and standard of living does not change. We should never give up fighting over pay. Wealth is created by the work we do, so we are just asking for a share of that wealth back: that's all wages are. The same system that exploited us yesterday exploits us today. The only difference is that it has shown its ugly side, proving it cannot (or does not want to)

Tubeworker is produced by tubeworkers in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, an organisation fighting as part of the labour movement for a socialist alternative to both capitalism and Stalinism, based on common ownership and democracy.

We want one democratic, fighting union for all railworkers. We reject artificial divisions between workers of different grades. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia and all prejudice that divides us. Only our bosses benefit from a divided workforce.



guarantee a life free of poverty. We should not make sacrifices to save this system. Now is the time to fight even harder!

When a crisis in capitalism hits, a battle takes place between the capitalist class who created this mess and the working class over who will pay for the damage. Working-class people could take the brunt, quietly accepting redundancy notices and pay cuts. Or we can take a stand. Refuse below-inflation pay deals. Say that this mess shows that cowboys in charge of the economy have been gambling with our lives and we should have no faith in this system that puts our lives at the mercy of the market.

Similarly, the working-class people who travel on the Tube and who face ever-higher bills should not have to pay for the crisis through BoJo's outrageous 6% fares hikes.

If workers strike, it is one part of wresting control of the economy out of the cowboys' hands and giving us control over our lives. We should couple this fight with other basic demands: a shorter working week; no job losses; taking industries unable to guarantee this into public hands to stay there when the crisis is over; a program of building council houses, schools and hospitals to provide services and employ workers ...

This would need a government willing to challenge not prop up the capitalists as it did by bailing out Northern Rock. We need a government that meets working-class people's needs: a workers' government.

Workers' Liberty is holding a series of educational discussions about the causes of economic crisis and the most effective working-class response. If you would like to take part, please phone 020-7207-3997 or e-mail tubeworker@btopenworld.com

SAMF SACKED UNFAIRLY

A sacked SAMF has won his claim of unfair dismissal and disability discrimination at Tribunal. Courts and Tribunals regularly let bosses get away with pretty much anything short of murder - and occasionally, actually murder - so the fact this one ruled against LUL must mean the company was way out of line.

Green Park SAMF Gianpaolo Vuoto was managing multiple sclerosis and work OK until a new GSM ditched the reasonable adjustments his predecessor had agreed, then drove Gianpaolo out of his job. The Tribunal had some choice words for the GSM and the senior manager who upheld his actions.

Gianpaolo will now get a payout - a big one if there is any justice. But he should never have had to go through this. It is good that RMT provided legal support, but we must ensure that our jobs and rights are protected so we don't have to rely on justice after the event. Managers who treat workers like this and cost the company dearly in both cash and reputation should be disciplined, and seen as unfit to hold people's jobs in their hands.

www.workersliberty.org/piccadilly

WOOD LANE ROSTERS JOKE

LUL intends to open the new Wood Lane station next month, but has overlooked staffing it properly.

Its planned rosters (which union reps reject) do not provide enough staff for what is going to be a very busy station. The rosters also rely on Edgware Road staff travelling from their station to work at Wood Lane. (A cursory glance at Mr Beck's map reveals that the two stations are actually quite a long way apart.) And the OPO kit won't work for the first three months and management plan to use the Special Requirements Team to cover train dispatch.

This is a joke. If management won't back down and concede to the unions' demands, then staff should simply refuse to work at the station in these inadequate, unsafe conditions.

www.workersliberty.org/handc

STEVE HEDLEY FOR RMT REGIONAL ORGANISER

Tubeworker backs Steve Hedley in the RMT Regional Organiser election. Here, we interview him about the key issues.

Q. What is the role of Regional Organiser that you are standing for?

A. RMT's London Transport region covers everyone once employed by 'London Transport'. The Organiser should set up organisations of workers to strengthen the union. The Regional Organiser conducts talks over pay and conditions and does high level disciplinaries. But people should vote for me on the basis that it is fundamentally an organising role. Level one or two reps should be supported in doing disciplinaries. But the role is to build the RMT as a formidable fighting force in the region.

If people think that good wages are won by someone presenting a clever argument to management, I challenge that person to do that now. Wage negotiations are a reflection of the balance of forces. If a union's strong, well-organised and militant, better pay and conditions are more likely. If numerically weak, disorganised and passive, I would like to see a case study where a clever negotiator has gained decent conditions for workers.

Q. RMT in London faces a big political and industrial fight with a Tory mayor and potential Tory government intent on breaking the union and cutting pay as recession bites. What are RMT's key tasks to prepare for and win this fight?

A. We need an industrial strategy in the short, medium and long term and we need a political strategy in parallel to it. We need to build up locally, regionally and nationally all-grades committees to co-ordinate effective action. These would be local committees of reps that meet to discuss strategy, but not official bodies. They would meet regularly, whether there was a dispute or not. Currently, the union is very reactive; we've got to build a position where we're going on the offensive. At the minute these committees will be defensive but they should have an inherent offensive capacity.

Q. RMT makes much of being a union that organises all grades in the industry. What would you do to bring about effective solidarity between grades so that even the most vulnerable workers win?

A. We are the only all-grades union on the railway. But too often we've acted like a single grades union, where each grade only wants to fight for itself. This is a result of the anti-union laws, which prevent workers in different companies taking action to support each other. The laws were part of capital's deliberate process of sowing division between workers. In addition to cross-grades meetings that all local and full time reps would be expected to attend, our task is to rebuild working class consciousness, not just as a grade or as a union but as a class.

More in the next issue ...

A COMEDY OF ERRORS

Five years ago Elephant & Castle's Northern Line ticket office was refurbished. But the new service counter was too low for staff to work in comfort. Because Brixton station closed at the same time, management would not entertain the idea of closing the Elephant office again to actually fix the mistake - oh no, they might lose revenue, heaven forbid. So plenty of staff have suffered with back problems.

Finally, management recently called in contractors, but in another triumph for private sector competence, they solved one problem only to create another, forgetting to provide a receptacle for the cash drawers! It appears that management expect SAMFs to work in the office with the cash drawers sitting atop the counter in front of them, in full view of the customers.

You couldn't make this up. Time to dust off that 'procedure for refusal to work on grounds of health & safety concerns'.

www.workersliberty.org/refurbs

AUTO-COMPLETE RIP-OFF

'Auto-completion' played some kind of joke on passengers over the bank holiday weekend. PAYG customers were charged £2 for a single journey where the advertised price is £1. NOC had the strange explanation that there was a 'base rate' of £1.50, but that only makes sense if you assume that everyone goes to the Carnival via Zone 1. So people travelling from the west were being deliberately overcharged.

Carnival weekend is hard work for staff. Inept and unfair decisions about charging make it much worse, by adding grief to our already high workload. It shows what happens when management make the decisions. Workers would do a much better job of it.

www.workersliberty.org/fares

SRT: ARE YOU FAMILIAR?

The Special Requirements Team is being familiarised in zone one stations, shown around three or four stations a day. They could find themselves working at stations where they were familiarised months ago. 'Familiarisation' seems to be more of a paperwork exercise than about building up knowledge to be effective staff.

SRT staff should assert their right to be re-familiarised when they start work - for their own and everyone else's safety. Life is tough enough for them - with no base, no locker, no fixed pattern.

They could take all these issues up with their union rep - but management have been stalling on giving them representation. The union needs to put pressure on management, decide what branch they are in and stop this group of workers being taken advantage of.

www.workersliberty.org/special-requirements-team

OPERATING COST REVIEW

Management has announced an 'Operating Cost Review'. Ominous or what? We can assume that this will not conclude that the company should spend money on more staff, better pay and conditions, and improving safety, services and facilities for the passengers, while making a few economies by trimming the fat cats' salaries and clearing out the deadwood in the management grades. Rather, we should be ready for cuts and we ready to fight them.

Tubeworker would also like to know: How much does the Operating Cost Review, erm, cost?

CUTTING STAFF?

Management let slip at one of their 'Northern line meetings' their latest plans to cut costs, which involves (no surprise) cutting staff! There will apparently be a reduction in the number of reserves, and people who are transferred or promoted will not be replaced. The result? More anti-social shifts for the reserves that are left, less flexibility in choosing rest days because less cover will be available, more last-minute changes of duties. Therefore, a big impact on the quality of life of reserve staff.

Are the company not supposed to be recalculating (increasing) the percentage of reserve staff needed by every group to take into account employees' new rights to time off for paternity leave, domestic emergencies, etc.? Reps should be asking for more reserve staff, not accepting less!

www.workersliberty.org/northern

London Workers' Liberty forum

US President election:

Should the left support Obama?

Tuesday 23 September 7:30pm

Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross

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