

# Solid strike by Tube workers

On 3 and 4 October members of transport unions RMT and TSSA working for London Underground, went on strike to defend jobs. Socialist Party members report from the picket lines.

## Boris's bluster doesn't impress

LONDON'S TORY Mayor Boris Johnson launched an attack against the trade unions. At Tory Party conference he lined himself up with the bosses' CBI calling for laws on industrial action - already amongst the harshest in Europe - to be made tougher, raising the threshold for strike action. He argued for strike laws to stipulate

a minimum 50% participation in a ballot for industrial action.

He had the brass neck to accuse the trade unions of orchestrating a "nightmarish return to the politics of the 1980s" with "wave after wave of debilitating strikes".

Pickets at Victoria station were outraged at this - as far as they are concerned it is Boris Johnson who

has forced this strike to take place. In the London news he described the strike as a political attack, but the pickets are clear: "It is us that's under attack. And it's Boris Johnson who refuses to talk. We've been left with no choice. We're fighting for jobs but we're also fighting on behalf of the public."

Paula Mitchell

## Around the picket lines

RMT MEMBERS at the Arnos Grove depot in North London said that the strike was strengthening. More workers were supporting the action than in September as they realise that the future of their jobs and conditions as well as safety on London Underground were at stake. It was also said that the overtime ban had resulted in stations closing as they did not have the minimum number of staff required by regulations.

Engineering work had also been postponed due to the overtime ban which has cost London Underground over £15 million, showing that the job cuts are not about money but attacking workers' rights.

Bob Severn

### Golders Green

REG JOHNSTONE and Elsie Hardcastle spoke to Sarah Sachs Eldridge at Golders Green station where a dozen or more pickets, half TSSA and half RMT, distributed leaflets to the public.

This strike was even more solid than the previous action in September. Over 100 stations were closed and it is the first time that the Northern Line was severely affected and reduced to a 'special service'.

Previously tube drivers had crossed the pickets at Golders Green but this time many respected the joint action.

Strikers reported on a good response in the main from passengers. Two lines were completely suspended - the Circle and Central lines -

with all other lines part suspended or only running a special service. The unions' leaflets highlighted the question of passenger safety.

RMT members detailed the impact of these cuts. "Mike Brown, director of London Underground (LU), describes the dispute as 'pointless'. When the Lib-Con coalition announces its spending review on 20 October that argument will be groundless because they will be proposing between 25% and 40% cuts in public services, including LU. Therefore LU will be unable to run a safe railway service."

A supervisor explained how he had been: "speaking to train drivers about the role that station staff play in supporting train staff. With the new rules that management are attempting to bring in, in an emergency, drivers will be expected to detrain without help."

"At Tottenham Court Road tube station staff numbers could be halved from eight to four. The new system would mean taking supervisor roles away from station staff and giving them to drivers."

"This is craziness. If a situation like 7/7 were to take place, which we didn't handle perfectly then, these cuts would mean we wouldn't be able to deal with it, period."

"How can we provide a world class service if we can't get people out quick enough? In Hampstead, for example, if staff are cut to three, that is the minimum required if the lift gets stuck and a hand-lift is required. If anything else goes wrong at the same time we are in deep trouble."

"The target time for a deep de-

training is 20 minutes. Under the new rules the driver would have to do this alone. This is a major job.

"But we are not going to give way. I've been on the underground for ten years but in my opinion this fight has to go all the way. It will cost us money. But we are fighting for the safety of the passengers and our safety too of course."

"As the firefighters have pointed out previously 'cuts cost lives'. I am scared for the public's safety."

### Loughton

SOCIALIST PARTY members were met with a warm reception at the Loughton picket, as RMT and TSSA flags stood side by side once more. The mood was lively, bus drivers were honking and everyone took a leaflet. There was support for the RMT-led demo on 23 October, with strikers pleased to see it being backed by other unions across the capital.

When talking about the London FBU's ballot for strike action, one striker said: "You can't run the railways without the fire department."

One worker said he was so convinced by 'The Red Line' (the bulletin by Socialist Party members on the tube) last time that he sent it to his Turkish colleague at the Canary Wharf picket to have it copied and handed out.

The picket line at Loughton was even larger this time, with around 15 workers. TfL's complete disregard for health and safety was on show again, however. One cleaner found himself locked in the platform unable to get out, having finished his shift at 5.30am, abandoned by the



More workers supported the action than in September.

photo Paul Mattsson

managers that had clocked him in. In the end, it was the strikers that helped him get out.

Stuart Walker,  
East 15 Socialist Students

### London Bridge

LONDON BRIDGE station was unnaturally quiet. The strike was obviously biting harder than last month, with very few trains running on the Northern line. The picket line was bigger, around ten this time including one RMT member on his first picket line, and the strike was more solid. Only three station staff were working.

Massive queues kept forming. Management had drafted in office workers to work on the gates, but they were having problems redirecting people.

Meanwhile the pickets were confident and in a good mood. Most knew about the demo on 23 October and were looking forward to it.

Management had opened Monument station, but with a very restricted District line service it wasn't doing very much. Pickets said it was similar at Bank: "They brought in staff to man one in every three stations on the Central line, but there's no service because the line controllers haven't come in to work." Pickets were in a good mood, but obvi-

ously worried about the savage cuts to come.

It's obvious when you talk to tube staff that Transport for London management has no concern for the safety of staff or the travelling public. 350 office staff and managers have been given only two days training to run stations during the strike.

Normally you have to have six weeks training for stations like Monument that have deep tunnels. What if there was a serious accident? How would staff who don't even know their way round the station evacuate hundreds of passengers?

Five years ago management cut the number of staff working in the Monument ticket office from 16 to eight, now they want to halve it again to four people.

Workers pointed out that it's a massive station, and people often need help with tickets or with Oyster travel cards: "With Oyster people are getting ripped off left, right and centre. In the ticket office we're limited in how much we can help people when they get overcharged - I get disciplined if I try to help too many. They want us to tell people to call the helpline instead, which costs 10p a minute."

In the first quarter of this year £30 million was collected in overpayments by the company that runs Oyster.

Naomi Byron

## Time to strengthen RMT's fighting leadership

AT THE end of October, RMT members in London Transport will be voting for a new representative on the union's national Council of Executives.

Socialist Party member Lewis Peacock is currently seeking branch nominations. Lewis is the assistant branch secretary of the largest RMT branch, London Underground Engineering, and also the assistant secretary of London Transport regional council. Lewis has an impressive industrial record under his belt.

Until it spectacularly collapsed, much of LU engineering was privatised and run by Metronet. Metronet workers fought successful strike action, defending jobs, pay and conditions in 2007. Lewis was involved in successful negotiations over the transfer back into London Underground, including winning passes and pension rights.

*The RMT is widely seen as one of the most combative trade unions, with a leadership that is willing to fight for members' interests.*

The RMT is widely seen as one of the most combative trade unions, with a leadership that is willing to fight for members' interests. General secretary Bob Crow made an important 'call to arms' when he called for generalised strike action against the Con-Dem cuts. The RMT initiated the National Shop Stewards Network, which is now playing a leading role in fighting the cuts.

RMT's leadership has taken steps towards a working class electoral alternative to the Labour Party, first

with No2EU - Yes to Democracy in the 2009 European elections, and then supporting candidates of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the 2010 general election.

But the RMT will face an onslaught from the government and employers, who will seek to encourage a right wing in the union in order to undermine the current leadership. In this election, it is crucial that the fighting leadership is strengthened, and these policies and important political steps are defended. This is why we believe it is important to vote for Lewis Peacock.

Socialist Party members of the RMT also argue that members who support militant left policies and programme need to organise in the union in a Broad Left, to defend and build support for those policies and programme.

## Support TSG strike

UNSCRUPULOUS BOSSES at Ty-neside Safety Glass (TSG) want to drive down the pay and conditions of the workforce - but the first week of solid strike action shows that TSG workers are determined to fight this. Now entering the second week of strike action, workers are standing firm!

Even before the strike, the overtime ban alone had slashed the deliveries from the factory by half. In the first week of strike action production of good quality safety glass plummeted.

The mood on the picket lines has been upbeat and this was re-enforced by support from other Unite branches and members of other unions visiting the picket lines.

One of the strikers, Peter White, told how pay and working conditions are being pushed back: "I started work in the shipyards aged 15 in the 1960s. When I was young we often went on strike for better pay and conditions. Back then

there was no anti-trade union laws - just a show of hands. Now working conditions have been set right back - conditions here are terrible."

The management have a 'dignity at work' policy but this is seen as a joke by workers. Complaints were also expressed by strikers on health and safety issues, such as machines blocking fire exits, lack of fire-drills, and the stench from toilets as the company got rid of cleaners six months ago.

TSG management used agency workers during the first week of the strike in a desperate, and not very successful, attempt to keep production going.

Agency workers should be given full contracts on the same rates, terms and conditions as all other TSG workers.

• Messages of support to: tsg\_strike@yahoo.co.uk

Elaine Brunskill