

Victory to the striking rail workers!

Defend the right to strike!



The 40,000+ striking rail workers are setting an admirable example to the rest of the labour movement. To have successfully balloted workers from across thirteen different train operating companies as well as from Network Rail itself, securing an 89 percent Yes vote on a 71 percent turnout, is an inspiring achievement.

By privatising the rail industry and breaking operations into separate franchises, rail bosses hoped that, combined with legislation banning sympathy strikes, the power of trades unions to organise across the industry would be fatally weakened. But the striking rail workers are right now busy proving that, given the right leadership, organised workers can overturn all the barriers which capitalism puts up to keep them divided.

We denounce Network Rail's plan to cut up to 2,500 rail jobs. Workers whose jobs are

under threat include those who maintain the tracks, signals and overhead lines, employed by Network Rail and by thirteen different train operating companies, including LNER, Chiltern, Avanti, Cross Country and South Western.

Network Rail complains that government subsidies to the industry to compensate for the fall in passenger numbers during the pandemic are drying up, so that "We cannot keep relying on government handouts, and so we must work together with train operators and our trade unions to save millions of pounds and deliver a more efficient railway."

Translated into plain English, this means that since government subsidies are drying up, the workers must accept worse pay and conditions and wave goodbye to job security. The train operating companies are telling workers that 'we' must now work together to

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cut millions of pounds from workers' wages in order to get 'us' out of the hole the train operating companies dug for themselves by their own mismanagement.

Whilst the rail bosses cannot be blamed for the pandemic, it remains the case that the long term underinvestment in the rail industry, plus the get-rich-quick mentality of the privateers, who drove the travelling public away by charging ever higher prices for the privilege of riding in ever more overcrowded and unreliable trains, rendered the rail industry extremely vulnerable to any external shock at all.

The government, having already doled out £16 billion in subsidies, is telling rail bosses the gravy train is leaving the station, and inviting them to make good the shortfall by imposing wage freezes, below-inflation pay settlements and job insecurity. In short, workers are being told for the umpteenth time that it is up to them to save the day by tightening their belts and keeping their heads down.

The Department for Transport even has the gall to tell workers that it wants a 'fair deal for staff, passengers and taxpayers so the railway doesn't take money away from other essential public services like the NHS', as if workers in the rail industry fighting for pay justice are somehow to blame for the collapse of the health service (in reality hollowed out from within by privatisation, just like the rail industry).

It is not the working class which is damaging the economy, but the crisis of the capitalist system, for which the working class must refuse to take the blame. Whilst stressing that it is 'always open for meaningful talks', the RMT states plainly that it would not work with 'the Rail Delivery Group or anyone else to help distribute the pain of job losses

and real terms pay cuts that have nothing to do with securing a thriving railway going forward'.

And if Grant Shapps presses on with his threat to criminalise strikes where service levels sink below a minimum level arbitrarily dictated by the government, rail workers will be right to tell the transport secretary precisely where he can shove his laws.

The plain truth is that neither the rail industry, nor the health service, nor the energy industry, nor any other industry which is vital to the rational functioning of a civilised society, can safely remain in the hands of monopoly capitalism as it descends into overproduction crisis.

Nor can we expect our country's governments, be they Labour or Tory, dedicated as they all are to promoting the best interests of monopoly capitalism and the billionaires who benefit from that outmoded system, to be of any use in dealing with the crisis. Indeed, the Labour Party, the supposed friend of the trade unions who fund it to the tune of several million pounds a year, is, not surprisingly, joining the Tory government in opposing the rail workers' just struggle. Not only the rail workers but all workers are being told to tighten their belts to help the billionaires get over the crisis. All must refuse and support each other in so refusing.

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