

RMT up front



The newsletter for London Underground drivers

Issue 6, August 2010

Time to join the picket lines!



After months of talks, talks and more talks we have finally arrived at the point where our union is asking us to take industrial action in defence of jobs. This is not something that is asked lightly; but with a mandate for strike action from RMT members it is a question which can no longer be avoided and to which the answer must be emphatically in the affirmative!

Some Train Operators are asking what it has to do with us. They are saying these station job cuts have no effect on me and my family. They say that a global crisis of capitalism means we all have to share the pain. We shouldn't rock the boat (or the train!) These train operators are being misled by LUL into a false sense of security.

LUL management have been intent on splitting the workforce in an attempt to weaken us. It is no coincidence that they are doing away with team talk – they don't want us to see ourselves as a team anymore: we are trains they are stations, hang them out to dry is the message. You remember we had "Time to Talk"? Well now it's "Time to Shut Up and Listen." The recent Valuing Time seminars were nothing more than poorly disguised propaganda tools to soften us up for the coming assault on our conditions.

It's not just an ideological push by

LUL, of course; though they have long been dismayed by the sense of solidarity and comradeship engendered by the RMT. But removing rostered T/Os talks reduces the number of T/Os needed across the combine. Following swiftly on from the reduction of pool sizes and slashing the number of rostered spare turns caused by the 2009 Agreement there are now close to 300 "excess" T/Os on LUL. How long do you believe LUL can sustain that level of excess with TfL bean counters breathing down their necks?

We have a choice: we can allow them to continue their salami slicing down at 55 Broadway or we can tell LUL that they have already gone too far and that we will not allow them to go any further with their slash and burn tactics. They want to cut 800 jobs as if it is nothing at all; as if it will make no difference to the safety of the service we provide; but it will do. We were told first of all that no front line operational staff would be affected; then it was duty managers and ticket office staff who were under threat; then it was CSAs who carry out the SATS duties on the platform who are surplus to requirements. When will it be Station Supervisors? When will it be T/Os? A senior safety rep is outlining some of

the very real problems elsewhere on this leaflet.

We cannot send our negotiators naked into the chamber – we have to give them a mandate to speak from a position of strength. We need to give an unequivocal and noisy response to LUL when, not if, we are called to take industrial action. The louder, the more aggressive, and the more militant we are on the very first day of action, the more willing LUL will be to sit down and enter meaningful talks with us.

It's time to join the picket lines!

Proof that LU has gone anti-TU?

Up Front attaches no blame whatsoever to Alexandra Bode-Tunji, who has been nominated for this year's ATOC Rail Staff Awards HR Person of the Year, but it's enlightening to see what LUL managers really think of the Trades Unions.

In the nomination letter, published on TfL's own intranet, an anonymous fan of Ms Bode-Tunji extols her virtues thus:

"A recent example is Alexandra's drive to introduce workplace mediation into the business **despite the problem of the company being very TU orientated.**"

We know that senior ER managers aren't falling over themselves to cuddle up to the RMT at the moment; but at least now they've dropped the language of "partnership" and "team talk" and admitted the truth. They don't see union reps as part of the solution; they see us as the problem.

Thank f**k.

One union for drivers - All grades united

Even more changes coming our way!

The current government aren't the only ones pleading poverty and lumping the responsibility for the clear up on the workers. LU is doing a very good impersonation of the ConDem's too.

The front line staff on LU will be feeling the pain for some time to come if we sit back and let LU introduce change after change just to squeeze every last ounce out of the workforce and let them slash our hard fought for terms and conditions. But cutting everything to the bone raises very serious safety concerns.

So we are losing 800 station staff and LU tell us that this wont impact on the safety of the job or have any effect on the driver? Next thing we know, we are presented with the Operational Effectiveness Programme; a programme of changes to the role of driver so clearly unsafe to this Council that we have opposed it at every turn around. This programme proposes that drivers reverse blind back into platforms after overruns, dispatch blind with defective OPO equipment. Why? Because there won't be any station staff available to assist. As well as the safety aspect, it will be the driver that takes all the responsibility and therefore all the blame when things go wrong.

Incidentally, your Train's Safety Council have referred the whole Operational Effectiveness Programme to directors level so they can discuss these unsafe proposals with our Head Office Officials.

Then LU starts to mess around with our training! We start off with 5 days annual training with teamtalk every month to up-

date us of relevant changes. Then they cut training to four days, then down to three and now teamtalk is being con-signed to the dust bin. We now get one day stock training a year. If you take into consideration travelling times and the difficulty of getting a train during the peak, you could end up with a couple of hour's stock training every year; training that is essential for the safety of you, your colleagues and your passengers.

Just when we are getting our heads round all these changes and proposals, initiations have just arrived at the safety council for us to attend another serious of meetings about training. Among the topics they want to discuss are: reducing promotional training for new drivers from 17 weeks to 12; they want a discussion about what drivers are taught on route training; a discussion about 'how we arrive at a competent driver'; a discussion about train equipment training and how we do stock training in future.

Believe us, LU management are not sitting up late at night wondering how they can improve our training. Rest assured there will be a new phase of changes and cuts to our already threadbare training.

The safety Council and your Head Office Officials will oppose any unsafe changes to the role of the driver, but we need your help! We need every member to stand up and be counted; everyone must let LU know that enough is enough, we will not stand idly by while the slash our terms and conditions and compromise our safety and that of the travelling public.

Runaway train

Everyone will have by now heard the story of the runaway train. It has been widely reported on the news and in the newspapers.

The Trade Unions have rightly called for a Formal Investigation and LU have agreed. This will be commencing soon with the full involvement of the local Northern Line safety reps.

For the benefit of anyone who has not yet heard about this near disaster here is a brief summary: On the 13th of August at 04.20am, during engineering works on the Northern Line, a diesel engineering train broke down. A 95 stock Northern Line train was sent to assist. This is where things started going badly wrong!

A lot of what happened next is not entirely clear and will be dealt with during the investigation. What is clear is that the defective engineers train somehow managed to break away while being pulled to the depot. Questions will be asked about the suitability of the coupling and the wisdom of pulling this train rather than pushing it; or having a train at the front and the rear of the defective train.

After the defective train broke away, it then careered at 40mph back down the Northern Line without any brakes. Unfortunately, someone had let a passenger train out of the sidings at Archway; we then had the runaway engineering train chasing the passenger train down the tunnel; a disaster was only averted when the controller managed to route the passer train down the city branch of the Northern Line with the trains reportedly only 600 metres apart.

Make no mistake, this could quite easily have been a major disaster. Many questions will have to be answered in the investigation: the coupling process employed, the wisdom of pulling the defective train, why passenger trains were still being brought into service and what effect any safety cut backs could have attributed to this near disaster.

The full report of the investigation will be forwarded to your local reps on completion.

Lack of dignity

Anyone reading the minutes of the Tier 2 meetings over the last year or so would be forgiven for thinking that the primary function of the Train Safety Council was dealing with toilets and water points, or more specifically, the poor maintenance and lack of these most basic facilities.

From the water points on the Victoria and District lines to the toilets across the combine, standards have been slipping.

LU 's policy entitled 'Dignity at Work' which covers the standard of toilets and water pointsn appears to be an aspiration. It is not asking too much that drivers when they come to work have access to clean toilets and chilled water to drink,

especially during the hot summer months. Unfortunately LU appears unable or unwilling to provide these most basic of requirements.

After item after item was referred to the Train's safety Council from your local safety reps and Tier 2 were unable to sufficiently address the problem, the matter of Dignity at Work has been referred to the LU Director of Safety for him to address.

Would the managers at 55 Broadway or your TOMs and Line managers put up with dirty, unhygienic toilets and a lack of water to drink while at work? No, they wouldn't. Will you?

Trains Functional Reps

Will Reid 07983 958429

Bill O'Dowd 07956 573197

Vaughan Thomas 07720 297657

Trains Safety Council Reps

Jim McDaid 07917 131692

Nigel Eivers 07961 141924

Dave Rayfield 07753 87933

Join RMT

**online at www.rmt.org.uk/join
phone 0800 376 3706**

**Regional Council website:
www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk**

email: drivers@rmtlondoncalling.org.uk

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