

Phil Rowan, Introduction:

Phil Rowan has worked in The London Underground for eight years and joined the RMT (National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers) from day one.

He is in the RMT Finsbury Park Branch - which runs the whole of Victoria Line and the east of the Piccadilly Line.

Phil lives in South East London and is a member of South London SWP.

Phil is visiting Denmark, invited by the Red-Green Alliance and will be speaking at public meetings in Aalborg, Esbjerg, Silkeborg and Copenhagen from March 20th to March 25th.

Q: Why was the RMT the first mover in the present wave of strikes in Britain?

Phil: Last year The RMT started the strike wave and the London Underground was the first to strike. The RMT has a militant reputation and a tradition of striking, if we have to.

Q: What are your demands?

Phil: The London Underground workers demand no change to our pensions, which is what the government wants to do. We are losing jobs, not that anybody is made redundant, but vacancies are not being filled so we have lost 500 jobs. We want to stop the company's "fit for the future" attacks on our working conditions and terms in general. Also the National Rail and Network Rail workers' terms are under attack by the "drivers only" And they both demand a pay rise, too.

Q: What do the bosses offer you?

Phil: There is no offer and the pension schemes are delayed.

Q: Do you have public support for your strikes?

Phil: The public support is overwhelming, also for the National Rail strikes. Every time people come to our picket lines and give us food and drinks and show solidarity. The bosses didn't expect that.

Q: How do you organize the picket lines and what are you doing on the picket lines?

Phil: We organize picket lines at every single depot and at as many stations as we can. And we start very early, half four, in the morning. Sometimes colleges are made to sleep near the depot in order to be there early. We try to be as many people as we can. We talk to each other and explain the different issues and how the fight can go on. We persuade people to join the strike. Other trade unions visit us and show support. It means that people feel better, especially the new people.

Q: First of February was a huge day of strikes and protests - what do you expect for March 15th?

Phil: We were not on strike on the first of February, because the union leadership thought it had a deal. But it was a bad deal. It should have been rejected at once. Maybe the union bureaucrats thought people couldn't afford to strike, because of all the strikes around Christmas.

I expect March 15th to be even bigger, because so many will be out on strike together. The RMT, The London Underground will be out together with Aslef, the union for the train drivers. National Rail will strike on March 16th and hopefully the London Underground, too.

Q: How can the working class win in Britain?

Phil: March 15th will show a glimpse of how we can shut down the country for one day. We have to extend that for a longer period. I will put more political pressure on the government, which is weak. So it will not take a great deal to put the government in crisis and force them to give in.

At the moment they "divide and conquer" in order to make some unions call off the strikes, like the RCN (nurses union) and the UCU (University and College Union) did recently. It seems like the union bureaucrats are desperate to get any deal and settle for that. They shouldn't do that. We must fight together until there is a deal for all. That's why we need more rank and file actions. And we need strike committees, too.